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The embeddedness of public-common institutions: the Citizen Assets Programme in Barcelona

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Abstract

In this chapter we focus on the embeddedness of participatory structures within social and political contexts, through an analysis of the "Citizen Assets Programme (CAP)" in Barcelona. This is a policy seeking to establish institutional support for the urban commons, those spaces and facilities rooted in the community that are susceptible to be transferred to citizens' collectives to manage them democratically (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017). For doing so, we define embeddedness as the setting of policies in their social and political environment with a "productive relation to the other institutions of the democratic system" (Bussu et al. 2022a, p.3). Based on qualitative discourse analysis of official documents and 17 interviews conducted with politicians, civil servants, academics, and activists between 2015-2021, this chapter examines the main constraints that hinder the embeddedness of participatory structures. Our findings point out the lack of an appropriate legal framework that challenges the implementation of the CAP and impair the creation of trust in the policy. Thus, we contribute to remind trust as one of the relevant elements in the fruitful embedding of DDG participatory structures at the local scale.

Introduction

In this chapter we focus on the embeddedness of participatory structures within social and political contexts, through an analysis of the "Citizen Assets Programme (CAP)" in Barcelona. This is a policy that seeks to establish institutional support for the urban commons, that is, spaces and facilities rooted in the community that are susceptible to being transferred to citizens' collectives to be managed democratically (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017). We define policies as being embedded when they are situated in their social and political environment with a "productive relation to the other institutions of the democratic system" (Bussu et al. 2022a, p.3). Embeddedness is considered a crucial element in the fruitful implementation and sustainability of innovative participatory structures.

Moreover, the CAP is a clear case of "Democracy-Driven Governance" (Bua and Bussu, 2020), henceforth DDG, since the formulation of the policy takes into account practices of self-government that have a long tradition in the city of Barcelona, and also sets out an institutional design, backed by the Barcelona en Comú (BComú) local government, that recognises and protects urban commons. The CAP aims to recognise, protect and promote 'public-common institutions', since it considers them an opportunity for democratic innovation (Bianchi, 2022; Russell, 2019). These institutions intend to substitute traditionally formal spaces of participation in order to create embedded and enduring participatory governance structures in which decision-making power is formally shared between active citizens, social movements and public actors, thus combining the principles of representative democracy with those of direct democracy (Blanco and Gomà, 2019).

The notion of commons has become increasingly popular within civil society, as a reaction to the privatisation of public resources and as an alternative form of democratic management (Laval and Dardot 2015). It is also one of the ideas underpinning the *Barcelona en Comú* (BComú) platform: an "in-movement and in-practice" (Russell 2019, p.991) political party born of the 15M mobilisations in Spain.¹

¹ This movement resulting from demonstrations against the austerity policies and the social consequences of the crisis, led to the creation of municipalist candidacies in different cities in Spain, some of them also connected to the national party *Podemos*.

The practice of citizen involvement in public policy and management has a long tradition in the city. Bottom-up demands for developing legal frameworks for citizens' management of municipal facilities have existed for decades, and resulted in policies such as the Civic Management regulations in the 1990s, that partially responded to citizens' demands to manage resources directly (Pera, 2022). The Citizen Assets Programme, however, is more ambitious, and looks to create a more robust political and legal framework that can implement commons-based democratic administration and public-commons institutions (Russell and Milburn, 2019; Bianchi, 2022) on a greater scale.

In order to better understand the factors that influence the embeddedness that is required to implement DDG policies, we address two issues: the instruments that BComú has used to create new public-common institutions, and the challenges that have arisen in implementing these instruments. Thus, drawing on the qualitative discourse analysis of official documents and 17 interviews conducted with politicians, civil servants, academics, and activists between 2015-2021,² this chapter analyses the opportunities that the CAP opens up for social movements and community-based groups to translate their proposals into a new framework for participatory governance in the city (Blanco et al., 2021), and examines the main constraints that hinder the embeddedness of participatory structures.

Our findings show that one of the key elements that enables the embeddedness of DDG policies in their institutional and social environment is effectively promoting civil society and administrative actors' trust in new democratic institutions. Trust had already been identified as an important element in the study of citizen participation in governance networks (Ansell and Galsh, 2007; Brugué, 2010), and we underline that trust also remains important in the embedding of participative politics. Thus, by analysing this program, one that recognises and promotes public-common institutions, we contribute to understanding the challenges faced by DDG in contexts of pre-existing administrative practices and cultures.

² This chapter is the result of three research projects in which the authors have been involved: 1) Collaborative Governance under Austerity: An Eight-Case Comparative Study (Ref. ES/L012898/1); 2) La gestión procomún en el Área Metropolitana de Barcelona: Tipos de experiencias, redes y aprendizaje a nivel territorial (2017 – SGR-1126); 3) PROTO LOCAL. De la protesta a la propuesta. Ayuntamientos del “Cambio”, políticas urbanas y movimientos sociales (Ref. No. CSO2015-68314-P).

We begin by describing the concept of embeddedness and the different conceptions of commons, and how it is articulated into policies. After briefly contextualising the spread and development of commons in civil society, we present the CAP and how it is being implemented. Finally, we analyse the main challenges that have appeared in the implementation process. We conclude by discussing how the analysis of the CAP highlights the role of trust in facilitating embeddedness, so that new democratic institutions can be developed effectively.

Embeddedness and commons in theory: dimensions and evolution of two interrelated concepts

One of the recurrent traits of DDG policies is how they take on board knowledge and practices that come from social movements and community-based organisations; this aims to create new forms of deliberative decision-making that involve citizens and attempts to increase the quality of democracy (Bussu et al., 2022b).

Embeddedness in participatory policies

Embeddedness is considered one of the main elements that aids legitimacy and efficiency in participatory governance (Bussu et al., 2022b). Although embeddedness is a concept that has been used in different disciplines for decades, few clear definitions of it have been formulated.

In *The Great Transformation* (2001) Karl Polanyi was the first to apply the concept of embeddedness to explain the integration and dependence of economic activities within the social context, and the influence of non-market institutions on economic activities, such as kinship, religion or political institutions. However, the advent of capitalism led to the dis-embeddedness of economic activities from their social context. In this way, the market was conceived as an independent system with its own rules, independent of social institutions. Based on Polanyi's notion, Bussu et al. (2022a) propose a definition of embeddedness in the field of participatory governance as the integration of participatory policies in the political and social context in which they are developed, one that establishes an efficient and fruitful relationship with the other democratic institutions and key actors in public administration and civil society.

However, embeddedness is not a stable, given characteristic of participatory structures. Instead, it has a weak and dynamic nature that needs to be reshaped to adapted constantly to the context in which is integrated (Escobar, 2021). Embedded participatory governance, which is not the same as the institutionalisation of participatory policies (see Bussu et al. 2022a), has a relationship of mutuality with actors and institutions in its context. This reciprocal relationship levers efficiencies and offers a potential for durability.

Embeddedness consists of three dimensions: *temporal* and *spatial*, and its *practices*. These refer to when, where and how to embed policies (Bussu et al. 2022a). The *temporal* dimension concerns the importance of iteration over time. This dimension underlines the need for participative structures to become permanent and work in conjunction with the political cycle and policy system (Chwalisz, 2020) as well as with civil society. On some occasions, embeddedness can be promoted through the recognition of informal spaces of deliberation within community and public administration structures as formal spaces of participation.

The *spatial* dimension aims to visualise the most appropriate level of government for embedding participatory structures. While there is general agreement in the literature on citizen participation that the local level is the most suitable one in which to embed new participatory institutions (Fung and Wright, 2003), Bussu et al. (2022a) point out two further characteristics which are not focused on scale but rather on where new democratic institutions should be situated to become efficient and productive: first, within the power structures that are related to decision-making spaces, and second, within civil society, conceived as either individual citizens or organisations.

The third and final dimension, *practices*, refers to the mechanisms that enable the process of embedding participatory governance. Thus, this dimension largely refers to the study of the design of formal mechanisms and regulations that frame new democratic institutions. However, it is also crucial to consider the informal practices that enable embedding. These include behaviours, attitudes, and bonding strategies with and across the community, that aim to include different cultures and interests in participatory structures (Bussu et al., 2022a). Moreover, informal practices that take

place within the scope of participatory structures can be used as guidance and drivers for reshaping formal institutions that are moving towards more participatory ecology (Blanco et al. 2021).

In what follows, we reflect on embeddedness by examining the CAP policy that aims to recognise and promote public-common institutions (Bianchi, 2022; Russell, 2019) as new participatory structures in which citizens can decide on and directly manage certain public assets.

The concept of the commons and its articulation into policies

The development and the design of the CAP was inspired by the concept of the commons, which has been the subject of growing scholarly and political attention over recent decades (Ferrerri and Vidal, 2021). Beginning with the extensive research carried out in the framework of Ostrom's neo-institutionalist studies (1990), academic research on the commons has expanded to include other disciplines, such as critical legal studies, political economy, geography, and political theory. This burgeoning interest in the concept has made it somewhat controversial and disputed, but has also enriched it with multiple approaches that highlight different facets of the study of participatory governance.

Initially, the notion of the commons had few points of convergence with local participatory policies literature. Ostrom's neo-institutionalist approach dominated the debate on the commons from the 1960s until the onset of the neoliberal project. Her approach saw commons as tangible and intangible resources that are managed collectively by a community of individuals who establish rules and enforce them (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom and Hess, 2007). In this way, the commons can include areas where villagers establish rules for fishing, urban gardens where neighbourhood residents take turns planting and harvesting vegetables, or digital archives where groups of scholars share scientific knowledge. The focus of this discipline was primarily to understand the motives and variables affecting the regulatory capacity of the commons. However, it was not generally concerned with the relationship the commons had with other political institutions, nor did it extensively examine its interaction with capitalism or its own modes of governance.

The notion of commons acquired a different meaning when it began to be used by critical theorists in disciplines such as law, geography and political economy. This new reflection on the commons emerged as a response to the accelerated processes of privatisation and commodification witnessed from the 1980s onwards. Commons are a social relationship based on the principle of direct democracy, use value and reciprocity that is established between a group of people and a tangible and/or intangible resource (Harvey, 2012; Federici and Caffentzis, 2013; Mattei, 2011). The construction of the social relationship between the group and the resource means that the commons do not only include horizontal, de-commodified and autonomous forms of collectively managed resources, such as urban gardens or digital archives, but also other types of resources, such as water and health services, that are managed by other institutions, but for which the community is campaigning for a more equitable, more democratic and more de-commodified form of management. In this way, the concept of commons is now set within a broader political debate, which is concerned with the identification of strategies, practices and modes of governance that are at odds with neoliberal capitalism.

However, above all, it has been contributions from political theorists that have caused the commons to become more strongly embedded in the debate regarding social change and participatory democracy (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Laval and Dardot, 2015). The work of Laval and Dardot (2015) has been inspirational for understanding how the concept of the commons can drive social change by pushing for a radical democratisation of government institutions and enhancing participatory democracy. The authors argue that state institutions can be democratised by following the principle of self-government, or the capacity of citizens to co-produce rules and norms, in Ostrom's sense. Despite pondering the risk of commons becoming co-opted by state institutions, Laval and Dardot (2015) underline their capacity to create new governance structures that allow civil society to go beyond institutional participation when the principle of commons is introduced into state institutions. They argue that the commons can lead a paradigm shift: it can help participation move forward from being carried out on a case-by-case basis – which has opened up some avenues of democratisation but has rarely led to effective social transformation – in order to building stronger forms of popular control that are based on a form of self-government which is permanently embedded in institutions.

The two authors illustrate this with the example of the re-municipalisation of the water service in Naples carried out by the new municipalist government of De Magistris. Here, the new governance structure of the service is made up of a supervisory committee of workers, civil society representatives and users, who have the task of ensuring that the management of water services follows the principles of justice, sustainability, and good governance (Mattei, 2011).

As we have argued, Naples and Barcelona are two paradigmatic cities in the development of policies that include the notion of commons. Thus, in this chapter, which focuses on policies regarding the commons in Barcelona, we analyse how public-common institutions can be inserted in their political and social context, innovatively connecting the concept of embeddedness with the notion of commons when these take the form of public policy.

Commons in practice in Barcelona: between civil society and party politics

The city of Barcelona has a long tradition of public-commons collaboration. This was consolidated over several successive social-democratic leaderships, from the first democratic elections in 1979 until 2011, when a liberal-conservative coalition won power. However, this consolidated tradition is not only thanks to the farsightedness of local government investment in these types of collaborations. It is also thanks to the particularly active role of Barcelona's civil society, which has always tirelessly put forward demands and claims for a fairer, more equal, and more liveable city (Blakeley, 2007).

The fact that these forms of public-common collaboration are widespread does not mean that this is or has always been the dominant model of governance in the city. The reality is quite the opposite: over the years Barcelona has made extensive use of forms of public-private partnerships (PPP), which are a feature of the notorious Barcelona Model, devised in particular to strengthen the city's economic and urban development (Balibrea, 2005), such as the remodelling of the seafront and the extensive outsourcing of local public services that has been carried out especially since the Olympic Games in 1992. However, the proliferation of PPPs has not excluded other forms of public-community collaboration. These have become

increasingly important in recent years due to advocacy for commoning practices carried out by both the ruling coalition of the BComú government and by organised civil society (Rubio-Pueyo, 2017).

Many groups from organised civil society and from social movements have used the commons to define socially transformative projects, aiming to build spaces of self-government inside and outside the state. Paradigmatic in this respect is the case of the *Fundación de los Comunes* (2015), created in 2011 by several organisations linked to social movements – such as the research and consultancy cooperative *La Hidra Cooperativa* (Barcelona) – whose aim is to collectively produce tools to develop critical thinking for political intervention. Although this foundation has been involved in the production and dissemination of critical knowledge on various topics, the commons represent an important part of its work.

In addition, in Barcelona, the concept of commons has recently been introduced into public institutions, in part due to the victory of BComú. In its electoral programme, BComú emphasises “new forms of public-common collaboration that strengthen the sense of belonging to what is common” (Barcelona en Comú, 2015 p.61), taking up the public-common collaborative tradition mentioned previously and strengthening it through the deployment of new policies and legal tools.

Public policy for the commons: the Citizen Asset Programme

The first BComú mandate in 2015 saw the beginnings of the CAP, which was designed and developed as part of the innovation programme of the Participation Department. The design of the programme went through a series of participatory workshops with different social actors (social movement activists, citizens, critical scholars) before it became operational in 2017. Its main objectives are:

“Supporting, encouraging and consolidating the community use and management of municipal public assets, through the construction of an institutional and regulatory framework that allows the recognition and promotion of citizens' experiences of community use of the public commons” (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017 p.3).

The first key element in developing the CAP was drawing up the Citizen Assets Ordinance. This defined the municipal assets that could be managed by organised citizens, as well as regulating the agreements that could be established between the city council and civic groups.

The second element was the Catalogue of Assets. This consists of a list of all the assets and plots of land that have been ceded or that could be ceded to non-profit organisations. It also includes the conditions and criteria for future contracts of this nature. Thus, the aim of this catalogue is to increase transparency and to regulate the concessions that until then had been carried out by various different departments or districts of the city council without using shared criteria. As stated by one interviewee, the justification for creating the catalogue was because no official register existed of all the assets owned by the municipality. The sale of public assets to private companies and the lack of transparency resulting from the push towards public-private partnerships had left the council without this essential information.

The third element is known as the Citizen Assets Board. It includes all the city council departments that deal with any aspect of the assets, especially community action services, citizen participation, urban ecology, and the social and solidarity economy. The aim is to coordinate the implementation of the policy and assess the demands of non-profit organisations. This is therefore primarily a technical area which evaluates all projects or initiatives that could become part of the programme and benefit from a concession.

The fourth element is the Municipal Citizen Assets and Community Management Board. This participative structure is different from the above-mentioned Citizen Assets Board and is composed of city council representatives and representatives of community-based organisations that manage public assets. The function of this board is to supervise the allocation of municipal assets to citizen groups, as well as to provide a space where the representatives of the commons who are involved with the CAP can express their needs and demands.

The Citizen Assets Office was created to provide support to non-profit organisations in the initial stages of managing assets, as well as to initiatives that were already doing

so but might require some assistance, such as in applying the Community Balance metrics (see below). The office is run in collaboration with *Torre Jussana*, the service centre for associations in Barcelona. One of the main forms of assistance it offers is training courses on the main objectives and strategies for community action, participation, governance, communication, gender policy and the management of economic resources.

Sixth comes the Community Balance Report, which is designed to help the non-profit organisations in charge of citizens assets to self-assess their performance. The metrics within it measure performance internally and externally on the basis of social and environmental criteria, such as participatory and democratic governance, links to the area/neighbourhoods, diversity, inclusion and community relationships. The Community Balance Report has been developed in collaboration with actors from the solidarity economy sector such as XES (Catalonia Social and Solidarity Economy Network) and from non-profit organisations. It therefore represents an innovative instrument that aims to improve the transparency of non-profit organisations' performance and to measure the transformation processes carried out by these initiatives. The plan is to apply these indicators and to implement them gradually for all the facilities and plots of land that form part of the programme. In addition to assessing the territorial and social impact of the projects, the rationale for creating this self-evaluation tool is based on the notion that the collective use of commons does not necessarily imply greater democratisation, especially when criteria such as class, gender, ideology or ethnicity are not taken into account.

To date, the main aspects that have been developed are the Catalogue of Citizen Assets, the Citizen Assets Board, the Citizen Assets Office, and the Community Balance Report. Although the CAP is an ongoing policy at an early stage in its implementation, it is worthwhile describing two examples of how it has been implemented: the case of the *Can Batlló* sociocultural centre and that of *La Xarxa de Dones Cosidores* (the dressmakers' network).

Can Batlló is a self-managed community space located in an old industrial complex that was reclaimed by the residents of the areas of Sants and La Bordeta, to be used

for socio-community projects and neighbourhood facilities. In 2011, following pressure from the residents, organised groups obtained the concession of one of the buildings to start various socio-cultural projects that are open to the community, through the CAP. These include an auditorium, art workshops and urban gardens. In 2019, after fighting for recognition of the social and economic value of Can Batlló, the residents obtained a concession of 13,000 square metres “for private use for non-profit social projects” for a period of 30 years, with the option to extend the concession for a further 20 years. This is one of the most paradigmatic experiences in the application of the CAP, and sets a precedent for other organised neighbourhood initiatives.³

While Can Batlló is a well-known space for critical urban scholars and activists involved in self-organised spaces in Barcelona and Europe, *La Xarxa de Dones Cosidores* is a recent initiative that supports the self-organisation of groups of women working in dressmaking. They define themselves as a “network based on sustainability, activism, mutual support and care”. The project was launched in May 2020, when different neighbourhood groups coordinated to produce 13,000 masks for essential workers in more than 40 municipal health and social services centres in the Nou Barris district⁴ and for the city council during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The municipal Community Action Service stressed that this network is an example of “the need for collective processes in the face of social challenges, as it shows that the community is capable of responding”.⁵ Groups of women living in precarious conditions were able to organise themselves and generate new self-employment schemes. The CAP now provides them with a space to continue growing and to hold training initiatives to start new projects that have strong ties to their neighbourhoods, while benefitting from mutual support and a feminist approach.

These examples show how the CAP aims to support transformative projects which have participants in vulnerable situations. As stated by a public official in one interview, many of these women are in difficult economic and housing situations (some of them

³ Agreement of concession (available in English):

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lBEHcfjDg7kXOq4WsL1SN5DFVhVqC7e_/view).

⁴ Nou Barris is the district of Barcelona with the highest rates of social vulnerability and has also been one of the most affected by the pandemic.

⁵ Dressmakers’ network of https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/acciocomunitaria/ca/noticia/mascaretesenxarxa-una-resposta-de-suport-mutu-que-connecta-els-barris_938057

are at risk of being evicted or are immigrants). They have embraced the collective ethos because it is their best opportunity to be economically autonomous. Furthermore, another facility granted to the network includes a community garden to be used and shared with other groups and initiatives in the neighbourhood, thus creating opportunities for bonding and generating a strong social infrastructure (Klinenberg, 2021).

Challenges in developing new commons-based institutions

The CAP represents a way for the public administration to recognise the capacity of organised citizens to manage certain types of municipal services and facilities autonomously. The programme is therefore based on the recognition of the social value of citizen self-government. However, our analysis of how the CAP has been implemented has revealed legal and administrative challenges that have hindered the creation of trust regarding the policy among public employees and civil society actors, thus impeding the CAP becoming embedded in an effective way.

First, the main challenge is the need to reinterpret or transform the current multi-scalar legal framework, in order for it to be able to allow public assets to be managed by citizens. In order to decide which community-based organisations should be granted the common management of public spaces and facilities, the CAP uses social criteria. The legitimacy of the management of public assets as commons is mainly built on how these commons are connected to the local community, the social impact of their projects and how they promote community empowerment. The current legal framework does not foster this process, and the current way of ceding a service to non-state actors works through the Spanish procurement law (9/2017), enabling the outsourcing of services but with economic efficiency as the main criterion for selecting the organisation. Thus, the criteria underpinning the legitimacy and the adequacy of community-based organisations to manage resources differ greatly from the administrative criteria established by the multi-scalar procurement laws (both Spanish and European). For this reason, the implementation of the CAP requires the modification or reinterpretation of the current law for the concession of public spaces

and facilities. As stated by some of the academic activists who participated in developing the CAP:

“It is about making a tactical and counter-hegemonic use of law, making an innovative application of the rules to expand what is possible, looking for loopholes and generating new regulations. It is about deactivating the law as an expression of capital and placing legal technicalities at the service of social struggles” (Castro and Forné, 2021 p. 31).

Thus, the strategy identified among the interviewees was not only to try to reinterpret and foster the CAP within the current legal framework, but to advocate for the approval of laws that recognise the idiosyncrasy of public-common institutions. For instance, one of the city council politicians that was interviewed mentioned the need to pass the new law on the social and solidarity economy in Catalonia, as its current draft covers the management of public resources and assets by community-based organisations. Passing this law would give greater strength and legal coverage when awarding assets to organised citizens, and would make it easier to set up public-common institutions.

The fact that no robust framework exists that is adapted to public-common institutions negatively affects the embeddedness of the CAP within local governance and public employees. We identified scepticism and resistance among some public employees who were required to participate in the implementation of the CAP. Selection based on social criteria, as well as possible risks of clientelism or transferring assets only to groups that are politically sympathetic to the municipal government has led to some public officers having a sceptical attitude to the scheme. However, the CAP includes tools to avoid clientelism, such as the Municipal Citizen Assets and Community Management Board, which is a plural and participative body representing community-based organisations and city council members, and which monitors the selection process of community-based organisations candidates for managing public assets. Moreover, the Community Balance Report also emphasises the social performance of public-commons institutions in terms of internal democracy, inclusiveness and their connections with the neighbourhood where they are located. Despite the tools that are used to avoid fraud when selecting who manages of assets and in monitoring

performance, the grassroots management of public services and facilities still generates some resistance among public employees.

Thus, although the local level has been observed as the most adequate arena for developing participatory politics (Fung and Wright, 2003), it is important to remember that the local scale is affected by a multi-scalar combination of laws that can complicate the implementation of new democratic institutions. Poor embeddedness due to the inadequate legal framework at the regional and state level is a key aspect that challenges the capacity of new municipalist platforms to implement policies that radically change the urban agenda of local governments.

Second, the CAP standardises the administrative processes for creating public-commons institutions. This means that the different city council departments have had to adopt new, uniform mechanisms. Over previous decades, the city council had designed specific, less ambitious mechanisms to respond to the management demands of organised citizens, such as civic management (the community management of municipal facilities). In most of these cases, the districts (territorial administrative organisations) were responsible for these arrangements, resulting in substantial differences between them in the criteria used to select the citizen organisations and evaluate their performance in managing the facilities in question.⁶

The standardisation of an administrative process requires public employees to invest a significant amount of their time. In addition, some public employees and politicians are reluctant to change mechanisms that are already in place. Moreover, in some cases these previous structures, which are less legally and politically robust, can coexist while the new ones are being fully implemented and consolidated.

Third, the implementation of the CAP entails the creation of new governance structures, such as the Municipal Citizen Assets and Community Management Board, that do not fit into an administrative culture that avoids the engagement of citizens in

⁶ In the case of civic management facilities, in 1999 the first recognition of the capacity of community-based organisations to manage municipal facilities was based on the Municipal Charter, and its application was decentralised to the district administration level. However, it was not until 2015 that legal bases for civic management were approved and thus regulated the criteria to select grassroots candidates (Pera, 2022).

the implementation of public policies. These kind of co-production spaces may generate reluctance from certain public employees who are antipathetic to co-production; some claim that people's engagement tends to be inconsistent because the citizens lack the required technical understanding and administrative knowledge; others claim that the processes become too long and drawn out due to the slow pace of participatory dynamics (Voorberg et al., 2014). For instance, the Municipal Citizen Assets and Community Management Board will begin functioning in 2022. This will be made up of community projects, actors involved in the facilities, and the city council. It is likely that in this space, the main tensions that arise in processes of democratic transformation that involve cooperation between activism and local government will become clear. One government official expressed that it is difficult to even contemplate what these spaces should be like and who should participate, e.g. whether all social organisations should participate or whether they should be represented in another way, something which in turn would be contrary to the idea of direct democracy.

The bureaucratic constraints and functioning of local councils hinder implementation processes when either prior frameworks are applied to new policies (which have key characteristics that cannot be translated into 'old' schemes), or because local governments have struggled to generate these new governance structures and public-common institutions, resulting in the dissolution or transformation of traditional patterns of public administration and the reinterpretation of laws at different scales. The kinds of modifications that are needed for implementing the CAP have not contributed to some public officers and politicians committing to it, and have not facilitated the embeddedness needed for the effective implementation of the CAP.

Last but not least, it should be noted that the CAP has not become fully embedded within civil society. No wholesale social mobilisation has occurred in favour of deploying and applying the CAP as a whole. Citizen mobilisation has instead been focused on the implementation of specific aspects of the programme, or even focused on the improvement of pre-existing mechanisms. The design of the programme develops the notion of commons and is based on historical demands for citizen management of public resources. However, people have not identified with the programme as a whole or fought for it. The reasons for this low level of mobilisation

are multifaceted and complex. However, through our fieldwork we may be able to identify some factors that influence it.

On the one hand, some community-based organisations that manage municipal facilities stem from an autonomist tradition that has self-managed projects for decades in Barcelona without any support from the state. This leads to some community-based organisations being rather sceptical regarding collaboration with the city council. These community-based organisations, despite not rejecting the current agreements with the state outright, are waiting to see how the programme develops and the effect it might have on their projects.

On the other hand, pre-existing municipal regulations oriented towards the urban commons have also led to mobilisations for them to be improved. Although older regulations are less robust than the CAP, some people have calculated that mobilisations for improving pre-existing participatory regulations might result in more tangible and achievable benefits than mobilising for a programme with a wider scope. This support for improving previous regulations rather than pressing for implementing the CAP is another illustration that trust levels regarding the CAP are low, which does not contribute to embedding the policy among civil society actors.

However, it should be mentioned that collaborative work among community-based organisations and the city council to develop specific tools within the CAP is taking place to develop concrete elements of it. One example is the measuring instrument of Community Balance that was developed based on the social balance of the XES (an association that promotes the social and solidarity economy in Catalonia) in coordination with some community-based organisations, academic activists and the city council.

Discussion

Throughout this chapter, we have shown that although the partial implementation of the CAP has entailed the concession of plots and facilities to community-based organisations, the potential of this ambitious programme has remained limited due to the policy not being embedded firmly enough regarding some public employees, some politicians and community-based organisations.

The margins of manoeuvre within the local state are narrow, even when a sympathetic party, such as BComú, is in power. These margins are mainly outlined by the multi-scale legal framework and by the cultural and organisational working patterns of the public administration. Firstly, the legal framework at the local level, but also at the regional or state level, does not facilitate the recognition of the citizen management of public services and facilities. The CAP involves the conceptualisation and implementation of a more democratic form of public management based on the commons-inspired idea of self-government. However, the implementation of this recognition is hindered by the Spanish public sector procurement law (9/2017) – in turn informed by the EU procurement regulation – that benefits private companies when contracts for services are granted through outsourcing selection procedures. That is why the insufficient development of the legal framework that covers some of the aspects of the programme and the associated reorganisation of administrative tasks have led to both scepticism and to the policy being poorly embedded in the practices of public employees and politicians.

Moreover, the policy inspired by the notion of commons requires some modifications in the organisational culture of the public administration, that understands the co-production of policies, such as the CAP, as ceding their power to citizens and as an excessively time-consuming way of developing policies. Thus, the implementation of the new programme requires adaptation processes and must consider training for public officials to develop new forms of organising and collaborating with grassroots and social movements, including the reconceptualisation of the structures for traditional participatory governance in Barcelona.

These legal and administrative implementation challenges lead to public employees not fully committing to the CAP, as well as a series of challenges regarding the mobilisation of civil society in the implementation of the programme. The existence of previous and more detailed regulations that respond to citizen demands for managing public facilities (Civic Management, Empty Plots Programme, etc.) has led to mobilisations to improve these particular regulations, rather than promoting engagement with the CAP and generating mobilisations for implementing commons policies in general. The CAP covers more types of initiatives and involves more city

council departments, adding to old mechanisms that were already operational by implementing new ones.

The CAP has had some very successful outcomes, such as the Community Balance Report or the cession of a space to *Xarxes de dones cosidores* (dressmakers' network). However, a major challenge remains in place: promoting trust in the policy in order to implement it effectively while maintaining its main objective. That is, to urge collaboration between local public institutions and citizens' initiatives through the creation of public-common institutions that understand participation as self-government and democratic radicalism, but use local government as a space that connects municipalism with the idea of citizens' rights to the commons and to the redistribution of power.

Thus, regarding embeddedness and how important it is in participatory governance, our analysis adds complexity to its dimensions: *space*, *temporal* and *practices* (Bussu et al., 2022a). We have identified different elements of the CAP that correspond to the dimensions of embeddedness identified by Bussu et al. (2022a), and we have gone further, pointing out that trust is a key element that influences the implementation of participatory policies. In terms of the *space* dimension, the CAP is designed to engage different areas of the city council that are involved in transferring assets to citizens. Because of this, the policy has highlighted the appropriate actors and departments in the city council that should be involved in the effective implementation of such an ambitious policy. Regarding the dimension of *time*, the CAP is designed to create permanent instruments to build and consolidate participatory bodies that allow public-common institutions to be created, thus guaranteeing a continuity in the policy throughout the years. Third, in terms of *practices*, the implementation of the CAP entails the standardisation of mechanisms for creating public-commons institutions in order to promote transparency and legitimacy and contribute to the embedding the CAP in the local administration and civil society. However, in order to ensure that it becomes embedded, the CAP also needs to generate trust among those that participate in its implementation and among those that can benefit from it, since innovative and collaborative policies often require social mobilisation from civil society and the engagement of those who have to implement it, as had been previously confirmed in the collaborative and network governance literature (Ansell and Gash,

2007; Brugué, 2010). Thus, trust is a transversal feature that facilitates the creation of embeddedness across the different dimensions, and is an important element to consider when analysing the insertion of DDG policies in their context.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have analysed the implementation of the CAP in Barcelona. The concept of embeddedness (Bussu et al., 2022a) has led us to focus on how this innovative policy that was inspired by the notion of the commons can be effectively inserted into its immediate political and social context.

This policy has implied reformulating how citizens collaborate with the local state, through the recognition and protection of collective forms of management of public services and facilities, based on the idea of self-government and direct democracy that go beyond traditional forms of collaboration, such as direct management or outsourcing. The CAP can be considered an experience of DDG in which a form of innovative, democratic and grassroots management of services and facilities is recognised and promoted by the city council. Public-common institutions promote citizen participation and community-based lifestyles and attempt to reconceptualise public service management by creating new democratic and institutional participatory structures. However, we have identified some challenges in implementation that underline the difficulty of translating concepts that have emerged from citizens' practices into the realm of policy (Bianchi, 2022). Our analysis finds that lack of trust is one of the crucial elements that has hindered the fruitful implementation of the CAP. This could be a useful addition to Bussu et al.'s (2022b) conceptualisation of embeddedness, since we consider trust as a transversal feature that covers all the dimensions of embeddedness (*space, time and practices*).

In a context in which local governments are adopting new schemes that are emerging from civil society as a way of renewing the democratic system and of engaging citizens in public policy, more research on empirical cases is needed in order to better understand the processes of implementation of innovative policies. Our analysis contributes to identifying trust, that had previously been confirmed in collaborative and network governance literature (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Brugué, 2010), as one of the

relevant factors in the fruitful embedding of DDG participatory structures. Moreover, this research underlines the relevant role of the actors' involvement in the implementation of DDG policies, and we highlight that these actors should be encouraged to commit further in order to achieve productive and durable participatory structures that can spawn new democratic paradigms.

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