Connected Action
for the Commons

CO – MAKING THE CITY
Ideas from the Innovative City Development meeting

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Introduction

This report highlights the conversations that took place during the Innovative City Development meeting, which was held in Madrid in March 2017. The meeting brought together a small group of innovative city makers – including researchers, activists, experts and city officials who are taking a progressive approach to cultural issues, social innovation, urban development and participatory governance processes with city governments.

The meeting was hosted by the City of Madrid, the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) and the Connected Action for the Commons[1] network during the ECF-initiated Idea Camp 2017 – which brought 50 cultural change-makers to Madrid over the same few days in March.

As well as reporting back on what was discussed at the Innovative City Development meeting, this report also includes three case studies that illustrate some of the issues raised and finishes by drawing together some ideas (which can be found from page 11 onwards) that we hope will help to advise city makers and people who care about the future of their cities.

The report was written and compiled by Nicola Mullenger with advice and contributions from Christian Iaione, Katarina Pavić and Igor Stokfiszewski. It reflects the conversations of the Innovative City Development meeting.

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[1] A three-year programme instigated by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) consisting of the following six organisations: Culture 2 Commons – Alliance Operation City, Clubture Network, Right to the City (Croatia), Les Têtes de l'Art (France), Krytyka Polityczna (Poland), Oberliht (Moldova), Platoniq – Goteo (Spain) and Subtopia (Sweden).

Why are we talking to city makers?

More and more people are co-working across different sectors and on different projects to help make their cities into better places for local residents to live. Increasingly, institutions such as governments, schools, healthcare services, cultural spaces and environmental agencies are involving local people in making co-decisions when it comes to issues affecting their neighbourhoods and cities.

Each of the three ECF-initiated Connected Action for the Commons Idea Camps have explored how citizens and communities can get directly involved in participatory democratic processes that shape and govern our cities – bringing together a total of 150 Idea Makers from across Europe. ECF's work has drawn inspiration from the growing commons movement that these Idea Makers operate within – a movement that is working to reclaim common spaces and processes.

Over the past three years, Connected Action for the Commons – a hub of six cultural organisations convened by ECF – has been co-working to scale up collaborative working practices and services for people in their locality. What started in 2013 as a small but ambitious structure of like-minded organisations has become a growing, influential network of cultural change-makers: a European-wide community that uses culture and creativity to revitalise democracy, sometimes working with local governments and sometimes feeling like they do not have the support of those city officials and city makers.

A working group from Connected Action for the Commons designed this Innovative City Development meeting with input from urban co-governance and public policy co-design expert Christian Iaione (from LabGov) to coincide with the 2017 Idea Camp. The group brought together some of the city makers their organisations had been working with (and against!) to find out about the concerns and challenges they face when working with local people in their cities. The aim was to give the group the opportunity to think constructively about how to work together with citizens in order to support their work.

The city makers in attendance were: Mónica Cuender, Goteo (Spain); Claudia Delso, City of A Coruña (Spain); Zhanna Kravchenk, researcher, Södertön University (Sweden); Victor Lutenco, City of Chişinău (Moldova); Ana Mendez De Andes Aldama, City of Madrid (Spain); Fabio Pascapé, City of Naples (Italy); Aneta Quraishy, cultural relations professional (Germany); Tomasz Thun-Janowski, City of Warsaw (Poland); Slaven Tolj, Rijeka 2020 and Rijeka Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (Croatia); and Julie Ward, MEP North West England (UK).

The meeting was co-facilitated by Christian Iaione, LabGov and Nicola Mullenger, ECF, with rapporteurs Katarina Pavić, Culture 2 Commons and Igor Stokfiszewski, Krytyka Polityczna.

"Social Innovation is becoming very important at this stage, and as it is gaining ground at a larger scale, it is finding more and more political obstacles. It is up to us to raise these obstacles in a collaborative spirit that social innovation demands, and move towards new solutions."

Amalia Zepou, Vice Mayor for Civil Society and Innovation, Athens (Greece)
Unfortunately Amalia had to cancel her attendance at the meeting because of an emergency with a collaborative regeneration process she has been working on for the past two years.

The design of the meeting

The start of the meeting looked a little like an upgraded 'show and tell' session. Each city maker was invited to deliver a four-minute presentation on a challenge they are working on in their own city, focusing on concrete issues in their own communities. This was followed by facilitated discussions in smaller groups looking at shared challenges and possible solutions for collaborative city change-making. The aim was to find practices that can encourage community and institutional participatory city-making processes.

Three case studies

From these presentations, we have chosen three case studies that highlight different problems within cities that can be applied to other regions across Europe and indeed around the world. These three case studies represent the diversity of issues and geographical areas in Europe where citizen participation and commoning practices are already making a difference.

The case of A Coruña
As presented by Claudia Delso, Councillor of Innovation and Participation, A Coruña (Spain)

The context

"A Coruña is a city on the Atlantic coast of northwest Spain governed by a citizen movement called "Marea Atlántica" (Atlantic Tide), which stems from the squares movement of 2011[2]. Marea Atlántica is one of the municipal processes now sharing power in public institutions in Spain.

In 2015, the City Council of A Coruña created – for the first time in its democratic history – a transversal Department of Participation and Democratic Innovation. This was designed as a transversal and cross-sectoral space for the whole government from which citizen participation could be developed. It activates and creates an institutional experience with a new perspective of participation policies. Through monthly open participatory spaces across the city, it has initiated the first experience of open budgeting in the city as well as activating participatory processes and citizens labs.

The task and the challenge of the department is to put these participatory policies into practice and to transversally apply them across the city government as a whole. This is not an easy task in the context of our city, which is working for the first time on citizen and government participation.

Over the last two years we have already done a lot, and there are many things that I could share. But I have chosen to share one case that has been a big challenge to us recently, and we still don't have a solution to that challenge. This case might be interesting to you all because it also challenges how we imagine the city for the next 20 years."

The challenge

"I am talking about the port and the future of the coastal edge of the city of A Coruña. This part of the city is a complex territory due to different responsibilities: nowadays it is owned by the port authority but it is the city council that has the responsibility for allowing certain urban developments there.

In A Coruña, as in many coastal cities in Spain, there was a moment when many public spaces became privatised, with port authorities managing that land in a very private manner. There is a practice in Spain that the property and the governance of the port land is related to the central

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[2] For example: this refers to the anti-austerity Take the Square movement in Spain.

government. This relationship is not a very good example of collaboration with the municipality. We started negotiations and public discussions to reclaim this space for the public, to get it back for the city.

There was an idea being considered to make a big speculative investment by building many luxury buildings, as is happening in other European cities. We have another problem in the mix: the external port, close to the city got into huge debt during its construction. What they intend to do is to pay this debt through speculations on the port land. At the same time, the port authority is legally obliged to waive the property rights on the land that the port uses, once the building activities on the port have ended. However, it came as no surprise that they used this situation to experiment with the possibilities of building there. We would prefer not to treat this situation as a conflict, even if it is a conflict. Instead, since the authority is somehow part of the city, and the port is collectively considered as one more neighbourhood, we would like to face this challenge and to look for a global solution for that whole area. This would involve different parts of the administration – not only the council but also the regional government and autonomous community of Galicia and its parliament, and of course the municipality and the port authority. So this is the challenge, the problem."

The methods

 "We wanted to connect what's going on around the port with the first participatory process that we started in the city, which was organised with the aim of organising the city into districts[3]. By law the city is obliged to have districts, which were developed as a decentralisation tool, although in reality no one cared about decentralisation in the city. We organised this big participatory process with more than 30 meetings in different neighbourhoods, working with the methodology of different maps and reflecting the neighbourhoods and how people really live in those neighbourhoods. Through this process, a set of criteria was developed and we were able to make a map of the city districts. A map of neighbourhoods was also created, opening up possibilities of thinking about the neighbourhood as something that is collectively identified. From this understanding of the meaning of the neighbourhood, we took the city port as one of the city neighbourhoods as well.

Our proposal of city districts is ready to be publicly presented. As well as having ten traditional city districts, we also have one district that we call the 'common district'. This is our way of territorialising the idea of the commons. We are thinking of a common district that would include the coastal part of the city, the beaches and also the parks and the hilly part of the city. But there are no records of common districts, so the question is: how do we imagine the governance of this common district?

 A third aspect would be the overlapping of scales at administrative and legal levels. This identification in the territory of a common-shared space composed of open spaces (the

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[3] In September 2015, the Department of Participation and Democratic Innovation (together with the Urban Regeneration and Urbanism Department of A Coruña City Council) started a participatory process to reorganise the city into districts.

beaches, hills and parks) and public property has also generated a collective debate about how to tackle the challenge of the urban transformation of the coastal edge. This land that has been designated as "public domain" is controlled by both the regional and the national legal frameworks and depends on them for its governance.

In short, A Coruña's experience is a good example from a local administration and a medium-sized city where an historic demand and public task (to organise the city into districts) became a great opportunity to re-think the territory, its governance and the way the residents of the city relate to the collective assets that concern everybody, because they affect everybody's lives."

The case of Chişinău
As presented by Victor Lutenco, Municipal Councillor and elected official of Chişinău, Moldova

The context

"Recently I saw a picture, a drawing of Chişinău at the beginning of the 19th century. The central street was very wide and it was full of mud. There was a huge herd of cows walking along it. This time of the year [in March] is when the snow melts in Chişinău and we still have that mud on the main street. Today, the street is narrower and you have a lot of cars moving and parking on it in a very chaotic way.

So the question I asked myself was: what's wrong with us? Why didn't we advance? Why didn't we change much? Part of the answer is probably connected to migration, in a very complex way. In the 1900s the majority of the population in Chişinău were Jewish and they created a lot of urban infrastructure in Chişinău, and then they moved to Israel.

In the 1950s, the Soviets came and they started building and industrialising the cities and there was another wave of building in the city. But they also invested a lot in building collective farms in the villages, kind of confining people there.

Now it is said that Moldova has a population of 3.5 million. There is a permanent figure going around that one million people are abroad, but what we have missed in terms of policy is that we have a huge amount of internal migration. What's happening actually is people are moving from villages to towns, mostly to the capital. They get an education, they get experience and they go abroad. And the wave continues, and it goes around and around."

The challenge

"So my challenge is this: in a way we don't have this idea of the commons. People still consider their apartment in a building in the city as their yard back in the village. Near where I live, in the last years of the Soviet rule they had to expand a lake outside of Chişinău, so a village was removed and placed into a housing block in the city. The new 'village' shop in the block, continued to function as before, with customers paying once a month when they got their salary. So village life continued and adapts to the city infrastructure.

That's on one side. On another side, a similar thing happened years ago in Italy. When a family was building a house, the whole village pitched in to help. And then the villagers moved and started building and renovating the next house, together. If my father went to a wedding then I

had to invite the children of that family to my wedding because it's the common thing to help get the families started. So villagers have a tradition of horizontal cooperation but also vertical cooperation in the past, so how come we lost this? How come now in Chişinău we don't have this idea of commoning? We don't have people working together or helping each other and working as a community?

Part of the answer is probably because the system is keeping the citizens as hostages. To give you an example, if a family has a small child going to the kindergarten and the family finds some of the food products are rotten at the kindergarten, they will be very afraid of reporting it or speaking up about it. Because the next day either the kindergarten will be closed and they won't have anywhere to put their child (and then maybe they will lose their jobs) or the child will be refused a continued place at the kindergarten. So the challenge is how do we start, or speed up, the civic movement?

On the political stage, speaking about the mud on the streets, recently the opposition came before the mayor and gave him a cup full of mud. The answer the mayor gave was 'everything that is happening now is because of the Soviet occupation 40 years ago'."

The methods

"So what do we do now? We are trying to build civic budgeting to give more support to those individuals who want to get together more people and implement innovative projects, such as organisations like Oberliht[4]. There are different ways to implement civic budgeting. We've chosen to allocate about 1% of the capital's city budget for citizens to decide what the authorities need to do. Groups of citizens will have the opportunity to apply with projects according to the priorities identified through a poll organised by a civic initiative group called 'Primaria Mea' (My City Hall). Citizens will then be able to vote in person and online. The projects with the biggest number of votes will be funded within this allocated budget. This will be mandatory for City Hall to implement.

Another dimension: about a year ago I piloted a project in 25 villages and towns around Moldova that have been affected by external and internal migration – the idea of a Home Town Association. This is an association of those who left the locality but kept connected with that locality. The idea has been developed insofar as they contribute financially through a crowdfunding campaign to implement big infrastructure projects in those villages – rebuilding the roof of the kindergarten, building a new road, the fence of the cemetery, buying a tractor to do some works etc. So now we have gained trust with those people who left and in one year re-built community projects for communities, by communities who don't live there.

So how can this be applied to a much bigger location, like the capital city, maybe with the perspective, given the size of the location, of using something like diaspora bonds for the future?"

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[4] Oberliht is a cultural organisation operating from Chişinău, and one of the Connected Action for the Commons hubs. Their expertise is in collaborative scaling of reclaiming and safeguarding public space.

The case of Naples
Presented by Fabio Pascapè, Office for Culture, Tourism and Sport, Municipality of Naples, Italy

The context

"Since 2011, Naples has become a city of experimentation upon implementation of the politics of the commons. We started by launching the commons laboratory – a space of deliberation on new forms of property, governance and legal instruments in order to call those new forms into being, in a municipal space; we then appointed the Assessor of the Commons to conduct a dialogue between the city council and citizens involved in commoning urban spaces and buildings; we launched the municipal Special Unit (a sort of 'department of the commons') and eventually we started to deliver legal recognition for buildings and areas transformed by the people according to the principles of the commons.

One of the most significant examples of such places is all'Ex Asilo Filangieri interdisciplinary cultural centre[5] – a historic palace occupied and self-governed since 2012 by performing artists, immaterial workers and urban activists. I want to use this example for putting forward one question and one challenge."

The question

"Is the commons a good way for the municipal government to allocate financial resources?"

"In order to answer this question allow me to present some of the statistics: 146 public meetings in three years; 580 days of public worktables for discussing projects and people's proposals; more than 3,800 activities and public events, including artistic presentations. The approximate cost for the municipality of the centre in 2015 was €300,000, which included the structural expenses and human resource costs in facilitating the commoning process.

There are also many immaterial benefits (civic profits and intangible assets) for the commoners of all'Ex Asilo Filangieri, for the direct participants of its activities and, indirectly, for the neighbourhood it is located in and for the city of Naples as a whole. These benefits include: community bonds within the centre, between its creators and participants of the activities, as well as with the residents of the neighbourhood; the development of the perception of quality of living within the neighbourhood; development of self-governance abilities of the creators and users of all'Ex Asilo Filangieri; expansion of their abilities to administer and manage the common goods; and development of democratic practices that can become beneficial in the entire Naples urban space.

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[5] all'Ex Asilo Filangieri is a former convent that was occupied in 2012 by cultural creatives and is now recognised by the local municipality as part of the 'common good' of the city and a space for experimentation.

The answer therefore is: yes, the commons is a good way for the municipal government to responsibly allocate financial resources. Not because they are cheaper than public goods or private ones but because the material and immaterial benefits they provide for the entire urban population are much more valuable from the social and economic point of view than the ones provided by public or private goods."

The challenge

"The experimentation of urban commons makes us believe that the municipality in its institutional sense should transform accordingly to the principles of the commons for the benefit of all. But how to achieve this? How to transform bureaucracy according to the dynamics of the commons, how to make it self-governed and capable of responding at the right time to the needs and urgencies of the people?"

Co–making the city:
Ideas for bottom–up transnational municipal reform

These case studies, and the challenges they raised, prompted the group to brainstorm about the conditions needed to pave the way for urban co-governance or urban commons participatory governance, as well as city making. These discussions were clustered into two questions:

- what are the values that could inspire commons-based assets and service management schemes?
- what are the methodologies, legal and financial tools and linchpins that could make a commons-based solution work?

Looking at each of these issues in turn:

What are the values that could inspire commons-based assets and service management schemes?

Overall the group agreed that a 'governing/decision-making' institution needs to overcome self-deferential bureaucracy and create a definition of common interest, like a charter of the 'Value of Commons' (such as in the case of Naples). This requires a high level of balance and equilibrium between values and coordination, trust, transparency, equality and diversity within institutions. So how do you create that?

Creating a system to operate within the principles outlined above needs to be carefully balanced with the need for an open process that makes the space for experimentation and to share solutions and information.

However, what happens when differences of opinion in collective action-making aren't solved? Can an institution be vulnerable in this way but also see its potential as stronger and more robust over the long term?

The institution needs to sustain engagement with core individuals and communities, and continuously attract diverse opinions, as well as finding evaluation models to communicate and replicate successes and acknowledge failures.

What are the methodologies, legal and financial tools and linchpins that could make a commons-based solution work?

Having consistency – such as regular gatherings of different city stakeholders to co-decide and plan actions – can also involve role play as a methodology, playing games in general and open source platforms, such as innovation labs. Existing and shared spaces such as public libraries can be used to bring together broad sections of the community. One consideration is: who moderates these spaces, both online and offline?

Other recommendations include:

Making clear how decisions are made by using city referendums with clear goal posts to make decisions and make usership: think of methods to show recognition, production and collective benefit to create a modus of governance that applies to everyone under the same conditions.

Starting with a realistic aim of collaboration: for example, participatory budgeting is a form of very clear, transparent and practical citizen activity and institutional decision-making. Create information packages, for example, publish 'how to co-budget' in order to encourage collaboration.

Looking at the need to support public servants in acquiring the skills for this role: define tools and operations and share/build skills. Implement this in a part of the institution as a starting point, then evaluate it and grow it institutionally.

Protecting public services is crucial for the accountability of politicians. Build in mechanisms that judge the work of grassroots public servants and consider who and how this evaluation happens on the implementation of policies?

Finally, implement a public consultation process across several cities and use an accessible tool to show the results to compare and contrast. This can engage the residents as they see impact and review their own contribution.

Conclusions – next steps

Urban co-governance or urban commons participatory governance, as well as city making, are increasingly becoming the answer to the demands of city residents who want to democratise their cities and city governance. These approaches can help reduce the tensions of those living in a city by coalescing different people or actors around a shared common goal. They can also be a key contributor to social innovation.

The statements and questions that arose out of the Innovative City Development meeting need to be developed further, both within the institutional work setting and with city makers outside the work setting, in a peer-to-peer context.

Some of the outcomes from the meeting can already be taken forward and applied as a pilot experience or can help to develop or scale up an existing scheme. Making a series of models that can be used flexibly within different contexts and by different people that consider sustainability, legality and financial roles, is a move towards greater equality for our societies.

The responsibility for the safeguarding and upkeep of a public collective needs defining and may need experts to create a flexible but clear charter. Creating a collective that is able to function with clear information management and distribution to communities is important to make informed civic decision-making possible.

Institutions need to decide what is a public good, what is the definition of a private thing and public interest and be clear about how participation helps its operation. With this information and transparency, decisions such as how and who should manage the redistribution of resources can be clarified to all stakeholders.

Building trust between all stakeholders is a continuous process. The need to balance the welcoming of new and different voices to its operation, such as transient communities, could help that process rather than derail it.

Keeping the door open to experimentation – for example, with shadow economies and applying collaborative methodology learning in education – could lead to further impact and also help to create a similar language to explain value. This may also translate into recognising different values – such as cultural, faith and freedom of speech – which will have a lasting impact on social cohesion and the well-being of societies in general.

So, how can these tasks and processes be realised?

The group suggested they wanted to meet again in order to deepen their knowledge and exchange practices, projects and policies on participatory governance or co-governance and city making. They recommended that the formation of a space for exchange, experimentation, mutual learning and co-working could enable the sharing of tools that city makers need going forward. Indeed the group felt they benefited from the time and space to come together as peers and examine their daily challenges.

ECF presented this report to some participants of the Innovative City Development group at the International Association for the Study of the Commons conference (IASC2017), in July 2017. Together we will give more thought to our collaborative work, having been accepted to present these cases above and others in a lab environment at the conference.

We hope these collaboratively produced ideas can serve as a guide for institutions starting out with co-design processes. We hope they can inspire confidence in working with methodologies and commoning processes with local people to be more creative, more involving and more democratic.