

Analysing the social practice of urban commons-oriented coproduction: The case of Sant Cugat del Vallès in Spain

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Urban commons
Co-production
Social network
Collaborative advantage
Social and solidarity economy

ABSTRACT

Research attention is being paid to the different ways urban commoners engage with the local state to address commons material needs and the implications of this engagement. To have a better understanding of these processes, this article proposes an analytical framework to examine the social practice of commons-oriented coproduction. It studies the social network of urban commons in a neighbourhood of Sant Cugat del Vallès (Spain), to assess the type of collaborations urban commoners are engaged in. It is combined with analyses of current collaborative processes among urban commoners and with the local state through the lens of The Collaborative Advantage theory, which distinguishes five aspects of the collaboration: shared goals, trust, cultural diversity, leadership and power. Our results show that a collaborative relationship exists between most urban commons initiatives and the City Council, the latter occupying a central position in the social network of urban commons. However, most initiatives expressed lack of trust in the City Council, complaining about the rigid administrative procedures and the frequent imposition of a political agenda. We argue that collaborations with the state are sometimes needed to ensure the (re)production of urban commons, however, they are often characterised by tensions.

1. Introduction

The literature on commons experiences in the urban environment has grown exponentially in the last 10 years. The concept of the commons comprises three dimensions: the community, the resource, and the process of commoning (Ferreri et al., 2025; Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). The community understood as a group of self-organised citizens that govern and manage a material or immaterial resource considered as common-pool resource. In addition, following much of the literature on the commons (Mattei, 2011; De Angelis, 2017), the concept implies the establishment of a social relationship between the community that manages and governs the resource and the resource itself. This relation is constituted through the act of commoning—that is, the reappropriation of the resource by citizens through political action, the establishment of rules and reciprocal ties that enable the community to care for,

take responsibility for, negotiate access to, use of, and the distribution of benefits from the resource—in short, to maintain and reproduce the commons. All three contribute to making the commons a form of social organising capable of expressing specific social and political agency—much in the same way that cities are regarded as socio-political actors, composed of an urban fabric, governance structures, community organisations, and other elements (Oosterlynck et al., 2019). In most cases, commons initiatives are alternatives to deficits in the way the state and the market satisfy social needs and provide services and goods. Urban commons represent the promise and practice of life beyond marketization, privatization and commercialization (Jeffrey et al., 2012), a bridge between “an incomplete neoliberal city and real transformation against, alongside or beyond capitalism” (DeVerteuil et al., 2022: 2080). In some cases, commons have an explicit anticapitalist message fostering transformation, others co-habit within

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capitalism and others have no sense of overturning capitalism but provide a collective platform beyond it that offers an alternative to neoliberal ideology and reverse the unjust distribution of resources via use over exchange values. Examples include community gardens and urban parks, housing co-operatives, consumer cooperatives or cultural centres managed by collectives or neighbourhood associations (Bianchi, 2022; Pera, 2020).

A crucial aspect of commons is the community underpinning them which comprises a network of people having a shared interest and often based in the same territory. These communities are constituted through the process of commoning itself (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). As Huron (2015:370) puts it, '[t]here appears to be a dialectical relationship between commons formation and community formations: one does not necessarily precede the other'. In line with the complexity of the task of commoning in the twenty-first century, the community that is assembled around the commons does not share an essence and may indeed comprise those who in other situations are locked in antagonistic relationships. Gibson-Graham et al. (2016) argues that commoning would be a transformative politics in the becoming of a commoning-community in the here and now. Communities constituting the commons are not homogenous; on the contrary, they are individuals with various and often contradictory interests and rationales, an assemblage that may include class and non-class alignments; social movements and different grass-roots organisations; sometimes in collaboration with other entities such as governments and other types of institutions that may not share the same political essence. Commoning therefore can be understood as a (or many) process(es) in which the resource is being commoned by the community, sometimes in collaboration with other entities such as the state, in different commoning setups.

Although recognising these assemblages in commoning, empirical analyses of commons have mostly focused on the internal dynamics of urban commons while largely neglecting the needed social practices and relationships beyond the commons itself, e.g. the collaborations with the local government. There is a current debate on whether the state, and particularly the local administration, can play an active role in the long-term sustainability of these communities and be an essential component of the network of urban commons (Bianchi, 2022; Bianchi et al., 2022). While some scholars (Hardt & Negri, 2009; Mattei, 2011) see the state as a political institution to avoid because its rationales and workings can often destroy or co-opt the commons, a more nuanced position, however, rejects the idea that governments must be completely outside the common urban experiences (De Angelis, 2003; Bianchi et al., 2022; Stavrides, 2016). As work on community-based natural resource management and co-management has already shown, the recognition and even material support of common initiatives by governments can play an important role in the long-term success of such initiatives (Cox et al., 2010; Ostrom, 1990) and promote innovative policies (Bianchi, 2023; Pera & Bussu, 2024).

Additionally, we look at co-production through commons-centred lenses, showing how urban commoners enhance their transformative politics by engaging in relationships with local governments; and call this practice commons-oriented co-production (inspired by Bianchi et al., 2022). Commons-oriented coproduction can serve as a political strategy used by commoners to promote social transformation and long-term stability. This strategy includes building relationships with state institutions, securing ownership and economic resources, and influencing public policy (Cumbers, 2012; Masella, 2018; Mitlin, 2008). However, this strategy also comes with challenges. These include the reluctance of policymakers and regional and local public administration staff to accept and share the commons way of functioning and framework (Chaves-Avila & Gallego-Bono, 2020), resistance to decentralisation processes within public administration, the risk of entities being co-opted by the state, and the tendency of the state to transfer its responsibilities to entities (Bance et al., 2018; Bianchi et al., 2022).

Here, we examine the coproduction between commoners and municipal governments understood as the local institution whose

function is to govern local issues and the administration of the interests of the residents of a municipality. Therefore, we do not refer here to local governments generically meaning the set of Public Administration entities that form part of the local government level, which in the case of Spain, would encompass both municipal governments and all the supramunicipal figures provided for in the Spanish Constitution and the Catalan Statute: provinces, counties, *mancomunitats* and metropolitan entities.

Conceptualizing the relationship between commons initiatives and the local government requires a systematic and empirically-grounded approach to the social processes through which the commons are created and reproduced, as well as to the interpersonal and cross-institutional relationships composing the network that underpin them.

In this paper, we aim to advance in the examination and characterization of the social practice of commons-oriented coproduction to better address its abovementioned challenges and foster it. There remains a significant knowledge gap of analytical frameworks that allow a detailed examination and understanding about the conditions and ways in which commons-oriented coproduction works and does not work. This gap limits our understanding of how commons can drive broader political-economic transformations. Studying these nuances regarding these processes is crucial for realising the potential of commons-oriented coproduction in the local context.

For this purpose, we propose a novel analytical framework of the social practice of commons-oriented coproduction. First, distinguishing which actors (including public authorities) play a central role in the social practice of urban commons by analysing their social networks and then assessing the quality of the collaboration between commons initiatives and public administration. For this purpose, we integrate in our framework the analysis of social networks with the Theory of Collaborative Advantage developed by Chris Huxham and Siv Vangen (Huxham, 2003; Vangen & Huxham, 2014). We claim that collaborations with the state are sometimes needed to ensure the (re)production of urban commons. However, they are often characterised by tensions, some of which are difficult to overcome, especially those originated as a result of different political imaginaries among collaborators.

The study draws on a larger project on commons initiatives in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona that have emerged in response to the 2008 global financial crisis and the 2011 austerity measures (Ferreri et al., 2020; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2021). Here, we focus on a particular neighbourhood of a city of Catalonia, the Centre-East neighbourhood of Sant Cugat del Vallès. Sant Cugat del Vallès is a city with a considerable amount of urban commons initiatives and counts with a public administration willing to collaborate with them.

2. The social practice of commons-oriented coproduction

We consider commons-oriented coproduction as the multiple interactions between urban commoners and the local government as part of the commoners' practices to assemble the necessary material infrastructure, e.g. economic infrastructure, property infrastructure. In previous work, we coined the term commons-led coproduction referring to the same type of coproduction (see Bianchi et al., 2022; Mombelli et al., 2025). However, here we nuance the concept to leave the room for other actors such as the public administration to promote the commons beyond the commoners themselves. As with the previous formulation, commons-oriented coproduction encompasses the initiative and agency of commoners, the process of commoning, and the outcomes (the commons as an object).

Commons-oriented coproduction builds on the concept of coproduction, which refers to the synergistic relationship between the state and civil society in the provision of public services (Ostrom, 1996). Ostrom and her collaborators have shown through their empirical work since the 1970s that the production of a service without the active participation of the recipients is challenging. Instead, it can be improved through exchanges between the "service producers" (such as social or

health workers) and the “service recipients”. Nabatchi et al. (2017) define coproduction as a set of activities that occur at all stages of public services and are characterised by the joint efforts of the state and civil society. This gives citizens a central role in the planning, design, delivery, and evaluation of public services. Coproduction has significantly influenced public management research and permeated social, public and environmental policies (Bance et al., 2018; Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen et al., 2018; Pestoff et al., 2012; Sorrentino et al., 2018). However, the literature on coproduction has been criticised for failing to acknowledge the risks of dismantling public services, the unequal power dynamics that can emerge, and the tendency to view coproduction as apolitical (Turnhout et al., 2019). In contrast, commons-oriented coproduction is explicit on issues of ownership and the character of the service and good provided, e.g. common good, and on the model of urban governance promoted being the collaboration between the public administration and urban commons (Becker et al., 2017). It also pays attention to the power relations and the historical, political and territorial contexts that embed coproduction within broader processes of social transformation.

Analysing the social practice of commons-oriented co-production at the local level requires understanding the processes through which commoners and institutional actors and their relations emerge, and the concrete arrangements and practices developed in a territory. To do so, we present a novel analytical framework of the social practice of commons-oriented coproduction (Fig. 1).

First, our framework considers that urban commons are a relational phenomenon where commons are built upon a network of people having a shared interest and often based in the same territory, i.e. a community (Bollier & Helfrich, 2015). It considers that this network constitutes the basis where the social practice of commons-oriented coproduction takes place. The state, and particularly the local administration, can be an essential component of the network of urban commons. The emergence of actors and their relationship can be fruitfully understood through a

social network approach, which enables a quantitative and qualitative understanding of heterogeneous actors and their relationships (Prell et al., 2009). Social network analysis (SNA) has been studied in the context of natural resource management and common pool resources in rural areas (Bodin & Prell, 2011; Calvet-Mir et al., 2015; Fliervoet et al., 2016), however, little research has been undertaken within the urban commons contexts (Carlsson & Sandström, 2008). SNA analyses social networks in terms of a set of nodes (e.g., individuals or organisations) and a set of ties between these nodes. It provides insight in the position and role of individual actors in the network and help to identify central, coordinating, and bridging organisations whose activities connect actors that otherwise would not have been connected. The structure of ties between these actors gives insight in intra and inter-group collaboration (Bodin et al., 2006).

Secondly, the social practice of commons-oriented coproduction involves the joint working across organisations. To have a nuanced understanding of this process of collaboration, we incorporate in our analytical framework the Theory of Collaborative Advantage (TCA) developed by Vangen and Huxham (2014). This theory seeks to have a real, positive and reasonably direct influence on practice and has been developed through action research. It aims to empower those involved through legitimising experienced frustration and providing conceptual handles to help address the practical issues involved. Hence, TCA explains the problems of collaboration as tensions between the “collaborative advantage” of organisations working together and the tendency to be frustratingly slow and conflicting, named “collaborative inertia” (Huxham, 2003). Collaboration between organisations is therefore necessary, but most frequently it is complex, and tensions appear. Tensions reveal the existence of trade-offs between different forms of management and its awareness allows participants to reach an agreement that is “good enough”. Tensions are, however, multiple and interact from one aspect to another. The TCA identifies five aspects of

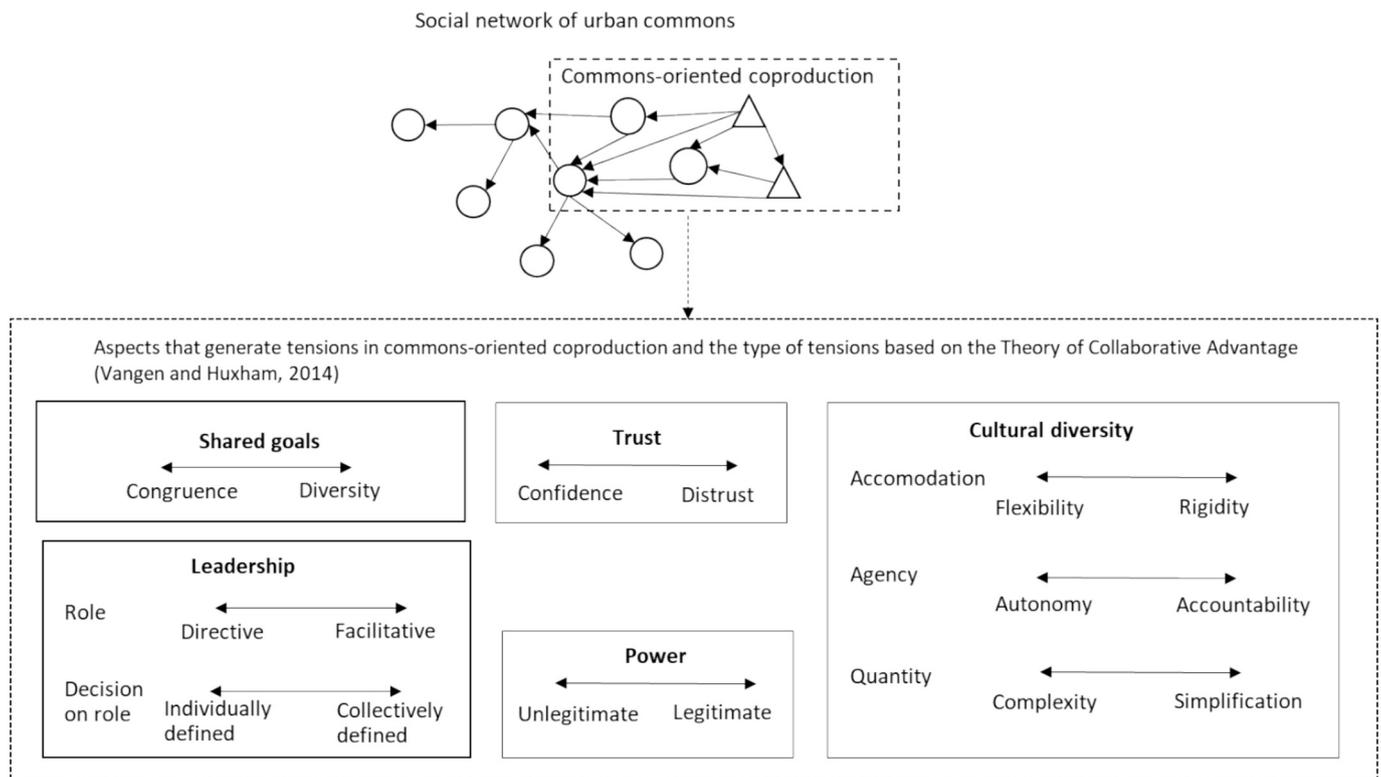


Fig. 1. Analytical framework of the social practice of commons-oriented coproduction. The social network of urban commons is the social basis for commons-oriented coproduction. Nodes represent organisations - triangle refers to public administration and circles to urban commons entities- and ties represent the existence of a collaborative relationship. Within this network, several experiences of commons-oriented coproduction take place, illustrated by the dotted box. Within the dotted box, several boxes represent the aspects that may generate tensions in collaborations and the type of tensions.

the collaboration that can generate tensions: shared goals, trust, cultural diversity, leadership and power. The boxes in our analytical framework represent the potential tensions.

These tensions are described as follows:

Shared goals

This tension ranges from congruence to diversity regarding shared goals (Vangen & Huxham, 2011). Congruence aligns goals and makes partners committed and motivated to collaborate, but it can also make organisations compete and hide information if goals fully coincide. On the other hand, distinct members may enrich the collaboration with diverse purposes, but it can make partners look for different and conflicting goals.

Trust

The second aspect that may generate tensions is trust (Vangen & Huxham, 2003a). The TCA considers that the first starting point of a collaboration is the formation of expectations about the future collaboration, based on the reputation, past behaviour or formal contracts of the organisations. The second starting point is the willingness to take the risk of working with partners that could work opportunistically. If both of these initiators are surpassed, trust can grow gradually starting with modest but realistic goals. The accomplishment of such goals will reinforce trusting attitudes and provide a basis for more ambitious collaboration. However, trust is something that needs to be continuously reinforced.

Cultural diversity

The third aspect is the management of cultural diversity (Vangen & Huxham, 2014; Vangen & Winchester, 2014), understood as partners' "habitual ways of being and acting". The distinct professional, organisational, and national cultures can be both a source of stimulation, creativity, and reward and a source of potential conflicts of values, behaviours, and beliefs. TCA theory points out three interrelated management tensions in this respect: accommodation tension, agency tension and quantity tension. Accommodation tension addresses the interaction between organisations in a collaboration. Flexibility is necessary to accommodate the different structures, procedures and performance of the organisations. Paradoxically, this flexibility may compromise the structures and processes that enable organisations to deliver their core goals. That is a tension between *flexibility* and *rigidity*. The second tension, named agency tension, focuses on members representing the organisation, the quality of their orientation towards the collaboration and their host organisation. Collaborators need enough individual autonomy to act on behalf of their organisations while at the same time maintaining accountability to protect their organisations' interest. A tension therefore exists between *autonomy* and *accountability*. Finally, the quantity tension relates to the cultural diversity present in the collaboration. When collaborations span sector and/or national boundaries, the context within which partners operate and their organisational cultures and professional practices can be very diverse. This diversity can imply increasing levels of complexity that need to be embraced to secure advantage from cultural diversity, while simultaneously exerting some degree of simplification to prevent complexity-induced inertia. A tension exists therefore by the poles of *complexity* and *simplification* in addressing cultural diversity.

Leadership

TCA describes leadership (Vangen & Huxham, 2003b) as the mechanisms that make things happen, that is, the processes that get goals accomplished. Vangen and Huxham (2014) consider structures, processes, and participants as important means to an overall understanding

of leadership in collaborative situations. Leadership is divided in two tensions, leadership roles and the decision on leadership roles. The TCA highlights and legitimizes the simultaneous enactment of both a *facilitative* and a *directive* leadership role in collaborations. The facilitative leadership role is characterised by promoting activities, structures and processes that embrace, empower, involve and mobilize partners. The directive role implies taking an active lead rather than facilitating agreement and joint implementation of the collaborative agenda. It may even involve manipulating agendas or imposing issues to avoid stagnation and collaborative inertia; and excluding those who are not "worth the bother". The second tension is about who decides which of the previous leadership roles is more suitable. In some organisations *one person* with a designated role power is the one making this decision, whereas other organisations might involve *more or all the members*.

Power

Another aspect to address is the tension generated by power (Vangen & Huxham, 2014). Different situations exist inside the collaboration where power influences its development, such as deciding the process to involve participants or who has financial resources. Power in a collaboration changes over time, therefore, it is important to identify and understand when each participant is exerting power, consciously or not, the sources of power and whether it is legitimate. A tension therefore exists between *legitimate* and *unlegitimate* sources of power. To ensure a good collaboration, the leader(s) have to promote activities and organisational mechanisms specifically aimed at overcoming power inequalities existing between partners.

Addressing these five dimensions provides deep insights into social practices and dynamics in the collaboration among commons initiatives, as well as with public administration.

3. Case background and methods

3.1. Case background

In this research, we focus on commons-oriented coproduction, specifically on collaborations between urban commons entities and municipal governments, which are the local governments characterised by being locally elected by the neighbours of a municipality every four years. They are the local institution whose function is to govern local issues and the administration of the interests of the residents of a municipality. The main bodies of a city council are: The Plenary of the city council and the government board. The Plenary is formed by a certain number of councilors according to the population of the municipality. The councilors are elected in elections by the residents of the municipality who are of legal age for a period of 4 years. The Plenary is the highest authority of the town council. The municipal mayor who is the one who presides over the town council and is its highest political, representative and personnel director. He/she is elected by the councilors of the Plenary from among its members. The Government Board is made up of the mayor and deputy mayors and its functions are those delegated to them by the Plenary and the mayor. Local governments in Spain collect municipal taxes and have many competences such as the management of municipal schools, cleaning of streets, waste, water, social services, etc.

Sant Cugat del Vallès is a municipality of the Vallès Occidental region (Barcelona, Spain) with 90,000 inhabitants. Among its five districts,¹ Center-East is located in the historical centre of the municipality and has a great deal of commercial and associative activity. We selected this neighbourhood as our case study because it was one of the places

¹ This municipality includes the semi-autonomous municipal entity of Vall-doreix, and five districts, each with a neighbourhood council: Center East, Center West, Mirasol, La Floresta and Les Planes.

that concentrated more urban commons in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (see [Maestre-Andrés et al., 2021](#)). Sant Cugat had always been governed by a liberal conservative coalition since 1987. However, a left-wing coalition including social democrats and a far-left pro-independence anti-capitalist party took power in 2019. This new government has close links with local social movements and are committed to supporting commons initiatives. Moreover, some municipalities, as it is the case of Sant Cugat, have specific areas within some Departments in charge of promoting the Social (and Solidarity) economy. In the case of Sant Cugat, they have specific staff within the Directorate of Economic Promotion, Employment, Business and Commerce, which in principle enables the collaboration with urban commons.

We have analysed the nine urban commons initiatives existing in the Center East district of Sant Cugat in 2019. One initiative dates from before the 2008 economic crisis (in 2003), and five had their origins in between 2013 and 2016. Sector-wise, the initiatives are quite diverse. Two of them belong to the culture/leisure sector, two to the agroecology/energy/environment sector, two to the health/care sector and the rest to the education/knowledge, housing and consulting/ethical financing sectors (see [Table 1](#) for more details).

3.2. Methods of data collection

To obtain the required data, our research involved a combination of qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews, a survey and two workshops. We run nine semi-structured interviews with representatives of the urban commons initiatives and two interviews with two public

Table 1
Overview of urban commons initiatives and their objectives in Sant Cugat Centre-East neighbourhood.

Name	Description	Starting Date	Members	Organisational goals
El Cabàs	Ecological consumer group	2003	100	Local and fair trade, responsible consumption, health, agroecology
Cal Temerari	Cultural equipment	2015	270	Popular empowerment, politicize, raise awareness, unite initiatives
Grup de Lectura d'Ecologia Política	Reading group on political ecology	2016	30	Degrowth, agroecology, environmental awareness
La Civada	Ecological consumer group	2008	70 (23 family units)	Local and fair trade, few food chain intermediaries
elCugatenc	Digital newspaper	2015	13	Media independence, make social movements visible
XES Sant Cugat	Network of initiatives from social and solidarity economy	2015	15	Alternative economic model, degrowth, sustainability, food sovereignty, cooperative housing
4Pins Habitatge Cooperatiu	Co-housing	2019	45	Awareness of the problems in the housing system, build a co-housing project
Hora Bruixa	Not gender-mixed feminist group	2013	20	Class feminism
Sindicat de Llogateres de Sant Cugat	Tenant's union	2017	10	Awareness of the housing emergency

workers of the city council of Sant Cugat del Vallès from January 2019 to December 2020. Interviews were conducted, in Catalan language, with one or two representatives of the initiative. We specially asked about their objectives, their internal functioning and the factors promoting the consolidation of the initiatives. The final part of the interview included a survey to collect data about the collaborations with other organisations, including public institutions.

We also run two workshops aimed to examine the commons-oriented coproduction practices and processes. Due to the covid-19 restrictions, both workshops took place virtually in February and April 2021 and we used participatory online tools such as Miro to be able to engage with the participants. We expanded the attendance to the workshop beyond the nine commons initiatives to be able to have a broader picture of the coproduction with a higher-level organisation integrating commons initiatives and entities belonging to the social economy. The Council requested to undertake a workshop separated from the initiatives, otherwise it would not participate. City council representatives wanted to avoid engaging in a discussion with the commons initiatives and preferred to express their opinion individually. We run one workshop attended by six initiatives – five commons initiatives and one entity from the social economy (50% of attendance ratio); and conduct an interview addressing the same topics of the workshop with the representative of the City Council. We firstly asked the objectives each entity had regarding the collaboration and the collaborative process. With regards to cultural diversity, we asked participants to identify which aspects of structure and functioning of their initiative they think facilitate or hinder the collaboration among the initiatives and the City Council. Afterwards, participants had to identify power situations within collaborative processes, the sources of power of those situations and who should have the agency; the necessary characteristics of a leadership role in a collaborative process; and whether collaborating with the City Council has become a more important strategy for developing their work. The entities had time to answer the questions individually following brief introductions and later participated in deliberative discussions about the research topics addressed. The discussions were facilitated by four of the authors of the article and were recorded, transcribed and reported by taking extensive notes. These notes complemented the transcriptions and were later used to discuss among the research team and reflect on the structure and functioning of the workshop.

3.3. Methods of data analysis

In order to understand the emergence, objectives and functioning of commons initiatives of the Center-East district of Sant Cugat, we rely on data from the interviews. All the interviews were transcribed and coded inductively following grounded theory ([Charmaz, 2006](#)).

To explore which actors are involved in commons-oriented coproduction, which actors play a central role and what is the role of governmental organisations, we used the survey data to build a social network. To study patterns of connectivity (collaboration) among actors belonging to the social network, we calculated network-level measures of the level of cohesion/fragmentation of the network and the existence of eventual leaders ([Borgatti et al., 2002](#)). The measures included: (1) size, or number of actors in the network; (2) number of components, or the number of clusters of actors within the broader network; (3) density, or the number of links in the network, expressed as a proportion (from 0 to 1) of the maximum possible number of links; and (4) indegree network centralization index, or the tendency for a few actors in the network to receive many links or nominations (expressed in percentage). We also calculated two individual-level centrality measures, indegree ([Wasserman & Faust, 1994](#)) and betweenness ([Burt, 2004](#)). We measured indegree as the number of nominations an initiative receives on other initiative's lists. It is a measure that represents more popular/well-connected initiatives in the network. We used indegree instead of degree (i.e., the total number of ties to other actors in the network)

because indegree is a more robust measure for assessing informal organograms under conditions of missing data (Costenbader & Valente, 2003). We measured betweenness as the number of times an actor rests on a short path connecting two others who are themselves disconnected. This indicates which initiatives brokered across different initiatives and disconnected segments of the network.

We used the information from the semi-structured interviews and the workshops to examine in detail the collaborative processes, structures and practices. The information was analysed following the method of qualitative content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A list of viewpoints was compiled and reorganised based on the five categories of the analytical framework of TCA: shared goals, trust, cultural diversity, leadership and power. We have used as a proxy to evaluate trust the insights of the interviewees towards the collaboration with the rest of the organisations, i.e. good collaborative experiences reinforce trust. Cultural diversity and leadership are analysed by the internal structure and the experiences that are explained by the interviewees and during the workshop. Power is extracted from the conclusions of past collaborations, the identification of power situations within collaborative processes, the sources of power of those situations and who should have the agency over the situations of power in a collaborative process.

4. Results

4.1. Social networks of commons-oriented coproduction

The social network analysis of the nine urban commons initiatives of the Centre-East district of Sant Cugat resulted in a network of 126 nodes, structured in a single component (no isolated sub-networks, see Fig. 2). Linkages among the nodes are relatively dense (density index = 0.0115, 181 linkages), meaning there is a relatively high connection between initiatives. However, centrality is low (indegree centrality index = 4.49%), indicating that the network does not have very central (dominant) organisations. This lack of a central actor is due to several organisations having a high indegree (nominated in others' lists). The most central initiatives were *Cal Temerari* (7 incoming ties), *El Cugatenc* (5), and *XES* (5). *Ajuntament de Sant Cugat* appears as the second most mentioned organisation with six incoming ties, showing that the City Council of Sant Cugat is an important actor within the network. Regarding the capacity of brokering, *Cal Temerari*, *El Cugatenc*, *Hora Bruixa* and *XES* are the ones with a higher capacity to connect different initiatives. These are very different initiatives, but all of them have in common a strong dynamism and capacity to establish relationships with other organisations. For instance, *Hora Bruixa*, which is a feminist collective that carries awareness raising and training campaigns, has a large network of collaborations with other feminist groups, but also collaborates with the City Council to design gender policies, writes a monthly article in *El Cugatenc* and is hosted in *Cal Temerari* premises. The social network is a reflection of the neighbourhood's associative and cultural

history and show a sense of belonging.

4.2. Understanding practices and tensions in commons-oriented coproduction

Our results show that the nine organisations studied have collaborated with each other quite intensively. They have, for example, jointly participated in fairs, e.g. Fair on Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), Committed Consumer Fair, and have organised educational workshops. Concerning the collaboration with the City Council, some organisations have participated as consultants in several decision-making processes such as The Master Plan of the Social Economy or the Housing Table while others do not collaborate with the Council. The Department of Economic Promotion of the City Council has a collaboration agreement with the *Ateneu Cooperatiu del Vallès Occidental* based on offering advice and training to entrepreneurial and business projects that want to opt for the options of the SSE, especially cooperativism; and for the promotion of a Cooperative Pole in the municipality. Another form of collaboration is the support given to initiatives through the cession of rooms and resources. During the workshop, most initiatives considered that the collaborative processes with the City Council tend to be disappointing. In the following sub-sections, we present the results of the analysis of the practices, structures and processes of collaborations among the urban common initiatives and between the initiatives and the City Council according to the five dimensions of the TCA framework: shared goals, trust, cultural diversity, leadership and power (Fig. 3).

4.2.1. Shared goals

We analyse the shared goals based on three dimensions of the TCA framework: the level, the content and the relevance. The level dimension of goals can arise from goals referring to individuals', the organisation or the collaboration expectations. Concerning the individual level, representatives of the initiatives engage with the core goal of their organisation, otherwise they wouldn't be part of it. The same cannot be supposed in the part of the City Council, as public workers do not have to be genuinely engaged with their position. However, when workers are involved with a goal of the organisation, they pursue it firmly. With regards to the goals of the initiatives, they are focused on different fields of expertise such as the social economy, housing market, journalism and organic food production, and feminism (see Table 1). They have common goals, such as raising awareness and building alternatives to the capitalist system by provisioning goods and services and transforming society, as mentioned by all initiatives.

The representative of the City Council stated the goal of giving priority to socio-ecological benefit over economic profit in their daily processes. It has developed a Master Plan of Social Economy with the objective to promote and support equity and sustainable values. Interviewees of the local administration talked about the importance of making initiatives visible, both as a way to highlight public problems and the alternatives that exist:

"Yes, it [the Social Economy] should be promoted, because they generate impact. Above all, the impact is raising awareness that economic activity is not the most important thing but to help workers and the whole society." (City council).

With regards to the collaboration expectations, we can distinguish here two types of content as highlighted by the content dimension, i.e. objectives that deal with what collaboration is about, and objectives about how the collaboration should happen. Representatives of the initiatives that attended the workshop identify their possible objectives for setting up a collaboration with the City Council. Some of these goals refer to the promotion of real intercooperation and synergies between the City Council and entities through the creation of a space for exchange and decision-making. The City Council recognizes the entities as experts that can carry out certain activities on behalf of it. It also allocates resources and specific endowment to the SSE, promotes a local social currency, and implements the proposals of social movements in

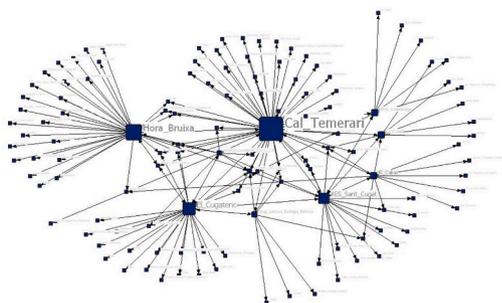


Fig. 2. Network of the nine urban commons initiatives of Centre-East Sant Cugat. Note: The colour indicates that all initiatives pertain to a single component. The size of the nodes reflects the betweenness or the brokering capacity of the initiative.

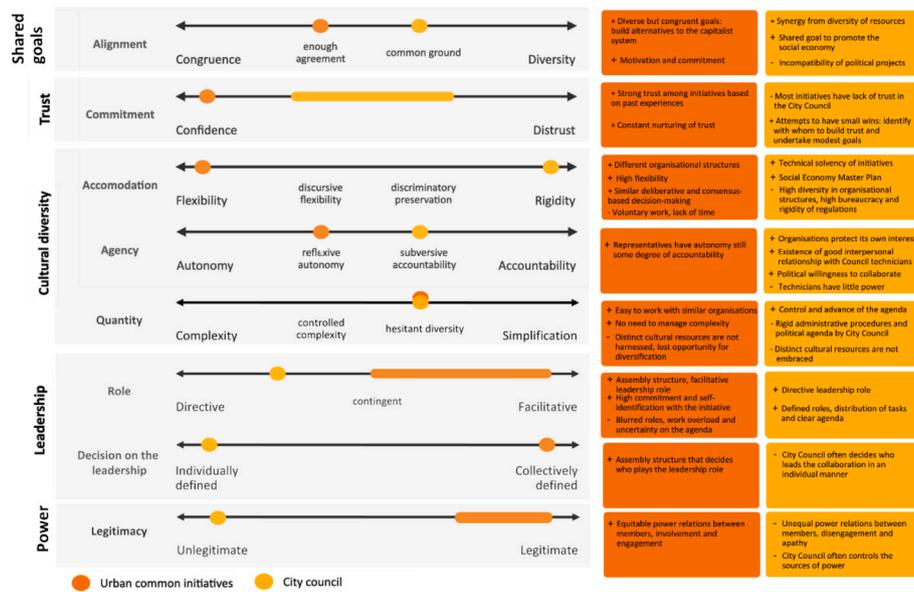


Fig. 3. Tensions identified regarding the collaboration among the urban common initiatives (orange) and between the initiatives and the City Council (yellow) based on the TCA framework. (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

public policies. Other objectives focused on the own interests of the initiatives, for instance, the cession of resources, such as the cession of a premises to make an agroecological food cooperative or the cession of a public land to make a first pilot project of housing cooperative on assignment of use, and promote a public-cooperative consortium.

The objectives of the City Council to promote a collaboration with the entities are to build shared objectives and join forces among the initiatives of the Social Economy, the City Council and other agents who may be involved as the resources for the social economy are limited. The representative also mentions the strengthening of the social economy and the expansion of its values and principles.

With regards to goals that target the collaborative process, all initiatives function according to internal democracy principles and assembly structures and want to implement this way of functioning to their collaborations and networking. With this, it should be noted that two initiatives have process goals as principal drivers for their organisations, by promoting networking and inter-cooperation among different initiatives (Cal Temerari and XES Sant Cugat). All the initiatives that attended the workshop agree that the collaboration between entities and the City Council should be based on joint work and peer-to-peer cooperation open to everyone, rather than on a formal process of assignment or a relationship through tenders and requests for bids. Some pointed out the importance of building a cross-cutting process which incorporates the different departments of the City Council and other stakeholders relevant to the topic under collaboration. Participants further considered that the process should be efficient, transparent and characterised by sincerity and trust. It was pointed out that city representatives involved in the collaboration should have knowledge about the dynamics of the SSE to ensure a fruitful collaboration. A crucial aspect identified was to ensure that the City Council does not use its position of power to manage public resources to condition the political and social action of social entities and movements. The City Council is also interested in how they are going to develop and implement the new Master Plan of Social Economy. One aspect they mentioned is the intention to change the wording of bids to avoid precarious wages, that is, to act according to the philosophy behind the SSE.

Regarding the relevance dimension, goals can be dependent or independent to the collaborative agenda. Six initiatives seem to be dependent on collaborations: La Civada and El Cabàs because they need to get in contact with local producers, Cal Temerari and XES Sant Cugat because their organisations are focused on building collaborations, the

newspaper El Cugatenc to increase its scope and number of articles and 4Pins Cohabitatge needs the City Council to get land for starting its project. The other three alternatives do not strictly need collaboration but they still collaborate to increase their impact. The City Council can also work on its own, as it has legislative and executive power, however, it prefers to collaborate with other organisations as it is considered advantageous because it allows to have a more comprehensive knowledge of the city problems and the needed solutions.

As shown, urban common initiatives embrace different goals but they do share values, which makes it easier to envision common goals. This located them in a position of “enough agreement” referring to the tension between congruence and diversity on common goals. Although the City Council does not frame public problems as a cause of capitalist dynamics, the purpose to prioritise socio-environmental welfare over economics is congruent enough with the initiatives to create a “common ground” for joint work.

4.2.2. Trust

Our results show that most initiatives are already in active collaboration with each other and are having good experiences. All of them, when asked, value those collaborations positively. Risk, understood as the uncertainty that the other organisation will not follow through on what has been agreed (Ring & Van de Ven, 1992), is not mentioned in the interviews. On the contrary, all initiatives praised networking together because it helps them achieve their own goals:

“Other movements and other spaces in the city have helped us a lot, for example Cal Temerari, which let us gather here. We have also made synergies with other social movements and entities in the city and they have given us visibility.” (Sindicat de Llogateres).

Differences appear among the initiatives regarding their perceptions about the collaboration with the City Council. Seven initiatives have already collaborated with the City Council while others have no relation at all and do not see the benefits of working together, e.g. La Civada. Nonetheless, two of those initiatives that were working with the local administration said to have a minimal relation, limited to the request of legal permits (Cal Temerari) or to consultation processes (Hora Bruixa). During the workshop, one of the six initiatives valued positively the collaboration with the City Council, being the initiative from the social economy. Other two initiatives recognised having positive collaborative experiences mainly through one of its members that works within the public institution but valued negatively the overall collaboration (el

Cabàs and Grup de lectura EP). The other three said being disappointed with the collaboration, either because they are working with it or because they tried to start something and have not been able to move forward. On its side, the City Council seems to have confidence in the resources that initiatives can bring into a collaboration, as they stated:

“For the new Master Plan of the Social Economy, we plan to do a bottom-up process with entities and jointly define the objectives and actions of this Plan. We understand that they have knowledge which we do not currently have.” (City council).

The representative of the local administration considered essential to build relationships of trust among the entities and the City Council and that collaboration is not understood as an interference in the tasks of the others or as a willingness to veto some projects but as a real willingness to strengthen the SSE. Fluent and continuous communication was considered important, not framed only through the participation in formal bodies but promoting other informal communication channels such as direct calls through telephone and a real social interaction. Grounded on past experiences, initiatives have stated good expectations towards collaboration with other initiatives and trust across initiatives is present and strong. Trust regarding the City Council is diverse. The local administration values working with social organisations but most of them are disappointed with the City Council which shows a lack of trust.

4.2.3. Cultural diversity

To analyse the cultural diversity present in the collaborative processes, we first looked at the organisational characteristics of the initiatives and their functioning. We found that the organisations are varied in terms of internal structure, three of them have created job positions and have a fee to participate, three only have a fee and the remaining three have neither a fee nor work groups (see Table 2).

In terms of functioning, all initiatives have in common the debate and consensus building as a source of decision-making. Almost all of them are structured through thematic commissions meaning that internal structures are easily relatable. The City Council, on its side, is organised in a hierarchical distribution of positions and administrative procedures that are rigid. Initiatives are quite similar in terms of operational and organisational culture while there is a high cultural diversity between the initiatives and the City Council.

Representatives of the initiatives identified several organisational aspects that enable the collaboration among initiatives and with the City Council. One aspect is the intercooperation and networking with other entities which provides more bargaining power with the City Council and favours collaboration. Another aspect pointed out was the flexibility of the entity, understood as the ability of the members of the entity to be involved in the tasks that are needed at any given time. The existence of a large number of participants in the entity and the assembly structure and specialization in commissions allow it to reach more areas of action, including collaboration with the public administration. However, four of nine initiatives pointed out that one of the main difficulties to collaboration is the lack of time or involvement of their members, as

Table 2
Description of the initiatives' organisation.

Name	Internal structure	Fees	Paid job positions
El Cabàs	Workers and board discuss and consult to the assembly	Yes	Two
Cal Temerari	Assembly and work groups	Yes	One
Grup de lectura ecologia política	Assembly	No	None
La Civada	Assembly and work groups	Yes	None
El Cugatenc	Assembly and work groups	Yes	Three
4Pins Cohabitatge	Assembly and work groups	Yes	None
Hora bruixa	Assembly and work groups	Yes	None
Síndicat de llogateres	Assembly	No	None
XES Sant Cugat	Assembly	No	None
City Council	Hierarchical	Taxes	Yes

participation is based on voluntary work and members argue that their schedules are busy working, taking care of their families or being involved in other social organisations. Technical solvency of the entity, understood as the expertise in dealing with the requirements requested by the City Council to organize events, request material, etc., was considered important because it allows entities to anticipate the problems and requirements that they encounter when collaborating with the City Council. The City Council considered that the main organisational aspect that favours collaboration is the existence of the Master Plan for the Social Economy, which was carried out through a participatory process with all the agents involved in the Social Economy of the territory.

When asked about the organisational aspects and functioning that hinder collaboration, most participants considered that it is mostly the aspects of the structure and functioning of the City Council that make collaboration difficult. Several aspects were mentioned such as a high bureaucracy of the City Council and slow administrative processes which leaves the results of the processes uncertain. The rigidity of regulations and the interpretation of these regulations by the municipal legal services, i.e., municipal secretaries and controllers, often paralyze projects, particularly those more innovative. There are City Councils that have municipal legal services which are more flexible than others and therefore do not exercise pressure to follow the rules strictly. Even the City Council recognizes this drawback:

“You also find that sometimes the administration doesn't let you. For example, we are now preparing a bid for a service next year and we have decided that who bids 10% under the rest is eliminated, because we cannot allow precarious salaries as an administration. But now it has to go to the contracting department and see what happens.” (City Council).

Most initiatives considered that the City Council processes are not intended for participation. As an example, they mentioned that the processes to request material from the City Council cannot be assumed by a small entity because they need a tax ID number, an insurance, be familiar with the processes, and request the material a month in advance. The constitution of formal bodies to undertake the collaboration, i.e. Sectorial Tables, is also considered complex by the initiatives because it requires statutes and only the City Council can set them up. Notwithstanding, they are stable bodies and the City Council assumes the commitment to carry out the consensual agreements. An additional aspect is the lack of financial resources of the entities which generates precarious work and demotivation. Consequently, some initiatives have decided to focus on the core goals of their initiatives, such as producing and distributing organic food, and loosen up on collaboration and activism.

Initiatives have in common simplicity and consensus, which makes them flexible when enacting collaboration to adapt to the needs of a specific agenda. Initiatives are in the “flexibility” pole of the tension. This flexibility, however, may come with the risk of dilated processes and loose members implication. In the local administration, procedures are more rigid and those structures are ill-fit for the collaboration with initiatives. The City Council is in the “rigidity” extreme of the tension.

Concerning the agency tension, our results reveal that although urban commons have a consensus-based way of functioning, their representatives have certain autonomy to act on behalf of the organisation. But still, they are aware that they cannot make decisions on their own and that they have to give explanations to the assembly, therefore there is some degree of accountability:

“The paid worker delegates to the commission the decisions he believes he should not make as a person” (Cal Temerari).

The representatives of the City Council have to account their acts to the procedures and structure of the law. Both the initiatives and the City Council coincide that one key aspect of the collaboration is the relationship and proximity of the entity with the technicians of the City Council. The technicians are the ones who finally have contact with the entities, so if the interpersonal relationship is good, it greatly facilitates collaboration, but if it is bad, it can hinder it. Another key aspect of

collaborative agency is the existence of political will, which exists in the case of the Department of Economic Promotion of the City Council as stated by its representative. However, participants complained that there is often no congruence between the agreements of the entities with the different politicians of the City Council and the subsequent technical difficulties to carry out the agreements. For instance, in some topics such as cooperative housing, the technical teams of the City Council often collapsed due to ignorance of the subject, excessive guaranteeing attitude and lack of courage to innovate. Another aspect is the absence of cross-cutting work regarding the SSE among the different Departments of the City Council, which hinders the collaboration between the initiatives and the City Council as a whole. Certain projects need to be developed by different Departments due to public competencies, however, usually projects do not advance because there is no joint work. Furthermore, resources are limited, and projects that cannot be undertaken by a single Department due to budget constraints may be able to succeed joining resources from various Departments.

Concerning the agency tension, initiatives are located within the “reflexive autonomy” (Huxham, 2003) as representatives can accommodate the particularities of the collaboration while they still have to explain themselves in front of the assembly. On the side of local administration, some collaborations with initiatives work better than others because of the public workers that are leading them. This means that members have some freedom adapting to the needs of the collaboration still following the constraints of the regulations. Therefore, the agency of the City Council is located within “subversive accountability” (Huxham, 2003).

Finally, regarding the quantity tension, collaborations seem to be tending to simplicity. On the one hand, because most of the collaborations studied take place between initiatives and those have similar structures, thus complexity is low. Despite having different goals and discourses, similarities in language and internal structure make the collaboration easier. On the other hand, the collaborations between the City Council and the initiatives do not embrace the needs of the different parts brought together and rather keep on with the rigid administrative procedures and the political agenda of the City Council. This simplifies the collaboration by imposing the culture of one organisation over the rest. Commons initiatives claim that embracing the heterogeneity of the collaboration would prevent the issues of subordination, control or appropriation of the agenda by the City Council. Affinity across initiatives can explain why collaboration among them is more frequent and satisfactory than with the City Council. Initiatives and the City Council are located within the “hesitant diversity” (Huxham, 2003) along the quantity tension, where there is some opportunity for diversification but still cultural similarities are greater.

When asked about how to improve the collaboration, more expertise and knowledge on the functioning of the SSE, agility and courage on the part of the City Council are needed to promote a new way of doing politics. Initiatives' representatives considered necessary to improve bureaucratic processes and provide facilities for carrying out the activities of the entities. They propose to involve the technical, legal and political representatives of the City Council simultaneously in the collaborative processes, otherwise mismatches and discrepancies appear among these actors which hinder the process itself. The cross-cutting of the SSE along the different departments of the City Council was considered important. Another improvement mentioned was the creation of sector-specific negotiating tables that involve regularity and a commitment on the part of the City Council to carry out the shared objectives. On the part of the City Council, the representative expressed doubts about whether it could be improved by making collaborations more flexible and supportive without having to bureaucratize everything. He highlighted that it corresponds to other levels of government, such as the regional and national level, to make the rules more flexible to promote these collaborations. Both the public worker and some interviewees from the initiatives considered that training initiatives on the administrative procedures of the City Council may help collaborations.

There is often willingness on the part of City Council staff to promote joint projects with entities, but technicians usually find themselves with many difficulties to do so. Initiatives also mention the elimination of double standards from the City Council with entities that are critical of its political management to promote a universal and feasible access to the City Council's public resources independent of the agency of the entities.

4.2.4. Leadership

Two types of tensions can arise concerning leadership, one regarding the leadership roles and other regarding the decision on leadership roles. With regards to the first one, initiatives have an assembly structure and assertions like: “*we all have the same level of power*” and “*everything is done by consensus*” show that they tend to have a facilitative leadership role, also when they collaborate among each other:

“In the April assembly we raffled the members of the board among the people who were interested, it was simply paperwork to be able to constitute. We all have the same weight, are equal members of the assembly and commissions.” (4Pins Cohabitatge).

This leadership role generates a high commitment and self-identification of the members with the initiative, however, often produces uncertainty on the organisation's agenda, indetermination on the tasks, and overload on the most active members. This can explain why three initiatives talked about organisation difficulties: “*it did not work,*” “*participants are overloaded*” or “*decisions are slow*”. Some of them recognised that day to day decisions were made by a board or just a part of the organisation to be more practical. One even acknowledged the trade-off of tensions:

“Participation spaces have a slower pace but we've done it to get more people involved. The assembly may not be as empowered and the operation may not be optimal.” (Cal Temerari).

When asked about the role of leadership in collaborative processes between the initiatives and the City Council, representatives of the initiatives thought that the leadership role needs to be goal-oriented. It must be characterised by active listening and must be a shared leadership where a group of people is responsible for specific tasks. The persons must be proactive, honest, hardworking and above all they must have the courage to innovate. Other opinions consider that it is necessary to let the entities take the leadership initiative.

Our results characterise initiatives as having a facilitative role of leadership regarding the first tension. On the second tension, the structure of initiatives is self-managed, this means that the leader role is never assumed by a single person and decisions are made collectively in a leaderless way. Members also complain about the pace and scope of their own organisation's performance, something characteristic of the leaderless style (Vangen & Huxham, 2003b).

On the contrary, the City Council is conceived in a hierarchical structure, typical of a directive leadership role (Vangen & Huxham, 2003b). Local administration shows an interest for the facilitative leadership role by starting discussion tables and other consultations with initiatives. Regarding the second tension, the City Council has a clearly defined leadership role established by the City Council itself. However, the representative of the City Council thought that during the process of drawing up a policy, for instance, the new Plan for the Social Economy, everyone should propose and jointly decide afterwards the leadership role and who develops it. He deemed that the most appropriate would be a mixture of collaborative leadership shared by diverse members of the initiatives and the City Council but at the same time dynamic based on an agile decision-making approach. He considered that putting this leadership model into practice is moderately realistic as there are representative figures in the municipality who could play this role. However, based on past collaborations, it is not rare that the City Council uses a directive role to influence the agenda, control the resources and have the last word on decisions. This quotation shows their unequal leadership role compared to the initiatives:

“At one point we contacted the administration. We've had several

meetings that have gone really well that we tore up a verbal commitment, now let's see how it goes with the change of town hall, but it's published in the press, I hope they don't change it." (XES Sant Cugat).

4.2.5. Power

Our results show that initiatives and the City Council have been involved in many past situations where power has influenced their development. The source of power in these situations is diverse including having financial and material resources, having the access to the relevant information, deciding the process to involve participants and which participants to invite, deciding the location and time of the meetings, having the required knowledge and expertise, and having the capacity to establish the regulations and being able to change them when required.

When initiatives collaborate among them, they tend to establish equitable power relationships and use their resources in benefit of the collaboration:

"We share resources, information, knowledge and expertise, approaches and members with other groups (...) This allows us to improve the impact of environmental awareness we want to achieve." (Grup de lectura d'Ecologia Política).

When collaborating with the City Council, however, initiatives pointed out a clear power imbalance between the Council and the community-based organisations. The unequal power relationship is often due to the City Council controlling the many sources of power identified above. For instance, the lack of financial and material resources of the initiatives in comparison with the City Council often illustrates this power imbalances. When promoting a housing cooperative, the project depended on the transfer of public land from the City Council to the cooperative as they did not have the resources to be able to buy the land. Moreover, the administration has been often the one deciding the collaboration procedures and inviting the participants. The outcomes of those are not always satisfactory and most initiatives have expressed disengagement towards them, as shown in the following quote:

"We participated in the Sant Cugat Housing Board but we stopped participating because the objectives were not met. The City Council came to the meetings to listen to the proposals of the entities, but they did not contribute. It was a way of not getting involved, of hindering the collaboration process with a clearly passive stance." (Sindicat de Llogateres).

The representative of the City Council pointed out to differences in power and ability to carry forward proposals between the different departments of the City Council. Therefore, internal cooperation between the various departments within the City Council in promoting projects from the social economy was deemed important, especially taking into account the necessary eco-social transition.

Concerning who should have the power to decide over certain aspects of a collaboration in a future new Plan for the Social Economy, some initiatives considered that the most important aspect is the control of resources, which should be decided collectively between the initiatives and the City Council. The decision about defining the characteristics and functioning of the collaborative space should be shared among those collaborating, currently it is the responsibility of the City Council. Some representatives thought that initiatives should play a greater role in choosing who is part of this collaborative space and in deciding how it works.

Beyond collaborative processes, social initiatives have the power to decide the pace and strategy in the public perception arena. They build normative content and disclose administration or market procedures concerning public problems, which can influence public agendas. Five initiatives have stated to have impact through influencing social opinion:

"We forced the City Council to hold a public bid. We have also stopped some contests for malpractice. These claims have generated a reflection within the City Council to evaluate the things they do and how

they are explained." (El Cugatenc).

5. Discussion

Our results show that commons-oriented coproduction with Sant Cugat City Council is an aspiration more than a reality. We find that urban commons initiatives are already having collaborations among themselves showed by a strong social network, but they have differences in their relationship with the City Council. In addition, most urban commons initiatives and the City Council are also connected. However, many of the initiatives would not consider that they are co-producing commons supported by the City Council but rather they express unhappiness with the way the collaboration takes place.

As shown, urban common initiatives embrace different goals, but they do share values and a common political project based on social justice, equality and environmental sustainability. Their different fields of expertise provide heterogeneity that enriches the collaboration with resources and motivation for commitment (Vangen & Huxham, 2011). On its side, the City Council has a discourse based on fostering the social economy by supporting initiatives and trying to promote internal processes that give priority to socio-ecological benefits over economic profit such as in bids. However, that is the goal stated for the Economic Promotion Department, another department could envision different and even contradictory goals. The size and complexity of the City Council increases the chances to have a large number of goals, frequently contradictory, non-genuine, unstated or hidden, which makes it difficult to converge on goals (Vangen & Huxham, 2011). Besides, the public administration is characterised by political fluxes of positions, which makes agreements temporary. Actually, some entities claim that very often the City Council, instead of endorsing a collaborative decision-making process with the entities and empowering them, prioritises its own political agenda and action plan. While, it collaborates with initiatives that share its political agenda or those that at least do not hinder it.

Regarding trust, we have found a strong confidence among initiatives based on previous experiences of collaboration and constant nurturing of trust. Nevertheless, most initiatives lack trust in the City Council. Nurturing of trust consists of continuous communication, recognition of power imbalances, sharing of outcomes, balance of workload, awareness of the levels of commitment and care of conflicting goals (Calvet-Mir et al., 2015; Pera & Bussu, 2024; Vangen & Huxham, 2003a). Those aspects must be balanced through the dynamics of a specific collaboration, especially with the fluctuations over participants, power, goals and organisational structures.

On the cultural diversity, commons-oriented co-production needs to accommodate a high diversity of organisational structures for the collaboration, which often comes across high bureaucratic procedures and rigidity of regulations. Attempts to adjust and make these procedures more flexible often come up against lack of political willingness, legal expertise, agility, lack of capacities and courage on the part of the City Council representatives, which would entail a new way of doing politics and a more facilitative role of leadership. It has often proved extremely challenging to transform the normative relations with elected policy makers and technicians and change their understanding and habits to act as facilitators rather than managers (Petrescu et al., 2016). Overall, it generates unequal power relationships between urban commons and the City Council, often culminating in situations of conflict that raises questions about the limitations of the current political regimes to be able to accommodate commons-oriented coproduction (Bianchi et al., 2022; Petrescu et al., 2016).

Our results, in line with the literature, show that the state's role in commons-oriented coproduction remains diverse and convoluted. State interventions sometimes protect the commons, especially when commons become well-established. It is the case of relevant coproduction, i. e., when the resources and institutional infrastructures mobilised significantly reinforce the actions of the commons; and key

coproduction, i.e., when the alternative projects of the initiatives are almost entirely in line with a policy of the public administration (according to Bianchi et al., 2022 classification). It is the case of some policies promoted by the City Council such as the Master Plan of the Social Economy or some public initiatives such as the Cooperative Pole. At times, commons can evade the state by thriving and surviving through a flexible collaboration strategy, which according to Bianchi et al. (2022) is called ad hoc coproduction, i.e., when initiatives engage with the state on a limited basis to meet their material needs. Examples of this type of commons-oriented coproduction is the support given to initiatives through the cession of rooms and resources as it is done by Cal Temerari. Some of these commons initiatives are aware that state involvement often entails the desire to transform common goods into state property or a capitalist commodity (DeVerteuil et al., 2022; Foster & Iaione, 2016; Gidwani & Bariskar, 2011), so they limit their collaboration to specific circumstances. In other cases, such as in aspirational coproduction (Bianchi et al., 2022), initiatives would like to coproduce but find the state unresponsive. It is the case of the tenants' union that wanted to make a first pilot project of housing cooperative on assignment of use through the cession of a public plot of land but did not obtain the support of the City Council. There are other cases where there is no state intervention at all and commoners do not see the benefits of collaborating with the City Council, e.g. La Cívada. Finally, in other occasions, commons are the target of state-imposed displacement (Gioielli, 2011), however, we have not found any evidence of this case as a result of commons-oriented coproduction.

We argue that the goals of the urban commons initiatives, their internal structure and current practices, the way they perform leadership and distribute power in collaborations embody 'prefigurative politics'. This means that urban commons technical and organisational forms and their current practices largely embody the political imaginaries and power structures they want to enable in society as well as the kind of society they wish to create (Husain et al., 2020). These organisational forms and practices are rooted in their everyday life by producing alternative social relations, discourses, institutions and political subjects which constitutes the everyday politics of the commons (Roussos, 2019). This political action is often articulated through forms of contentious politics together with other agents as "concerted, counter-hegemonic social and political action, in which differently positioned participants come together to challenge dominant systems of authority in order to promote and enact alternative imaginaries" (Leitner et al., 2008, p. 157). Hence, when urban commons collaborate with the local state, often a guarantor of the status quo, collaborative tensions may appear as it often tends to limit the expansion of practices that provide alternatives to capitalism and different political imaginaries. Several examples exist in the literature showing the withdrawal of the public administration from commons-oriented coproduction projects such as the R-Urban project in Colombes (France), where the Municipal Council was initially a partner in 2009 but revoked their participation in the project partnership because of the change in local politics after local elections in 2014. The project had nevertheless continued to be effectively self-governed by urban commoners (Petrescu et al., 2016). However, opposite examples exist where a strong social movement had been able to negotiate with the local state and succeed in receiving support and even co-designing the delivery of services to guarantee their universality and gratuity innovating even into the legal institutional framework, e.g. commoners-led social space Can Batlló in Barcelona (Spain) (Asara, 2020; Pera & Bussu, 2024). In this case, the government of the city of Barcelona shared the political imaginary of the urban commons and invested time and staff to create an environment of trust and mutual understanding between public administration and commoners to find innovative instruments that can respond to commons' demands. Nevertheless, recent political changes at the City Council hamper the collaboration.

The contentious politics of urban commons illustrates the post-capitalist commoning politics suggested by Gibson-Graham et al. (2016) and Dombroski et al. (2023), understood as "an eclectic collection

of prefigurative interventions that invite us as residents and researchers to imagine and enact a different kind of city. In this sense, a counter-city is postcapitalist, in that it shifts our imaginaries away from capitalocentric notions of the city as always and necessarily capitalist, enabling new visions beyond capitalism to infuse our analysis and sense of the city". While capitalist practices are also present in the city, the idea is to attend to the generative diversity of other economic practices (particularly the non-exploitative ones) rather than seeing them as always in the margins. Although the political action of these urban commons is often based on building spaces of counterpower that are autonomous from the state (De Angelis, 2013; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Stavrides, 2016); we have shown that often commoners' needs of material infrastructural elements push them to interact with the local state. Some initiatives are deeply aware of the risks involved in collaborating with the local state in terms of becoming co-opted through the domestication of their radical claims (Stavrides, 2016). As a response, they have an ad hoc co-production (Bianchi et al., 2022) by engaging with the City Council only when it is strictly necessary to fulfil their material infrastructural needs, such as asking for permits to undertake activities in the street or specific funding. They are proud of having developed a strong technical solvency in managing this ad hoc collaboration. This ad hoc coproduction illustrates the articulation of a commoning-community as a wide assemblage that includes social movements, grass-roots organisations, governments, institutions, and even firms that do not need to be politically aligned (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). Having said that, emerging collaborative processes of commons-oriented coproduction also enable new forms of political experiences which influence the collective imagination of the political. As an example, we have found that the role of particular technicians of the City council that share the political imaginary of the commons is key to ensure a fruitful commons-oriented coproduction as they understand their transformative goals and the way they function.

6. Conclusion

A growing body of scholarship understands the process of commoning as a relational dialectical process between commons formation and community formation. Who constitutes this commoner community is still under debate. Some authors argue that it is constituted by an assemblage that includes humans and non-humans, class and non-class alignments, social movements, grass-roots organisations, governments, institutions, and firms that do not necessarily need to share a political essence and may even represent antagonistic relationships (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). Other scholars tend to see the urban commoners-local government interactions as a prelude to the commons being coopted (Hardt & Negri, 2009; Mattei, 2011); and governance scholars, instead, argue that these interactions are not only crucial for the commoners to assemble the needed material infrastructures (Foster & Iaione, 2016), but can also be an opportunity for them to gain political advantages (Mitlin, 2008).

In line of this debate, this paper proposes an analytical framework for the study of the social practice of commons-oriented coproduction and implements it at the urban neighbourhood scale, at the Centre East neighbourhood of Sant Cugat del Vallès (Spain). This framework is a novel approach that combines the analysis of the social network of urban commons with a qualitative approach using the Theory of Collaborative Advantage to disclose the tensions emerging in collaborations between urban commoners and the local government. Our results show that a network of urban commons exists composed by initiatives with a markedly transformative character. Urban commons initiatives play different roles in the network with key players acting as brokers with high capacity to connect different initiatives. The City Council of Sant Cugat is the only public administration appearing in their social network in a second position of importance.

Although the City Council occupies a central position in the urban commons network, which may lead to consider it a key player in the commoning-community assemblage, our findings resulting from the

nuanced analysis of the everyday practices and tensions originated in commons-oriented coproduction suggest that the collaboration between urban commons initiatives and the public administration is unsatisfactory, however, it is not uniform. There are experiences of success but also of frustration and scepticism. There seems to be enough agreement on shared goals between the initiatives and the City Council to enable a fruitful collaboration as the latter wants to promote the social economy and has a specific Master Plan for it. However, most initiatives lack trust in the City Council and the collaboration is characterised by a high diversity of organisational structures and high bureaucracy and rigidity of regulations on the side of the City Council that hinders coproduction. The City Council and the urban common initiatives count on different resources that, well-managed, could result in collaborative advantage.

We argue that collaborations with the state are sometimes needed to not only ensure the (re)production of urban commons, but also to include urban commons initiatives as a significant key player in the coproduction of urban policy and planning towards social and environmentally transformative local development. However, these collaborations are often characterised by tensions. Some of these tensions can be overcome and others are unsolvable, especially those originated as a result of different political imaginaries among collaborators, which highly influence the goals the partners have for the collaboration, how they practically (re)distribute power and leadership along the collaborative process and the way they function and organize.

Our findings outline further lines of analysis for understanding and supporting urban co-production for the commons. Further qualitative and quantitative research is needed to develop theories of and methodologies for better understanding the dynamics and perceptions of the partners involved in commons-oriented coproduction processes and help deconstruct the tensions identified to promote these processes. Specifically, there is a need to gather more empirical insights from other geographical locations that may complement our findings and the experiences of commons-oriented coproductions processes where partners have a shared political imaginary.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Sara Maestre Andrés: Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Laura Calvet Mir:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Gemma Simón-i-Mas:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Formal analysis. **Iolanda Bianchi:** Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Mara Ferreri:** Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Marina Pera:** Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Núria Reguero:** Writing – review & editing, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Sergio Villamayor Tomás:** Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Funding acquisition, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the participants of the two workshops conducted in February and April 2021. This research received funding from the Càtedra de Política Econòmica Local (Universitat Pompeu Fabra and Ajuntament de Barcelona), reference number: AZ616927/48032101. S. Maestre-Andrés, G. Simón Mas and S. Villamayor Tomás also acknowledge the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities “Maria de Maeztu” programme “Unit of Excellence” (MDM2015-0552). Any errors or omissions in the article remain our own responsibility.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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