Learning in Community Networks of Exchange in Buenos Aires and Rosario, Argentina.

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Introduction: situating this piece of writing / presentation

As a member of social solidarity groups for more than 30 years, I have been practicing alternative ways of organizing work and other activities (e.g. I worked at a cooperative of workers who ran a school; I worked at community, not for profit organizations; I participated in social solidarity organizations) and I have analyzed some or their outcomes (e.g., Heras, 1989; Heras 1998). As a researcher in Argentinean academia for the past 16 years, I have combined my membership to social solidarity groups with my interest in documenting and analyzing such practices in my country, a society where these orientations are not predominant, yet where they have existed for a long time.

Thus I write from a combined perspective, and my voice may oscillate between community participant and researcher.

This piece of writing and photographic essay[1] is part of a larger collaborative inquiry project in, with and about *grupos autogestionados* (self-managed[2], autonomous groups) in different geographies of Argentina. I am the coordinator of this teamwork effort to document practices, discourses and meaning-making processes in the city of Buenos Aires, the city of Rosario, the rural area of the Province of Tucumán, the rural area of the Province of Misiones, several small suburban districts in the Province of Buenos Aires, and the cities of San Salvador and Palpalá in the Province of Jujuy. The goals of the groups with whom we work vary from feeding homeless families, to running artistic and educational projects and/or public schools, to producing (food, clothes) to running small businesses (a bar, for example) or conducting agricultural collective farming. We have been documenting these groups` processes by audio and video, photography and writing. These documents are shared with group members, in order to support an on-going reflection process, collectively (Miano and Heras, 2015; Heras, 2014; 2015).

The groups with whom we work collaboratively define themselves as *social solidarity groups*. In these groups, the term *cooperative* is used to refer to a way of thinking about relationships and power, yet not all of these groups are cooperatives of workers. However, they define themselves as *auto-gestionados* and *auto-organizados.*

For this presentation I analyzed data from two networks located in a region called *central* or *pampa húmeda*, more specifically in the cities of Rosario and Buenos Aires, cities where historically there has been an ongoing process of cooperative work, consumers` cooperatives, and other different ways of doing / performing the economy. This tradition is thus part of the social discourse available at these geographies, yet it is always in tension with, or disputing

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[1] Credit for the photographs is to David Burin, Amalia Miano, Ana Inés Heras. Credit for the iconography is to the organizations that belong to MTA and Circuito Cultural Marcos. I thank David Burin for helping me craft the Prezi photographic essay available at http://prezi.com/vtuk7wy437eg/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share
[2] A note needs to be made on the term *self-managed*. In Spanish we use the concept of *auto-gestión* and *auto-gestionado* to refer to self-management as a concept and self-management as a way of organizing. However the term *management* is used (in English) in our Spanish-speaking world, and it conveys an emphasis on alienated labor, labor controlled by *managers* and not by workers. For this reason, the reader should keep in mind that I choose to use self-management and/or self-managed (groups) as the best place holder (in English) for a meaning that intends to convey a notion closer to autonomy, self-organization, emancipation and internal democracy than to *managerial* perspectives.

the meaning with, other available discourses: privatization of public space; so called *modernization* that goes hand in hand with for profit enterprises; efficiency as it is advertised by the media and other loci of communicative actions, such as the current administration at the national government.

For this piece I take data generated with 8 cooperative groups in the city of Rosario over 2014-2016, studying the specific aspects of their networking. Their network is called Movimiento de Trabajadores Autogestionados, and as we shall see, their networking does not necessarily end within the confines of their 8 groups. Our team conducted videotaped individual as well as group interviews; we also met 4 times with all 8 groups in a format we called *taller* (workshop), which we also documented by note taking, videotaping and photographs. It was the members of the network who asked us to conduct the *taller* focusing on issues they had identified (relationship between cooperative groups and state regulations). We have also observed their practice at some assemblies and at their work places.

I also analyzed data from a network in the City of Buenos Aires, the Circuito Cultural MARCOS, documented for 2015-2016. I participate in this group as a full member, and therefore, my analysis seeks to objectify a practice in which I am a direct actor. I have analyzed narrative accounts of the Circuit´s meetings, a set of photos and other visual documents (e.g. flyers), and an oral diary (i.e. audio-records) where I document the process, sometimes in dialogue with others and sometimes as soliloquy (auto-reflection process).

I focus on describing, analyzing and interpreting the uses space. In order to do this, I describe practices and discourses in order to interpret meaning-making processes constructed in interaction.

Prior work and framework for this presentation

According to prior analyses conducted by our team, *grupos autogestionados* [self-managed groups] create their organizational structures placing each member at a horizontal position (Heras, 2008). Elsewhere (Heras, 2011 a) I have discussed that *grupos autogestionados* are practicing a specific set of practices that we have analyzed by using the concept of *dispositif*, following the work of French philosophers (Guattari, Deleuze, Foucault). These authors have argued that at any organization, their *dispositifs* become, at the same time, a *way of doing, a way of constructing meaning* and *a way of seeing the world and communicating about it.*

In Argentina, there is a culturally specific term to refer to the orientation that guides *grupos autogestionados* practices and ways of signifying/seeing the world: *asambleario/a,* as members of many of these groups call this orientation. This concept (used as such in daily conversation, in the media and in academic settings as well) started to permeate social discourse after the Argentinean crisis of 2001. We identified it is regarded both as a practice and as a discursive action.

As a practice it means to make direct decisions on issues concerning all participants. The moment / space where it happens is called *asamblea.*

As a discursive action, *asambleario* and *asamblea* refer to a type of collective power, constructed dialectically, namely granting each member a horizontal position (and thus the possibility to do and speak for themselves), and also granting the organizations´ identity as *collective* (Heras, 2011 b; 2013). This means that a delicate balance is constantly kept between not closing down any particular point of view a member may hold, and simultaneously sustaining the group as such.

We have found that acknowledging difference, and even sustaining tense debates, becomes accepted in these groups as part of their cultural ways of doing things. We have interpreted

that such cultural ways are developed because in their *asambleas*, these groups systematically hold reflection processes with their peers, which include debating, arguing and even calling a break on the discussion in order to continue the debate at a later point in time, if agreement can not be reached (Heras and others, 2014). It is assumed that thinking collectively is a process and that there are several forces at play amongst which contradiction or tension, as well as synergic processes, may emerge. New ways of doing things, or re-establishing norms, or even creating new structures at these organizations seem to come up as a result of this continuous decision-making, decision-taking and debate processes (Heras, 2016).

We have conceptualized the learning processes by *grupos autogestionados* in a matrix, as follows:

Figure 1: Learning Matrix

Within the organization		
TYPE OF INTERACTION	Parity and mutuality in decision making	Deciding and reflecting on the process of decision making	Creating a new structure within the organization
WHERE AND HOW	Face to face interaction – all members can participate at assemblies where difference may be spelled out	Discourse patterns at assemblies show that they include a purposeful reflection on what is being done and how	A new structure may be created and internal rules may be re-established
When a new organizational creation is acknowledged and given a name, the organization has changed. We identify that learning has occurred. Consciousness about the specificity of the organization and its creation emerges.			

An example of one of the groups with whom we have been working for 4 years now may help see how this continuous process takes place. This is a collective of educators who run a public elementary school for homeless children, youth and adults. They started as a one-teacher, one-room (several ages and literacy level students gathered together) school in 1998. Over 18 years the school grew: now it hosts 250 students and 50 educators (teachers, psychologists, social workers, art-teachers, physicians). Since the student population with whom they work faces very challenging living situations, the educators found themselves one and again having to intervene during the school day to attend the students´ needs or to re-establish some of the ground rules for school functioning. Finally, in 2008, and after a series of trials and errors (e.g., where, how and who would decide what about the school management) they decided they would start meeting at a weekly assembly, where all educators would attend and where decisions would be made together. It didn´t matter whether they held differential positions in the school organizational matrix, e.g., whether Principal or Teacher Aide, but what mattered was that all could sit down (for three hours), talk, reflect together and make decisions. Over the years, thus, they acknowledged their way as *autogestionada*, *asamblearia* and *popular*. They had to re establish some daily schoolwork patterns in order to accommodate the weekly assembly, and they also established some ground rules about how decisions were made in this new space. I have documented their decision making process for 2013-2015 in these assemblies, and have also conducted interviews about this process. From participants´ perspectives, the capacity of making decisions at assembly meetings distinguishes this educational process from any other they have either worked before, or are concurrently

working at (because some of them work part time at this school and part time at other schools).

What is distinctive about the learning matrix for *grupos autogestionados* that we have identified is that they define their focus as *collective interest*, by simultaneously generating a way of understanding what they do (e.g., by making explicit the processes of meaning construction at play). Over time, a way of seeing the world is constructed by members if they hold their participation in such groups, a way that includes a constant ongoing learning process. What members identify as having learned, for example, is how to engage in debate, how to reach agreements, how to accept that sometimes agreements can not be reached, how to think concurrently about their practice as a group and their practice as an individual. Along these lines we documented that a social discourse (Angenot, 1999) on *autogestión* is currently happening in Argentina, supported by these specific social practices. These discourses and practices encounter tensions, as we have described, within these organizations.

They also find tensions at the societal level. There seems to be three reasons for the tensions that emerge between *grupos autogestionados* and society at large. The first one lies within the area of state regulations. The administrative rules (laws, norms, decrees) are not well suited to acknowledging *autogestión*, and thus several issues come up when these groups relate to the governmental structures (e.g., the government seeks for example to establish contact with an authority, a boss, and these groups proceed by collective decision making and collective authority). The second one seems to lie within social imagery: the orientation towards power tends to be hierarchical and bureaucratic in society, and collective power (*asambleario*) is not well understood. Many a time their ways are seen as *démodé* or *old-ish*, and qualified negatively (as *the hippies from the 70s* in a negative tone). And the third one is related to class struggle: at some points, *grupos autogestionados* become the explicit target of others´ actions because they might have challenged the statuo quo (for example, the government, or other forces at play, such as interest groups, in terms of the use of public space). It is at these moments that it becomes visible that if they rely on a network of support, they may be successful in navigating these confrontations (Heras and Burin, 2013; Miano, 2013; Heras, Miano and Burin, in press).

These analyses led us to conclude that members of these organizations create a specific body of knowledge. Thus, in order to participate within these groups, as we said, members go through a learning process, which mostly takes place by doing, talking, reflecting, and meaning-making processes. This type of analysis is inspired by the work of Corneille Castoriadis, specifically his conceptualization of *autonomy as a project*. From his perspective, autonomy is a constant process of dialectically practicing collective power, which entails a permanent reflection on it (Castoriadis, 2007; 2004; 1997; 1993). He has argued that internal democracy in any group is related to the capacity of purposefully deliberating on the practices and meanings constructed over time. He has also highlighted the importance of imagining, and has even underlined the fact that, if anything, it is this capacity what distinguishes humans from other species. He has called this process *radical imagination*, analyzing different societal configurations over time (e.g., Greek democracy in the ancient past; workers´ councils in the 50´s; French cultural processes in the 60´s) to show the intertwined process of social action and meaning making. He coined the terms *social imaginary signification* processes, and, he argued, these continuously change by effect of the capacity to imagine, which is not determined, nor fixed to any societal structure per se. For example, he reconstructed the long historical process by which Greek democracy crafted anew practices and meanings that were not available before, such as *isonomia, isologia* and *isegoria* (ancient Greek terms to refer to parity in decision making processes, in taking up voice and in casting a vote). He assumed additionally that horizontal power is not granted but instead produced.

We have incorporated also some ideas developed in the late work of Sándor Ferenczi, the Hungarian psychoanalyst. I have been studying his way to understand interactions when participants want to build a mutual frame for the generation of shared knowledge (Heras, 2015 c). For example, in his role as a therapist, he practiced *mutual analysis* with some of his patients, and insisted in that this kind of perspective may open up a process of joint knowledge construction for both the psychoanalyst and the patient (Ferenczi, 1932). He worked with this framework when relating to other colleagues, when coordinating the Hungarian Psychoanalytic Association, and when establishing relationships with others with whom he shared common political views (e.g., at the Galileo Group). Even though he is well known today for his psychoanalytic contributions to relational therapy (at least in English speaking academic communities), his notions about power, and his reflections on them, have been scarcely interpreted, and if so, they have been conceptualized as part of his innovations in therapeutic techniques, and not as socio-psychological theories about power relationships, which is where I pick up his lead.

We also orient our analysis by the concept of *diverse economies* as discussed by Gibson-Graham (2008 a and b), that is, as a set of existing practices that can be distinguished from what is considered hegemonic (i.e. exploited labor, hierarchical relationships or practices of decision making distant from the people who are affected by these decisions). Specifically, we take this point of view in as much as it provides a framework to identify what emerges as *empancipatory* and in line with the notion of *hope* that Fickey and Hanrahan (2014) point out in such practices. Consistent with this approach, we focus on interpreting practices and social discourse, as well as the capacity of creation that rests in language.

Methods

Data presented in this paper come out of a larger data set that is being generated collaboratively with different groups in Argentina. As I stated, for the past 7 years our team has been working collaboratively with groups in different parts of our country (the north east, the north west, the centre and the city of Buenos Aires). Our general guiding question is: How do groups [learn to] self-organize, self-manage and support a culture of reciprocity and solidarity in what they do?

We have generated a body of data consisting in interviews, focus groups, observed events (documented in notes, pictures, audio or video); also, by establishing different kinds of agreements with the groups, we also conduct workshops, reflexion sessions on issues they want to work with us on, or movie sessions and debate afterwards. And additionally, with some of them, we have engaged in ethnographic, long term, observation and data analysis. In some of the groups with whom we work, some of our team members are full participants (e.g., I am a full participant in the Circuito Cultural Marcos). So in addition to working _with_ self-organized, self-managed groups, I am a member of organizations that self-organize and thus, in my own role as participant, I co-analyse the work we do together. This co-analysis is done with other members of the group/groups, just like we do when our action-research team works with the groups mentioned above. It means that as a direct participant I also make notes, and/or read notes taken by other members, construct an organization archive, take pictures or make short films, etc.

Specific themes are identified and analysed as we establish partnership with different groups. For example, how groups generate resources and distribute them; how they see their work responding to society's challenging conditions (e.g., unemployment; discriminatory practices towards those who are perceived as poor; lack of schooling for some groups of families); how decision-making processes take place in their groups, and in which specific organizational structures; or how these groups conceive of and use technology.

For the purposes of this piece I focus on analysing two Community Networks in Argentina, one in the City of Buenos Aires and the other one in the City of Rosario.

I have chosen these examples for two reasons. The fist one is that both are auto-organized, autonomous networks, by their own definition. The second one is that they are performing ("live") a different way of doing and thinking about the economy, about relationships, and about participation in decision-making processes. They also challenge core current orientations in regards to power and property. Therefore, their acts can be located within geographies of partnership and mutual exchange.

I started by identifying and describing these Network´s culturally situated practices, and the orientations that support them, as a first analytic step. Thus, practices and orientations (i.e., meaning making processes) become interpretable units, which are analysed in relation to one another, following an adapted matrix based on the now considered classic work of Spradley (1980) in cultural anthropology.

In this presentation I specifically focus on space as a point of entrance to unravelling some of the relationships established within these two Networks.

Data analysis

Movimiento de Trabajadores Autogestionados. Rosario, Argentina. This network comes out of the need of several cooperatives of workers to reflect and learn about what is specific in their way of doing work (i.e., cooperative work where participants share in equal position a responsibility towards the organization and their work).

These are a group of 8 cooperatives, as follows:

Lavadero Unión - industrial laundry; Estudio Contable Cooperativo - accounting office; Inlakech – warehouse; Pronoar - warehouse & delivery; Prana - food produce; Movimiento Cajonardi - beer brewery; Pichangú – bar; Sattva Veg - vegan pizza

Each of these groups was founded at a different point in time, ranging from 2007 to 2012.

In what follows I will describe some of their practices in regards to the way they use SPACE. I will then describe and analyse some of their discourses about what they do (meaning making processes about their own doing). Following these descriptive analyses I will provide an interpretive framework for these practices and discourses. I thus intend to respond three different questions: How is space used? What does this use of space mean to participants? How can we interpret this doing and signifying?

Practices located in space

 [See prezi.app for a photographic essay / descriptive data]
http://prezi.com/vtuk7wy437eg/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share]

Table 1. Practices regarding the use of space by public / social categories & their relation to meaning making processes

SPACE	PRACTICES			MEANING
Who is the owner?	*PUBLIC SPACE* *Street, sidewalk, river banks*	*RECLAIMED SPACE* *(OCCUPIED / OWNED COLLECTIVELY)* *La Toma & Piedra Libre*	*SPACE RENTED BY EACH ORGANIZATION* *Buildings rented by coop of workers are used by several groups*	*What is public / private is constantly re-crafted by practices & discourses.*
Decision	*By the administration (govt.).*	*By a collective of cooperatives*	*By each cooperative*	*Loci for decision making vary, yet collective orientation seems to guide what gets done. What is public & collectively owned is regarded as open and it can be put to use, to connect with society at large, and to make visible a different way of thinking and doing.*
When?	*Periodical*	*Permanent*	*Permanent*	
How is space used?	*Collaborative actions to use public space: e.g., street and sidewalk (festival en la calle: to eat, share cultural + artistic activities and and hang out with neighbors . Using the river bank (4 to 5 times a year) to gather as MTA and connect with others (e.g., neighbors, other organizations, people from other neighborhoods).*	<u>*La Toma*</u>*. Sharing space, e.g. several groups on the same space that was previously obtained by re-covering the workspace (workers / creating La Toma). Supporting common space together, e.g. paying dues to support space.* <u>*Piedra Libre*</u>*. Renting and sharing space by 3 groups (credit union to social economy groups; accounting cooperative of workers; women selling their crafts; educational space for social economy groups).*	<u>*Pichangú and Prana*</u>*. Each of them is renting a space (by a coop of workers) that in turn is shared with other cooperative groups. Sharing space for public library; meetings and workshops (recreational space; arts workshops).*	
What for?	*Public space is used to:* - *Make visible a way of living / being* - *Connect with other people*	*Community space is used to:* - *Work* - *Learn how to do work* - *Reflect on their specific way of doing work*		
	THEY DO THIS BY: - *Celebrating* - *Exhibiting their produce* - *Playing cooperative sports, dance, etc.* - *Selling agro ecological produce* - *Conduct educational and recreational activities*	*BESIDES WORK THEY ALSO USE THE SPACE FOR:* - *Celebrating* - *Exhibiting* - *Playing sports, dance, etc.* - *Selling agro ecological produce* - *Conducting educational and recreational activities* - *Connecting with other people*		*Work is connected to other expressions such as art, recreation, and getting together with people.*

Cooperating amongst Schools, Neighbors, Families and Small Family Owned Business in the area of Colegiales, Buenos Aires. The Community Exchange Network, called Circuito Cultural MARCOS, is located in the neighborhood of Colegiales, in the north area of the City of Buenos Aires, a district belonging to the Comuna 13 (which hosts three districts: Colegiales, Belgrano and Núñez). Comuna 13 is a big area, hosting 250,000 people, and it is also a very diverse area. There is a very wealthy part of Comuna 13, where high class families live, and there are other parts of Comuna 13 that are inhabited by middle class, working class or families with a non-stable job pattern as well. In this Comuna, also, there are several Comedores Populares where homeless families attend daily to eat.

This Network was initiated by the work of families gathered in what in Argentina is called Asociación Cooperadora (similar to what in English Speaking countries is known as Parent Teacher Association). In the year of 2005 my eldest son entered MARCOS SASTRE small, neighbor public school and in 2015 my youngest son graduated from this same school (7th grade). For this reason, as a mom, I was part of this school for ten years and participated of the Asociación Cooperadora as a regular member.

In every public school, there is a A*sociación Cooperadora,* roughly translatable as "Cooperating Association". Here to *cooperate* usually means to support the school in any shape or form that Principals see fit. The goal of these Associations is defined as *cooperating with the educational goals of the school*, and it is usually thought of as administering state monies. In other words, principals need these Associations to be conformed since, otherwise, they cannot use the funds provided by the state. There are several procedures that the Associations need to follow in order to become legally eligible to receive and administer these funds, such as forming an Association´s Board, conducting an Assembly so that the Board presents the results of the annual accounts and annual reports to the community, and open a bank account to receive and administer state funds. However, receiving and administering monies is not their sole purpose. The overall, embracing term *cooperadora* can adopt several different meanings, according to how it becomes interpreted by particular groups at different points in time. In other words, it could be interpreted merely as "a group to administer state monies" (it is listed amongst its responsibilities) but it can also be interpreted as a "group with autonomous decision over matters concerning educational, cultural and community related purposes".

By way of context it is important to state that in Argentina the funds destined to public education were lessened over time. This meant that many "Cooperating Associations" sought to generate their own funds and manage their own budgets, many of them for the purpose of having their neighbor schools be appropriate places for their sons and daughters to attend.

Thus, together with the (scarce) funds provided by the state, the monies and resources generated by the Asociación Cooperadora are used to support the schools´ needs, from the very daily ones (e.g., toilet paper, soap, cleaning supplies) to the ones related to teaching (e.g., Xeroxing, art supplies, books for the library), to implementing special projects (e.g., fieldtrips, community related

projects), and even sometimes, to repairing schools (e.g., fixing plumbing, providing heaters or repairing furniture).

The capacity to generate funds is differential across the city of Buenos Aires because family income, neighborhood resources and community support differ. This means that access to resources is unequal and the geography of inequality, in this respect, can be severe in our city. In different neighborhoods the concerns or interests of the Asociación Cooperadora differ according to the challenges presented to the families in every district. And also is different the expertise, time, resources and possibilities that families may have to become involved at schools.

MARCOS SASTRE is a public, neighbor school that hosts very diverse families, ranging from immigrant families from neighbor countries (e.g., Perú, Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile and Brazil), and other countries (e.g., France), or from other provinces (e.g. Province of Buenos Aires, Province of Santa Fe) and from other neighborhoods (e.g., further North or South in the city). For the school population during the past 4 years, more or less 80% of the families hold a stable job, and the other 20% have either non-stable jobs or cannot access jobs at all, and are funded either by the state or by other networks of support (e.g., other family members). Over the 10 years I spent at this school as a mom, the neighborhood changed: old houses were tore down and new, small buildings replaced them. New small, family owned business opened their doors, and the neighborhood landscape changed as well.

During the years of 2005 to 2008 the Asociación Cooperadora stayed mostly the same by having only 7 members in the Board and not calling up for any participatory action or process towards families attending the school. During 2008 there was a change in administration in the City Government, and a new party won the elections, with a very unsupportive perspective towards public schooling. In 2009 there was a massive teacher strike, and many families supported the educators. Part of this situation spilled over each specific school site, yet it was signified differently at each of them. At MARCOS SASTRE there was not much receptiveness towards these issues but I, individually, became involved and thus networked with other families at other neighbor schools. This situation meant that I approached the Asociación Cooperadora to communicate what I had been learning and in hopes that the Board would be open to disseminating the information towards other families. This did not happen, and the Board members stressed that in order to do something like that, it would be best if I became part of the Board in the upcoming elections. It sounded as an ambiguous statement, in as much as I thought it was a politically correct way of telling me there was not much interest in the Asociación becoming involved in such issues. There was a consistent message by this Board that the *cooperadora* was about administering funds, and not about anything related to the education of our children beyond that.

I participated in the elections and became a Board member. During 2009 and 2010 I learned about the way the Asociación Cooperadora worked, and consistently suggested different ways of doing things, which were resisted in very many different ways. However, and due to the fact that I started creating communicating channels (e.g., a mailing list, a system of flyers to be sent to

families in name of the Board, etc.), slowly, other families became interested in participating.

During 2010-2012, consistently, more and more families started participating in the Asociación Cooperadora and its Board, and thus practices changed. Instead of focusing on administering state monies, the group focused on several different issues. The organization changed because instead of having only a Board of 7 members, 25 mothers or fathers became Board members, and another 50 (on top of the 25) enrolled in decentralized committees. The committees were (roughly translated): Press and Communication; Web Site; Community Affairs; Celebrations Committee; Maintaining the Building; Committee of La Mesita; Committee in charge of purchasing; Cultural Events. These Committees changed over the years, although some of them were stable.

The committees in charge of Culture, Community Affairs, and Cultural Events started to network amongst each other as well and managed to set up an agenda for educational and recreational activities at the school. However, each time we wanted to host an activity, we had to ask permission from the Principal who, in turn, had to ask her Supervisor, who in turn asked the Government about whether or not an activity could be held. In 2015 the Principal approached the Asociación Cooperadora to explain that *there were too many activities going on*, and that it was difficult for her in her role to continually ask for permission to use the school building.

At that point, as families, we decided to find other spaces where we could run the school-related, cultural and artistic activities. It should then be noticed that the use of public space was interdicted by the administration, and perceived as not entirely "legal" or "within scope" the aims of the Asociación Cooperadora. The Asociación Cooperadora debated in several assemblies whether or not it was within our scope to put public space to use in order to conduct cultural, educational and recreational activities. It was concluded that it was within scope but it was also concluded that it didn´t make sense, at that point, to enter a tense debate (that could end in an argument) with the Principal. Therefore, I volunteered to look for other spaces where we could hold our activities within 5 blocks around the school building. I contacted the Board of the Instituto para la Inclusión Social y el Desarrollo Humano, a research Institute where I conduct part of my job, and the conference room was offered to conduct some of the activities (e.g., showing movies and holding workshops with adults). Thus, the first link was established and an incipient CIRCUITO was born: the school and the Institute were the first interconnected nodes. We then asked a small, neighbor restaurant whether they could lend the space to host an arts and crafts workshop for children ages 8 to 12. A mom had volunteered to teach Mexican design and arts and to create masks using recycled paper. The workshop was planned as a sequence of 8 meetings (once a week), which finally lasted a total of 12 weeks (because kids and mom wanted to continue). The restaurant agreed to open their main room on Mondays, even if they used to close (they were closed on Mondays but they opened to host our workshop). Thus a third node was added to the Cultural network. This restaurant also hosted a group of neighbor musicians ("Profesionales de Otra Cosa") who played on the sidewalk 4 times that year. The restaurant owner lent the electricity, fed musicians over dinner the nights they played, and agreed to disseminate via their electronic newsletter

that the Circuito Cultural had been created to support cultural activities in the area of Colegiales.

From that point on, several other *nodes* started joining the network because by word of mouth they learned about our activities. Those were: two musical bands; an art gallery; a small family run business dedicated to celebrating children´s birthdays. Over time, other small family-run business and other PTA s (3 more) joined as well, covering an area 10 by 5 blocks, approximately.

Two ground rules were agreed upon participants: that there was not going to be exchange of monies and that the CIRCUITO would meet monthly to make decisions together, as a group.

All activities organized by the CIRCUITO are thus free of charge and open to whoever wants to participate. This means that some of the participants (who are private owned business) decide to donate their space and time to contribute to hosting free of charge activities for children and their families. It also means that artists, educators, professionals or regular neighbors offer their knowledge and expertise, at no charge, to share what they know with other people. In this manner, we continually offer cultural, artistic, educational and debate-oriented activities, organized by the CIRCUITO.

Additionally, several activities have been held on the public space (sidewalk and street) and/or are being planned, as follows:

- PTA "Mesitas" on the sidewalk of 4 public schools (once a month)
- Coordinated "Mesitazo" on 4 different neighbors, linking 7 different public schools
- Celebration of "100 Mesitas" by Marcos Sastre PTA (street festival)
- Celebration of "Colegiales Anniversary" (Sept. 25, 2016)

See prezi.app
http://prezi.com/vtuk7wy437eg/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share

Table 2. Practices regarding the use of space by public / private owned space categories & as they relate to meaning making processes

	PUBLIC for COLLECTIVE USE	*PRIVATE OWNED SPACE donated for COLLECTIVE & PUBLIC USE*	*MEANING*
SPACE	*USE PUBLIC SPACE (inhabiting public space). Sustaining collaborative actions to use public space:* - *Using the street and the side walks to eat and hang out with neighbors (celebrating the creation of the CIRCUITO; putting Mesitas; using the park for art and educational activities).* - *Using the street and the side walks to celebrate the Neighborhood´s birthday (September 25).*	*SHARING (two or more groups get to do things in the same place / use space in common).* *Jambory, Cocilón del Clú, Casa Freire, Libros del Vendaval.* Agree to sharing space, e.g. to host recreational and educational activities. *Colegiales News, Revista Planetario* and *Revista Soy Vecino* donate their sites and community media (e.g. monthly journals) to communicating the CIRCUITO´s activities. *Parent Teacher Associations* donate time to network with neighbor family owned business and media to plan and organize cultural activities.	*What is public / private is re-crafted as collective action takes place.* *What is public is regarded as open and it can be put to use, to connect with society at large, and to make visible a different way of thinking and doing.* *What is privately owned is put to public service at no charge.* *Knowledge is shared by people who want to offer what they know how to do and teach to others.*
	Public space is used to: - *Do things together (recreation, education).* - *Make visible a way of living / being* - *Connect with other people*	*Private owned space is used to host activities such as:* - arts and crafts workshops - music workshops - music performances - tango, ballet and yoga lessons - story-telling events - seminars directed to teachers and families - seminars directed to PTAs - film and debate sessions	

Discussion
What would all this mean? How is this set of practices building a discourse of its own?

What does the use of space mean to participants? There is a notion of space as: shared, collective, open, reusable.

For the Movimiento Autogestionado de Trabajadores, work and other activities go together: these are spaces for *living* life in a specific way (work, art, recreation, gathering with others are not separate spheres of daily life: they interconnect). Space is seen and acted upon as a common resource. Public space can be reclaimed, regained, reutilized, enjoyed. Private space can be reclaimed and regained for making a life (recuperate work) and for other community purposes.

For the Circuito Cultural Marcos private space is put to use for public purposes. Public space is also jointly used by neighbours, family owned businesses, and school PTAs to organize cultural and artistic activities.

What does this use of space may mean to us as a society? That the borders and definitions of private, public, collective and community space may change. They are mobile frontiers. Action exerted upon space can reframe how space is conceived because its use changes and therefore what the space is or can be used for does change also.

A preliminary conclusion is that space through collaborating, sharing and exchanging, becomes a common resource, which in turn generate specific (situated) meanings about what counts as work, recreation, private, public, non profit.

What are the themes that unfold when we look at practices, meaning making processes and our potential interpretations of them?

- These networks can be conceptualized as mobile. They create paths that are constantly changing because since they are open, people come and go.
- Space is an important resource in crafting and re-crafting practices and in establishing concrete points in time and geography to meet: it is in space that *things happen*, and are also *communicated*.
- Because participants and paths change, so does the landscape (therefore: geography changes). The collective geography of *neighborhooding* becomes a way of thinking about space, social action and the power of collectively doing something.
- Group practices in turn generate a change in meaning (meaning is unstable: it depends on what is being actually *done*). E.g., what does *public, private, collective, social, community* may mean depends on how it is *being done*.
- Practices are contextually bound. E.g., work may mean "generate resources to live" (monies and other resources) but may also mean "gather with fellows", "share a cultural space", "get together to decide upon matters that count", "plan a street festival and get it accomplished".
- It is at the group level that action is placed.
- The group becomes a subject.
- Their action is supported by discourse, which in turn relates to meaning-making processes.

- Subjectivity is produced within the group and in contact with other groups.
- Disputing other groups´ ideas may be part of becoming a subject (as a group).
- Difference (e.g., what each member is and can offer) is put to work towards the group´s benefit.

Community Exchange Networks as subject-groups (not *subjected to*)

Several pieces of writing by Félix Guattari during the years 1955-1970 were compiled in a book called *Psicoanálisis y transversalidad* (in Spanish). As a professional, Guattari was mostly concerned with a way of understanding (and acting upon) psychiatric therapy to de-institutionalize it, that is, to provide a way for all participants in psychiatric institutions to perform an analytic task on their own group, institution, and social context that would allow them to multiply their creative action.

Even though he started by the psychiatric institution, he became concerned with understanding how this type of action was enacted across society, for every field or area (culture, education, politics, health, economy), coining the term *institutional analysis*.

Two concepts were important to his thinking. One is the term *grupúsculo*, small, rather un-important group, to emphasize its immanent status. The idea behind the use of this word is that groups may be finite, that no group needs to be thought of as serving a manifest destiny, and that all groups are traversed by the logic and action of other groups in society. In his view, it was in the doing of these groups that he conceived most of what is political.

The other was the characterization of any group as *subject* or (on the other extreme) *subjected to*. Even if this perspective could serve as a distinction to analyse different groups, he emphasized the idea that any group could become subject or subjected. A subject-group is defined as the one in which assuming a voice becomes possible, self-organization and self-analysis is sustained, and an orientation to auscultate its own practice is always alive. By contrast, a subjected group tends to think and act as a piece in a hierarchical structure, with no voice and no intention of analysing its own practice, nor the social context in which its practice is taking place.

A subject-group trusts its potential, which may be yet to be uncovered, and orients towards multiplying this open-ended type of social position, which leads the group towards the unexpected.

In the Prologue of this book, Deleuze points out to the similarities that some of Guattari´s ideas may bear with those of Castoriadis, even though his comment does not get further than stating this.

It is interesting to relate the work of these two thinkers, contemporary to one another, in as much as they provided some important foundations to work that, later on, was done in the areas of geography, economy, political science, and other social and human sciences: the capacity of groups to take decisions in their own hand; the immanent quality of their doing (as opposed to thinking about

these groups as "permanent" or "destined to become the historical subject that could make the revolution"); and the possibility of oscillating between being a collective subject and becoming subjected by (other forces at play).

Castoriadis worked on a theory of society that placed imagination as directly linked to the human capacity to act upon society, and he posed the idea that imagination would always be *radical*, that is, is via the imagination that we, humans, construct differing and diverse meaning-making processes.

Radical, in this context, means that something unexpected may come up by free associative processes, and that it is not a necessarily expected outcome of anything prior. He has used the concept of *magma* to refer to a logic that does not follow a syllogistic path but, rather, an interconnected, multifaceted trajectory.

More than the rational capacity, it is the radical imagination that is specifically human, in as much as it is imagination what may bring change to happen.

Castoriadis also coined the idea that *reflecting* and *deliberating* were two intertwined actions in groups where there was recognition of their own capacity to self-organize and to assume their own auto-analysis.

The work by Gibson Graham helps us also see some of the characteristics of the Networks of Exchange we have described in this piece. These Networks seem to be practicing a type of exchange that is *diverse* by seeking to establish a relationship to space focusing on collectivizing the places they inhabit.

In the city of Rosario, collectivization takes place by sharing space that:

- has been taken up (e.g., La Toma) and collaborating to support it;
- is rented (from a private owner), such as the case of Pichangú and Prana, and lending the place to other groups;
- is rented collectively by three groups, and in turn is shared with other groups as well;
- occupying the public space and sharing food, music, artistic activities;
- occupying the river bank and communicating their way of working (cooperative) to the public.

In the city of Buenos Aires collective practices in regards to space make visible that:

- private owned space is put to use to the benefit of the public (making public the private space);
- public space (street and sidewalk) are used to communicate about collective recreational projects, a "way of being neighbors".

These processes in turn generate a discourse that takes up a place in society: as Angenot has stressed, it becomes identifiable. In addition to the signifier of *asambleario, assembly* and *collective,* which seem to have already entered the discursive scene in Argentina, these Networks seem to be communicating also other meaning-making processes and practices that we interpret in light of Michael Löwy´s ideas. He has written about the ways in which collective action may overcome hegemonic discourse and capitalistic practices, posing the idea

that there may be a set of practices that may allow for a different perspective altogether. These are:

- extending gratuity (free access, no cost activities),
- make the value of use be the focus,
- reducing the time we spend at work,
- reorganizing the way we produce, focusing on social needs and not on profit,
- protecting the environment,
- reducing the gap of inequality,
- extending non for profit as a way to establish exchange in society.

The Networks that we have analysed in this presentation seem to follow these characteristics. By analysing what they do from the angle of their use of space, we have identified that they challenge the notions of *private for profit*, and they seek to extend the boundaries of *public.*

Time and space does not allow me to go into an analysis of the aesthetics of semiotic change, that seems to be at play with some of these groups, and that seems to be key in their practice / discourse / meaning making processes. I.e., by occupying or using space, and using specific tools to doing this (ranging from art, to music, to speeches, to performances), a visual / oral / written intertwined (inter-textual) capacity seems to emerge. I will deepen into these analyses in further communications.

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