
SCHOOLS AS SPACES OF CONFLICT AND PUBLIC SPHERES

collective learning
popular education
un-doing institutions

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The schooling processes have always been subject to political tensions and conflicts due to the nature and genealogy of the school itself. There is an unsolvable tension between the school as simply a social reflection where inequalities are reproduced and the school as a space of social transformation and democratic institution. A tension that has been materialized by infinite projects, initiatives and moments of modern and contemporary history that overwhelm the public space through self-organization, and open new ways of creating schools. In this text, we intend to review some experiences of free, alternative, democratic or alternative schools.

We reflect on their political and contextual processes to be able to reread the public institution where educational policies and diverse pedagogies are projected, intensified and questioned. In this rereading, we place productive tensions between the spaces of education institutionalality and the spaces or initiatives of resistance and institutional practices more linked to social movements, emphasizing in most cases the city of Barcelona and the Catalan educational policies, since we have investigated these fields on other occasions. This tension will help us to see the school as an institution that surpasses limits —with the community and with other forms of knowledge—, and as an alternative political space where popular education processes take place.

Modern School, Atheneism, and Cooperativism.

At the end of the First Republic a social process was generated in Catalonia of political relations and the emergence of libertarian movements, which involved a pedagogical renewal under the idea of building “free men and women”. It is in this field of cultivation that one of the most eminent figures of anti-authoritarian pedagogy emerges: Ferrer I

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Guardia. A pedagogue and anarchist who founded the rational school movement, a movement in favor of the secular, militant and libertarian school, which is based among other elements in the anarchist heritage, and of thinkers like Froebel or Delacroy. It generated modern schools, and programs and spaces for reflection on pedagogy, at the time as a libertarian virus of 34 centers and more than 1000 students. A model that is still valid, giving rise to an international movement of modern schools (Avrich, 2005).

Within the framework of cooperative work², in relation to the workers' movements that emerge strongly in Barcelona in the 1910s and 1920s, work in education was a key issue that highlighted the political dimension of cooperatives (Jaume, Irene and Miró, Ivan, 2017.) As these authors remind us, there were few public schools, and the existing ones were monopolized by the church or in private hands, where social upswing was controlled by the upper social classes. At this moment the campaign for Popular Education was born, which was the ideological furnace of the cooperatives of the neighborhood “and was designed in 1918 at the headquarters of the Flower of May” (IDEM). In this space the members of the cooperative and other people of the neighborhood, like the Ateneo enciclopédico popular decide to generate this education campaign with the aim of solving the lack of schools in the district of Sants. That same year, a mass demonstration was launched with the slogan: “the people have the right to culture. We want the education of our children” (IDEM).

With this political framework, we can highlight the work done during the second republic: if there is a moment of origin of the work of schools as opposed spaces, of the development of political processes and of a political commitment to education as an engine of change, we can affirm that it happens in the period of the Second Republic, above all from the formative line that continued the work of the free educational institution (ILE) on the one hand and the labor movement and atheneist, debtor of the framework of libertarian anarchism.

Thus, on the one hand, the educational work given to pivot from the Second Republic was a key point, with a program of literacy based on rationalist precepts, of the New School, of co-education between girls and boys and always under the framework of equity, social justice, public schools. This work was carried out in rural school projects, in the process of cooperative work and a radical commitment to universal access to education in the Second Republic.

On the other hand, as a counterpoint to these phenomena, it is worth mentioning the popular or workers' athenaeums, which were committed to the integral formation of the working classes with the direct involvement of intellectuals and artists on many occasions. The Athenians organized classes, excursions, trips to the beach. Above all,

² This part of cooperative work draws from the book *Overflies de la Cultura* (2017) and especially from the contributions of *The Invisible Ciutat* (Irene Jaume and Iván Miró, 2017).

they were based on education on specific topics, such as Catalan or history, and they also promoted debates and conferences around diverse topics such as sex education, photography, cooperativism, etc.. (Desbordes de la cultura, 2017). In its structures there was a strong presence of cooperativism, with a project of formation and resistance that was truncated in 1939 with the installation of the dictatorship

We see that these political and educational processes went hand in hand with a profoundly radical change in the institutional and democratic model, with a commitment to culture and humanitarian knowledge, as indispensable elements for change or social transformation, a perspective that in fact seems a prelude to many of the precepts of popular Education.

La transición y los nuevos municipales: tensiones entre el cooperativismo, la educación popular y la escuela en democracia.

In the 60s and 70s, we can find other period of tension and promotion of education as a space to change and democracy motor. In the Spanish state, with the regime of Franco compulso and a period of “forced” opening, and imbued with tensions with the workers' movements (factory strikes) and the most self-managed side, new spaces of politicization and direct self-formation that affect many fields emerge. With the ghost of the transition and the change of the decade to the eighties, many community spaces and neighborhoods begin to promote the self-management of public services, some already coming from the tradition of self-built neighborhoods. This social emergency, as a consequence, groups that propose to regulate social services, social care and health policy, the housing with the rise of cooperative movements, and of course the education.

The 1960s and 1970s, within the framework of Education in Barcelona, are the seeds of spaces of schools active in Catalan, identity and community work. The pressure of the Franco regime, along with censorship and cultural hegemony, produces spaces of counter-hegemonic resistance carried out by civil society, either in the form of defense of neighborhoods, work with red parishes and priests or cooperatives or spaces of alternative schools. In many of these spaces are developed cooperatives of parents or of teachers under formulas legal in some cases hid the first schools of resistance organised around Rosa Sensat in the 60's.

The guiding principles of these teaching cooperatives were secular education and active school, the use of Catalan, and democratic school. Between 1966 and 1985, more than 174 teaching cooperatives were built, as consumer cooperatives during the Franco regime in order to be legal, and then as worker cooperatives. All of them stressed the commitment to a Catalan school and democratic values against Franco's idealist. These cooperatives first developed the Unió de Cooperatives d'ensenyament de Catalunya in

1976, and later the Colectivo de Escuelas para la Escuela Pública Catalana (CEPEPC) in 1978. This collective consisted of about 80 schools, many of which would later become part of the Public Schools Network. All this germ is catalyzed with the first summer training days of the Rosa Sensat Summer School (1975), which approved the declaration for a new public school, and promoted the movements of pedagogical renewal (MRP's), understood as social and democratizing movements that escape the regulation of the authoritarian regime, already in full decline, which like other spaces of self-management, Mark escape lines from the grassroots movements. Rosa Sensat opted for an active pedagogy, where training was generated among teachers and was committed to the incorporation of families and social contexts in schools as active. Parallel to this phenomenon of cooperativism, popular education is articulated as a political sector in many neighborhoods, especially in the urban peripheries, in the face of the imminent need to provide basic school degrees to working-class populations with literacy skills, which are articulated in both popular universities and adult schools, with a direct inheritance from Paulo Freire and critical literacy processes. In this sense, the school of Adults of Paulo Freire in the Nou Barris district (Barcelona), active since 1971 thanks to the struggle of women, is an example. As well as the school for Adults of Verneda with learning communities and reading clubs or the Popular School of Prosperity founded in Madrid, in 1973, and still functioning as of these days (Colectivo La Prospe, 2015.) This space was a revulsive in the Barrio del Norte de Madrid, implementing official titles with collective evaluation processes, working with the barrio and the various collectives of the eighties and nineties, and reactivating the parameters of popular education with spaces of anti-globalization and other urban struggles in the 2000's (IDEM.).

Popular education spaces and innovative pedagogies

Estos espacios de educación popular también emergen en los 80's en espacios informales de educación y trabajo comunitario, a veces bajo formas diversas y áreas municipales muchas veces secundarias (Juventud) donde gracias los movimientos del ocio o *lliure* (tiempo libre) se dará el germen a una escuela de democracia en asociacionismo y asambleario que será clave en la configuración de los escenarios políticos, en la formación de bases de educación popular y en espacios de gestión horizontal o de otras formas de hacer barrio. In this way the movement of the *caus*,³ especially in Barcelona with its secular character, or the Casales de jóvenes or Barrio, represent places of direct democracy, schools of associationism and cooperative work and construction of community fabric in the neighborhoods (Casal de Roquetes, from Prosperitat 1988, among many others). They are spaces that promote the self-management of the assembly and that even achieve that the youth groups manage and

³ Caus, or places of leisure and leisure similar to Boy Scouts, but in cataluña, some with a more secular or transformative character, others more related to the Church.

professionalize in these spaces as places of real sovereignty. In these frameworks it is always seen as a reference to the Modern School, progressive pedagogies and other frameworks inherited from both the Second Republic, the popular education movements and the Liberation Theology of Latin America. In parallel with these spaces for informal experimentation, schools also begin to activate other models of active pedagogy and cultural policies in education. Little by little the visual culture, the work with the territories and the frameworks of popular education and critical pedagogy are inserted in methodological processes, such as the project work developed by the Teaching Innovation Group Minerva Group in 1992.

Three Living, active education, new schools, and new spaces of resistance: public school, free universities and nurturing and caring groups.

Currently the free school has various ramifications and implications in the infinity of educational projects, especially has left a legacy of work in democratic schools and the introduction of curricular development from work projects (Hernández and Ventura, 1998), a perspective that was born of the Minerva group, a group of teachers and researchers active since. Work projects are defined as global working methods, where questions can be developed from the knowledge and concerns of school groups, and where research and knowledge can be generated. They develop interrelated knowledge and transdisciplinary processes.

On the other hand, from about 2012, in Barcelona we can see an explosion of democratic schools are a strong commitment to active and living education, in its methods and parameters. This type of Education draws from the aforementioned frameworks of democracy , accompaniment, respect, free or modern school, sometimes defined as living education (accompaniment to growth and school as a living organism) or active education (education as an active recognition of lxs niñxs, and of school as an engine of change). In many cases it is simply defined as public education. This development and reactivation of the school permeates a set of schools, which on the other hand connects with the translations of public and Democratic schools of the 70's and 80's, of the free school (Reggio Mila, Montessori,) and the framework of the work projects, to rethink the school of the SXXI:

These alternative experiences do nothing but recover pedagogical methods from the past, as in the Catalan School of the Republic, The Montessori method or Reggio Emilia. And the reason for this resurgence in several new schools is due to "the concern among teachers about the path to be followed by the school in the 21st century," says Fina Monell, professor at CEIP Ithaca (Gutierrez, 2009).

This explosion represents a failure in the education system, or a new opportunity, as due to the educational policy framework and educational project of the school, many

schools may have some freedom or autonomy to choose teachers. In the macro of the new school regulations (Catalonia), educational teams can choose the teaching team for a specific time, allowing them to consolidate teams under a common educational framework and project. At the same time, educational teams or specific people present themselves as management teams in neighborhoods or areas where there will be a new public school, allowing for curriculum innovation projects, a work of cooperation among all teachers. This emergency allows, obretodo, to gain an autonomy of pedagogical project where not only to test as methodologies the inheritances of alternative pedagogies or the free, modern or progressive school, but above all to create educational communities with a solid political and pedagogical project.

In this sense one of the first centers was the Martinet de Ripollet⁴ inaugurated in 2003. The work of architectural, design, and pedagogy go hand in hand, with open spaces, committed to diverse environments, a space for permaculture instead of a courtyard with competitive sports (football pitch), or the rejection of the slates and the use of hallways and other corners as spaces, assets or samples, or educational activities. All this from the participatory design of the remodeling of the building that would be transformed into a school: "When the school of the team of teachers and representatives of the school was built they collaborated with the architects to define the spaces according to the pedagogical project" (30 minuts, 2017.)⁵

In this center all the architecture is the result of the pedagogical project, generating a new institution that "forces the regulations" to transform the classrooms, corridors and environments into educational spaces⁶ (idem, 2017.) A model that focuses on the culture of the infant (in catalá, de la niña/o), with open assemblies, with teachers who accompany groups of students, who investigate with images their behaviors and their learning, which is part of the free movement of girls and boys throughout the school. In addition, the center promotes special days, initiatives that promote various actions in the public space and in the downtown neighborhood, to generate spaces for contacts and relationships between the groups of children with the territory or to activate spaces with the educational community⁷.

The estela del Martinet and other educational centers will mark a turning point and development of schools, teaching innovation plans and new centers throughout Catalonia, and in the rest of the Spanish state. Examples of other similar educational centers can be the Congr s Indians school (Barcelona, 2010), rural anti-authoritarian

4 <http://pladeformacioajuntament.santboi.cat/blog/lescola-el-martinet/>

5 <http://www.ccma.cat/tv3/alcarta/30-minuts/una-altra-escola/video/5620064/>

6 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2cy-MZkTEk>

7 <https://vimeo.com/album/1811004>

schools such as the free school Paideia (Extremadura) with 40 years of tradition⁸, Itaca in Manresa, O Pelouro in Pontevedra founded in 1973, or the Roure in the province of Barcelona. This new wave of centers and pedagogies is also materialized and articulated with historical democratic public schools, such as the Trabenco school in Madrid, with more than 40 years of history, and the legacy of old teaching cooperatives or the Costa i Llobera Institute / School in Barcelona, with more than 25 years of travel. Another of the axes of these **schools** is the involvement of families and the neighborhood in which they are located - they participate in many activities of the center - one of the issues that Joan Badia values the most. However, it is difficult for these projects to continue over time, as mobility of teachers through the transfer competition makes it difficult to maintain the same system and teaching equipment. It can be noted, for example, that only in the district district have models similar to the Martino Congress Indians, about 6 schools (Enenteça, Xirinacs, Gaia, Example II; Encants, of a total of 18 public schools), which can be verified a growth of this institutional model, which also has its lights and its shadows.

In dialogue with this reality of schools that project democratic policies, there is a clear relationship of reactive dialogue and resistance to the processes of schooling, which has its relationship in **self-education movements**, especially arising from the privatization of the university and the process of the Bologna Plan of neoliberalization and weakening of the public structure of higher education. In the light of these frameworks, and focused on working with second-generation social centres, militant research, training and thought programmes emerge that regain the idea of autonomy and critical thinking.

Examples of this are the Universidad Nómada, the Ulex in Malaga in relation to the Invisible House, Espai en Blanc, the Rimaiawith its successive venues and communal project (both in Barcelona), or more recently the Common Notions program. There are also attempts to work within the same university structures as Aulabierta (Granada, 2003-2009 approx), understood as a collective *hacking* space, or more recently La Trastera (Complutense University, Madrid) or the Overflow the University platform (Catalonia) , or the Program of Studies in Common Hand (PEMAN) in collaboration with the University of Santiago. También hay intentos de trabajo dentro de las mismas estructuras universitarias como Aulabierta (Granada, 2003-2009 aprox), entendido como un espacio de hackeo colectivo, o más recientemente La Trastera (Universidad Complutense, Madrid) o la plataforma Desbordar la Universidad (Cataluña), o el Programa de Estudios en Mano Común (PEMAN) en colaboración con la Universidad de Santiago. A program developed as a popular University of Commons located and with advice of wisdom in Galicia, under the framework of the program of studies of ruralities, feminisms and common.

⁸ <https://www.elsaltodiario.com/saltamos-extremadura/paideia-40-anos-de-lucha-contra-las-maquinas-escuelas-libres>

these retaguardas it may be that the question of school and new forms of institutions or resistances, we find other spaces where we can rethink education from one we and a process of shared experiences

As we see pedagogical experimentation, the new forms of militant or feminist research and the critical relationship with the University also generate spaces of resistance, dialogue and transformation from other schools.

Regarding education in the first years or months of life, another educational space that is also stressing the "school institution" are the **parenting groups**, which come to cover education from 0 to 3 years, even to 6, due to that the Spanish State determines that education in these ages is not mandatory. The state provides public nurseries, but in many cases they do not meet 50 per cent of the real needs. The breeding spaces are spaces of community and respectful breeding, many of them located in the parameters of free, living/ active education. Also drink models Walldorf, Pestalozzi, Pickler... These spaces usually have a group of educators, it is fixed, and a direct participation of the families, in assemblies, working groups and other events, giving also the

possibility of co-parenting, where the families help, and make companions of lxs niñxs. In this field there may be spaces directly involved with social centers (La Rimaieta, Crianza group and care community), with cooperative spaces (Babalia), with nomadic co-aging spaces (the Xugurú tribe), or even with cessions of spaces for a group (Tatanet.) In other cases, some groups are committed to free and anti-authoritarian education beyond the age of 3, creating models that last up to the age of 6 years or beyond and resisting models of compulsory schooling. Spaces such as La Pinya, a self-managed rural school started in 2004⁹, or Espai Agua focus on this type of independent free school models.

The emergence of these groups is clear, even in neighborhoods where they begin to organize and claim parenting as a common good¹⁰, and therefore promote a community and collective management model that overcomes the false dichotomy between private or public model, ie of private day care centers that are difficult to access and elitist or of nurseries / kindergartens supported by the State with few resources, ratios or teaching staff. For example there is the PEPI, platform for Education and Participation *de/s*

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHgF5G-m6AQ>

¹⁰ <http://heteropolitics.net/index.php/2018/09/12/crianza/>

*Infants Poble-sec*¹¹ neighborhood, founded in 2016 in accordance with the need to create a neighborhood that cares and raised, as a fundamental right of citizenship, or rather of "citizenship" (Malo, 2014). In this sense, the work of upbringing is articulated with the traditions of right to the city from the question of the tribe and the new political forms of motherhood (Elmo, 2014). It is ultimately linked to feminist policies and spaces of interdependence and care, and it is linked to the care retaguardas (León, 2017). In these retaguardas it may be that the question of school and new forms of institutions or resistances, we find other spaces where we can rethink education from one we and a process of shared experiences (Garcés, 2018).

With this brief review we have tried to reread the school from its complexities, as places of resistance and social transformation. We have also wanted to review other initiatives that draw on the traditions of self-management, popular education or are linked to community management and new forms of cooperativism, free universities or experimental spaces, or co-parenting and care policies. The school, like every institution that is the daughter of modern democracies, is traversed by these contradictions, between opening and closing, between universality and common management by some groups. As an institution it can be a space to experience other forms not only of learning, but to build neighborhoods, sustain lives and offer spaces of resistance from care, slow education and local knowledge.

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<https://www.elperiodico.com/es/barcelona/20171112/grupos-de-crianza-del-poble-sec-6414488>

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