Stage 2 Report:

Biography, social networks and social policy

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Foreword

　　　　This report focuses on two community projects within the framework of the SOSTRIS research, but it also gives space to further insights on the link between biography, social networks and social policy. The reason why two specific agencies have been chosen, and not others, follows from the findings gained throughout Stage 1 of SOSTRIS. Yet, the exercise of contextualising our choice within the research framework is not enough if we want to have a global picture of both experiences. We shall therefore contextualise them within a historical and societal framework in Spain by focusing on the transformations of our welfare system. Next, we shall give an overview of the urban context of the neighbourhood areas where both agencies are located.

　　　　By following some of the key guidelines of our methodological approach for Stage 1, we shall proceed by contrasting the 'lived life' with the 'told life' of both initiatives. More specifically we have analysed all the written material and other documentation obtained in both cases, and have actively participated in both communitary processes (attending to the meetings of the neighbours, and listening and taking notes of our impressions of the interactions). Our most valuable empirical tool, though, are the transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews carried out with different people involved in the agencies (staff, users, micro-leaders, social services). After selecting those which are most free-flowing, we have detected the emergent themes and payed

attention to the absent and more conflictive ones, by following the interviewees frame of relevance.

Finally, we have complemented the views voiced by the agencies with contrasting voices coming from parallel activities organised by the researchers in Stage 2 of SOSTRIS (e.g. policy-meeting, attendance to seminars, conferences, informal interviews with practitioners, policy-makers). The main purpose of our methodological approach has been to triangulate data from different sources and points of view. Some final evaluations and reflections on the whole experience gained in Stage 2 will close this report.

1. Introduction : social networks as a biographical resource

The biographical approach in Stage 1 made clear that there is not an univocal path or strategy followed by individuals who are at risk. We could even say that we did not get a well-delimited picture about 'social strategies in risk societies'. However, our first stage of research proved fruitful in getting a better understanding about the lived dimensions of risk and social exclusion, in contrast to social policy categorisations of them actuarial risk, and how individuals respond to them. We found evading or 'virtual emigrating' strategies through drugs, depressions among the young interviewees who could not enter the 'world of adults', according to the prerequisites of adulthood (obviously defined by adults themselves). We found important biographical blockages among youngsters in being pushed to invent life and not having the resources for it. We found biographical ruptures generated by different sorts of expulsions mainly from the labour market, but also from school, family and we found family and health constellations pushing individuals beyond the margins of a 'standardised biography'. We found unequal gender relationships across different life situations, and painful experiences of abuse, violence and stigma.

Yet, in contrast with a large variety of material, cultural and symbolic constraints we have also seen a great diversity of biographical stategies, of actions developed by individuals with a large variety of resources and aspirations. The quantity and, above all, the quality of the interviewees' resources and aspirations proved to be crucial to witness the shift from heteronomous to more autonomous strategies. In both cases, though, the 'others' play a determining role. Even the most individualist strategies among our cases cannot be understood in an abstract way, but in a relational one. Social networks, and more specifically, the 'primary group' (family/kin, peers, friends, neighbours) have revealed themselves to be a crucial resource for understanding our subjects' strategies.

One could argue that our biographical methodological approach is inevitably biased to the world of primary and voluntary relationships, to the sphere of informality and therefore far from the more 'formal' social spheres such as the State or the market. Maybe. One could also argue that this

methodological approach is better suited to capture the dynamic and changing aspects of social reality, than to providing a structural picture of a given reality. We agree.

In any case, we have put an emphasis on the family and community spheres not as an arbitrary choice, but as a result of the analysis of the structures of relevance for our subjects. We have seen how social networks are a source of meaning and experience and act as a precious (and sometimes risky) resource and social capital for facing (and interacting with) uncertainty and exclusion. They have revealed themselves as playing a significant role in the reconstruction of individual and collective identity, even if often they cannot operate without the resources deriving from other spheres of social activity. Similarly, our emphasis on 'trajectories' derives from our interest in detecting those elements which go beyond the structural position of individuals, and, lastly, in understanding the meaning of social action and change.

When confronted with the question of choosing agencies within the framework of Stage 2, the researchers decided to take the previous elements into account, and look for communitary processes which were as little institutionalised as possible. This led us to community-born initiatives which are the result of individuals gathering together to change or bring into question some aspect of their lives, of social life. 'La Broca' and 'La Xarxa' (these are the names of the selected agencies) seemed to fulfill our expectations regarding these matters. Both of them are 'small' projects, that is, not very representative in numerical terms, and therefore with limited possibilities for exerting influence or challenging the local or regional (let alone the national) approach to social policy. However, both of them are significant experiences in qualitative terms for their innovative and creative nature. As we will see the new or innovative aspects refer here to the transforming traditional values and resources into modern ones. So, in 'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca' the 'old' principles of 'good neighbourhood' are re-adapted into new forms of caring. Furthermore, both agencies allow us to focus on the link between biography and agency, in the sense that the trajectories of the projects are linked inseparably to the biographical trajectories of their actors.

An institutional approach to 'La Broca' and 'La Xarxa' would rapidly try to assess to what extent they reach integration or social cohesion within the community. We prefer to leave for the moment the question of integration, and start recognising that 'the community' as such may not exist, and is internally fragmented. What we have observed is the existance of several networks which are trying to 'create community'. 'La Broca' and 'La Xarxa' are two of them. We shall therefore look into the trajectory of the persons involved, and find out the meaning of this involvement in this biographical stage. We shall then address what significance this involvement in community action has for the context of the neighbourhood and social policy, and what impact in terms of integration.

As in Stage 1 we could detect a gap between the questions or themes addressed by social policy and the questions experienced by individuals, we

wondered at this stage what kind of questions or principles would emerge from community-born experiences such as 'La Broca' and 'La Xarxa', and to what extent they would coincide with social policy concepts. One of our starting hypotheses would be that the poor degree of institutionalisation of such agencies leaves more space not only for innovation and experimentation, but for the possibility of connecting with relevant questions which worry the citizens.

2. Historical and societal context: the transformation of the welfare system in Spain.

After the centralist and paternalist orientation of the State Administration during the Franco dictatorship, the democratic government tried to answer the citizens' needs by following a Keynesian-oriented welfare system. In 1979, four years after Franco's death, the first democratic Local Councils were created. They were given authority in different sectors of social policy such as culture, health, education, social services etc. According to some authors (Plana, 1998), the process of de-centralisation developed during this period implied a major shift in welfare regulation and brought social conflict into the local domain.Besides the provision of services, the Local Councils developed tools for regulating social participation and promoting social cohesion (e.g. strategical planning, integral actions).

When Social Services were founded in Barcelona in 1979 the orienting principles were based on the philosophy of the Keynesian Welfare System: equity, redistribution and universality. During this period the Local Council did not play a determining role in the design of own social policy programs. In fact, the political weight and consolidation of Local Councils as providers of services and welfare soon clashed with the administrative overlapping of the three existing government levels in Spain. These were the national or State level, the regional or autonomic level, and the local level. The institutional and administrative complexity of the three government levels has resulted in problems of the definition and functions of the welfare services. Competition between services and duplication of functions are two features of the political scenario of Spanish welfare provision.

In the mid 80s economic growth and cultural changes in society towards the modernisation paradigm implied a transformation of the political culture of welfare. In order to answer the more pluralistic demands of the population the local authorities experimented with different methodologies oriented towards the regulation of welfare. Whereas in the late 80s some work was done at a community level in suburbs on the peripheries in process of decay, the major strand was constituted from sectorial policies aiming at those collectives at risk of poverty and marginality. In 1993/94 the 'Pla Municipal d'Atenció Primària' (Municipal Planning for Priority Attention) regulated for the first time the number of hours for practitioners to dedicate to the promotion of community activities. The individualistic approach, however, has been the mainstream

welfare approach in Catalan (and Spanish) social policies. The resulting system is one of universal measures of welfare in some areas of social policy, combined with an individualist-assistential approach.

In fact recent research on the Spanish Welfare State has defined the Spanish welfare system as a system of 'integrated precariousness' (Aguilar *et al.,* 1995), that is, a system where a high level of labour precariousness and social instability are compensated for by extended welfare provision in health, education and social services. It has also been argued that the Spanish universalisation of services implies a very extensive coverage of 'risks', but the degree of protection afforded individuals is very low (Rodríguez Cabrero, 1995).

The Spanish welfare system has also been conceptualised within the 'meridional model' of welfare (Ferrera, 1995), which is applied to those countries sharing a high degree of polarisation of social protection. The coverage for those central parts of the labour force, located in the formal sector of the labour market, contrasts heavily with the coverage of those located in the more informal sectors. The gender impact of this phenomenon means in practical terms that women (as well as young people and migrants) are less protected. Research on the Spanish Welfare State within the meridional model of welfare also shows the crucial role of family as a welfare provider and therefore as an articulating sphere within the Welfare State. Here again the gender dimension is crucial, in the sense that only women act as carers inside and outside the domestic unit.

Today the welfare debate at a local level is structured by the paradigm of social exclusion-integration. Spanish society, like many other European societies, is confronted with diverse processes of social fragmentation. The new social context reveals how the growth of multidimensional inequalities cannot be simply analysed through the Keynesian paradigm of welfare. Such inequalities go beyond class dynamics, and show how the culture of welfare belongs to a more heterogeneous social environment. Personal demands co-exist with community needs in the frame of everyday life. The expectations of local government to respond to global social needs in a flexible and plural way are confounded by a contradictory inertia, since policy intervention continues to be individualistic and assistential, with little space for prevention, and with few tools for community activities.

3. The Urban Context

3.1. The neighbourhoods: L'Esquerra de l'Eixample and Poblenou; experimenting with 'network-welfare'.

The 'Esquerra de l'Eixample' is a populated neigbourhood (95.386 inhabitants in 1996) which emerged in the last years of the 19th.century. Ildefons Cerdà, the engineer who designed the whole planning of the suburb, conceived a

reticulate structure for l'Eixample as a modern urban area in which all kind of services were located. The underlying idea was that of self-provision and proximity: the streets, the open public spaces in the courtyards (*mansanas*) of the buildings and the markets were conceived as spaces for social relationships.

Over the last twenty years the speculative nature of capitalism has had a big impact on this suburb. On the one hand many relational spaces in the courtyards have gradually disappeared, while cars and motorcycles invaded the streets. On the other hand the fact of being a central and well equipped area of Barcelona has increased the prices for renting or buying flats and services. For this reason, l'Esquerra de l'Eixample has experimented with a progressive tertiarisation of the residential structure, and has expelled the young population from the suburb. One of the resulting effects has been the increasing numbers of elderly living alone and/or in precarious conditions. Problems of loneliness and isolation emerge as a dramatic reality with which Social Services are confronted daily. This is the territorial and social context in which 'La Xarxa' was born and has developed.

The suburb of Poblenou is a socially peripheral part of Barcelona. Yet, geographically speaking, Poblenou is central in relation to the old part of the city and strategic in its location on the Barcelona sea front. This suburb grew throughout the first industrialisation process in Catalonia in the 19th.Century. The population (48.620 inhabitants in 1996) has traditionally lived and worked within the borders of the suburb until the mid 70s. The exploitative conditions of life during the industrial development and decline of the city were the factors behind an important social working movement which developed in the suburb. This activist movement became an oppositional movement against the Franco Regime during the 70s. In urban terms the suburb has a complex structure which combines industry with residence. The regulations of Cerdà for organising Poblenou were not respected by the industrial owners. They prefered the speculative and 'spontaneous order' of day-to-day capitalism, thus generating a particular cohabitation of residents and industries.

During the 70s Poblenou experimented with two converging processes. The industrial crisis of 1973 saw the disappearance of many industries, while the industrial owners speculated in land in order to reconvert the industrial and working class suburb to a modern residential area. The celebration of the Olympic games in 1992 accelerated the urban transformation (tertiarisation) of Poblenou. The Olympic Village and the recuperation of the sea front, among other big urban projects, are examples of this process. The conflict between this capitalist dynamic and the will to preserve the identity of the working class community has continued until now. The City Council considers this area as the last part of Barcelona still growing in urban terms (Encinas 1997). The tension between the model of neighbourhood defended by local authorities (which combines residential areas with malls and leisure services) and the community neo-industrial model claimed by the neighbours illustrates the conflictive framework in which the experience of 'La Broca' was born.

3.2. The lived life of 'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca'

'La Xarxa' was born in 1990 when a group of members of the Neighbours Association of 'L'Esquerra de l'Eixample' decided to present a project for an open competition organised by the FAVB (Federation of Neighbours Associations of Barcelona) and won the competition. The 'Neighbours Association of l'Esquerra de l'Eixample' was founded in 1975, but was not authorised until the consolidation of democracy, because of the ambiguity of the geographical term 'Esquerra', meaning 'Left'.

The title of the project was 'Project for the Exchange of Services' and it was categorized under 'Projects for Civic and Social Action in the Neighbourhood'. The aim of the project was to exchange services and goods and create a solidarity fund for those who could not offer any service. As one of the leaflets published by the Association puts it: 'the aim is to organise a solidarity bank of services based on the knowledge, capacities, experiences and abilities of the neighbours, as well as to improve the quality of life by providing services which are difficult to obtain, and to provide the neighbours with the possibility of interaction through the exchange of services'. Each participant provides the necessary information to the bank of the network, in terms of demands and offers. The bank has the task of distributing the services and the hours, as well as administering the solidarity fund. The initiative is therefore centralised in the Neighbours Association, and the territorial limits of the exchange are restricted to the suburb of 'L'Esquerra de l' Eixample'. Most of the exchanged services are domestic and caring tasks. Others belong to the educational field, leisure etc.

During the two first years (1990-1992) about 130 neighbours were involved in the network. Most of them are lower and middle class (mainly women) with very different profiles. The Local Council soon gave support by partially funding the initiative. In 1992 the 'Generalitat' (Catalan government) contributed to the further funding of the project through the Department of Social Welfare. However, 'La Xarxa' underwent a crisis of membership and organisation until the beginning of this year when the Local Council decided to actively support the project. A new impulse was then given to it by organising a public presentation of the initiative to the neighbours and an exhibition of its history throughout its almost nine years of existance. Today around 200 families are officially registered in 'La Xarxa'. The new leaflet launched last year makes reference to the changing contexts in society: 'Modern society is rapidly changing , both at the family and social-professional level. New responses to new needs and to the new situations arising from these needs are required. Now is the moment to broaden and improve the services needed by the neighbours'.

A social worker and a psychologist who work at the Social Services of the suburb have been following the initiative since January 1998, and have been participating regularly, making a bridge between the users of social services and the members of 'La Xarxa'. 'La Xarxa' can be considered to be a pioneering

initiative of its kind within the metropolitan area of Barcelona.

'La Broca' is a network for the exchange of services which combines institutional and community participation, and reproduces the model of other networks based on the LETS (Local Exchange and Trading System). This model has its origins in Canada during the beginning of the 80s, in a region with serious problems of unemployment, and it has been introduced in several European countries during the 90s. Similar experiences have been implemented in other three medium-sized Spanish cities and in some small cities of the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona. 'La Broca' is a project for a working class industrial neighbourhood of Barcelona which started to be implemented at the beginning of last year.

The origins of 'La Broca' lie in the proposal of one social worker from the City Council who contacted a Ms. Eulàlia Vinyes from the Neighbours Association. Ms. Vinyes became the founder of the network and contacted people from the neighbourhood. So far six persons have agreed to participate: one unemployed woman, one active member of the Neighbourhood Association, a young couple linked to an ecological cooperative, a retired man, and a social worker.

The general aim of this network is to exchange different kinds of services without a monetary logic, in order to increase personal self-esteem and foster new ways of living together, the furthest possible from the productive logic of the labour market. Both the neighbourhood and the Local Council are participating. 'La Broca' was originally thought to attract unemployed people of the neighbourhood, and those individuals open to experimentation with new forms of social relationships. The procedure is quite simple: the members of the network (a minimum of 5 or 6 persons) exchange services of all kinds (including knowledge, abilities, information) on the basis of a value unit called 'Broca', which corresponds to an hour of work. Out of the 50 services offered in the network, 34% refer to domestic and caring tasks. Other services come under the headings of leisure, education, and interchange of goods.

After analysing the objectives and the historical context of both projects the following assumptions can be made and can be be contrasted with the results of the told life of the agencies: both 'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca' follow the theoretical and ethical principles of many organised groups in the local domain (NGO's, neighbour associations, voluntary groups, etc.) according to which the individual is not a client, but a citizen with rights and obligations, with responsibility and autonomy, with needs, wishes and pluridimensional capacities/ abilities. Both of them focus on single individuals understood as relational subjects within the context of the community. They promote a space of social relationships and creativity, where community action is developed within the framework of interchange, not exclusively of productive values or commodities, but emotional and relational values. Through them individuals try to be heard, seen and, lastly, recognised. All this is taking place in a sphere of proximity which reveals the neighbourhood to be a very adequate context.

Both initiatives have a mixed character of social participation, through the institutional links with the Local Social Services, even though they are both born in the context of the neighbourhood. However, the context of the neighbourhood is a crucial factor for understanding the differences between both initiatives. On the one side we have 'La Xarxa' in a neighbourhood characterised by a high percentage of elderly, most of them widows and (early) retired who try to find a sense of usefulness and meaningful activity by participating in a service network. On the other side we have the more recent experience of 'La Broca' in a suburb damaged by precariousness and the rupture of a traditional industrial trajectory. 'La Broca' represents a space where the unemployed can combat their sense of invisibility and uselessness. The differences in the structure of population in both suburbs might be an explanation of why 'La Xarxa' reproduces a more assistential dynamics than 'La Broca', despite its shorter history, for it's aiming at an alternative way of generating social relationships. Another reason for the different philosophies of 'La Broca' and ´La Xarxa' may lie with the traditional working class culture of Poblenou, when compared to the more residential character of l'Esquerra de l'Eixample.

In both of them the gender dimension is very present in the caring tasks, which seem to be the main services being exchanged. The increase in the ageing population and the change in family structures, such as the increase of one-person households, have led to 'new' needs, which in fact are social needs traditionally covered by the unpaid and unrecognised work of women. 'La Xarxa' is mainly composed of women who are engaged in caring tasks beyond the borders of the domestic unit. In some way it could be seen as a communitarization of reproductive work, and therefore a highly gendered activity. 'La Broca' has a more mixed character of participants and activities. The initial contract, though, was made by a female social worker and a female member of the Neighbours Association. We could hypothesize that whereas, on the one hand, an increasing visibility of female caring tasks is a result of these networks, on the other hand the voluntary nature of these initiatives seems not to be contributing to their (social or economic) value.

But who are the protagonist of 'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca', how do they present themselves in relation to the agencies, and what do they tell us about the agencies?

4. A polyphonic narrative

4.1. The life of the agencies as told by their protagonists

After listening to the voices of the protagonists of 'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca' an analysis of their narratives was carried out. An attempt was made to respect the principles of thematic field analysis, especially in those interviews which were most free-flowing. While the emergent themes have been presented,

we have also tried to pay attention to the gaps, contradictions and conflictive questions contained in the narratives.

The initial question was as follows: *'We are studying communtiary initiatives in the framework of a European research project on social strategies in risk societies. We would like you to tell us about the initiative you are part of, and your personal experience in it. We are interested in both the history of the project and your own history up to the point when you became a member/ founder of this project (or simply got involved in it). Take the time you need, and afterwards we will put some questions to you about anything which isn't clear to us'.* Our interviewees were:

*Casimir : President of the Neighbours' Association and founder of 'La Xarxa'
* Francesca : member of 'La Xarxa' and member of the 'Unemployed Group' within the Neighbours Association.
* Lourdes: social worker from the Social Services of the District of l'Eixample
* Anna: psychologist from the Social Services of the District of l'Eixample
* Pep: ideological leader of the LETS system in Catalonia
* Ferran: member of 'La Broca' and member of the Neighbours Association of Poblenou
* Nèlia: member of 'La Broca'.
* Paco: member of 'La Broca' and member of an ecological cooperative.
* Carles: social worker of the Social Services of Poblenou and member of 'La Broca'.
* Eulàlia: founder of 'La Broca' and member of the Neighbours Association.

The analysis of the interviews has allowed us to detect some of the outstanding principles shared by both initiatives. Whereas the first refers to the link between the biographical trajectory of the interviewees and the agencies, the rest of the themes refer to the nature of these agencies, and their relationships with the institutions.The principles are: **a high personal involvement, solidarity and reciprocity, 'a neighbourhood-network approach', a strong 'caring' dimension, and competition with the State and the market.**

High personal involvement: a biographical experience

Casimir is a 63 year-old early retired man who combined his job in a multinational company with active political participation in the Neighbours Association of l'Esquerra de l'Eixample. When he became early retired, Casimir started to spend all his time working for the Association until he was elected President. While being President he actively supported and participated

in the birth of 'La Xarxa', nine years ago. During all these years the activities of the Association and especially 'La Xarxa' have become his principal activity in life.

I used to work doing market research for a company, but the period of early retirement made me think about a lot of things and I felt I should get more involved in the neighbourhood. I cannot understand those early retired who get bored or try to engage in activities just for fun(...) I know that I'm too much involved in the network. Someone called the other day, and nobody could go, so I gave that woman my telephone number, just in case the network could not find anybody at the time (...)My wife always complains about it, she says that I do not dedicate enough time to being at home, with the family (Casimir).

Pep worked as the doorkeeper of a State school and in his free time he studied as a self-didact different subjects related to ecological farming and the cooperative system. Three years ago, Pep decided to leave his job and started to work on his own by doing courses on domestic economy, ecology and farming. After some short political experience in the local City Council of his village, Pep became the introducer of the LETS system in Catalonia and since then he has been developing this field of work in different places.

I worked as a Civil Servant in La Generalitat (Catalan government) until two years ago. I was 35 and very tired of the system. I felt myself to be part of a machine...it was a very hard moment for me. I entered the political world at a local level, but after that experience I got ill, and also I learned a very valuable lesson about the limits on my activities. I decided to abandon that and dedicate myself to politics and the pursuit of my ecological ideas in a less rigid context, that of the neighbourhood(Pep).

Francesca is a 50 year-old woman born in l'Esquerra de l'Eixample who started to work at a very early age as secretary. She was fired when she got pregnant, and since then she has done precarious jobs, most of them caring for people. She has had a very active trajectory within the Neighbours Association, thus becoming a leader, and mentor of many initiatives within the association. After some years participating in 'La Xarxa' Francesca has decided to leave it and instead, to assume the leadership of the 'Unemployed Group' within the Neighbours Association.

All my life I have worked in different places. I'm now 50 years old and I'm not entitled to a pension. I took care of a person with AIDS (who died in my arms), children and elderly people, I'm now caring for an old couple of handicapped people (...) I've always been involved in social projects themes, and the Neighbours Association was a good place to get involved. That's why I joined 'La Xarxa' (Francesca).

Ferran is a 61 year-old early retired man who has always lived in Poblenou. At the age of 12 he started to work in a textile industry in the

neighbourhood. He has had a typical working-class trajectory and married life. In 1994 Ferran suffered from heart disease and had to be operated on He got involved in the Neighbours Association, where he has been participating in political activities opposing some City Council measures concerning urban renewal in Poblenou. He was the first member to register in La Broca'.

Someone who I don't know donated his heart to me for my operation. If this person hadn't acted in this altruist way, I wouldn't be here now. 'La Broca' can become a similar experience at another level (Ferran).

Nèlia is a 43 year-old woman born in Poblenou. She is currently working as a social worker in the Child Protection Office in the Catalan government. Two years ago she encountered a professional crisis when she considered the balance of the results of her social practice. In 1998 Nèlia started to collaborate with the Neighbours Association in order to claim for child care services for the neighbourhood. This led her to get in contact with La Broca, where she has had a supporting role.

The crisis in the welfare State coincided with my own personal and professional crisis. As a social worker I can help families living with difficulties with money. Over the last years I have tried to discover what kind of abilities people have for overcoming critical situations. When I heard about 'La Broca' I realised that the principle was the same as those I had been putting into practice. I decided to participate in order to create something positive without money (Nèlia).

Paco is a 41 year-old man who lived in a religious boarding school and started to work in the industry at a very young age. He has been involved in the trade unions until recently. He spent his youth in a hippy community, the members of which are still his friends today. Together with this group they organised meetings for reflecting on social problems and they decided to set up a cooperative of ecological products three years ago. Paco is one of the founders of 'La Broca' and the introducer of the idea to Poblenou.

I arrived at 'La Broca' because I had participated in a cooperative. By reading some stuff about similar network experiences we got in contact with other groups in Barcelona. After evaluating the success in other parts of the city, we decided to implement the project in Poblenou (Paco).

Eulàlia is a 45-year-old woman who has been participating in the Neighbours Association of Poblenou for fifteen years. She worked in the industry sector until she became unemployed five years ago. After encountering a severe crisis she gradually got more involved in the Neighbours Association. She was a founder member of 'La Broca' in the latter years.

Once I lost my job I felt useless. I only felt useful as a woman, but this was not enough for me. When hearing about the LETS I realised that this could

mean something important for me and for people in my situation (Eulàlia).

As we can see from these fragments of narrative the personal involvement of the protagonist in the agencies, both at a senior level and at a member level, is very high. The participation of the interviewees in the networks does not constitute a new pattern within their biographical trajectory, but a **continuity** in their previous committment with social activities and collective mobilisation within the community.The Neighbours Association is the framework in which such social activities take place. All interviewees have played a significant role in the origins of the agencies. This explains their high personal involvement.

However, their narratives seem to reflect different meanings and ways of perceiving the experience of the networks. Two different concepts or approaches to understanding social relationships at the local level can be distinguished: solidarity vs. reciprocity.

Solidarity through the old rules of 'good neighbourhood' vs. reciprocity as an instrumental choice.

The experience of the network provides the interviewees with some important ingredients for combating alienation, namely meaningfulness, usefulness and creativity. However, different shades of meaning illustrate the diversity in understanding and interpreting the mission or philosophy of the agencies.

All it is about is finding new mechanisms for doing things which have always been done(...)It is the most natural thing in the world; people used to help each other (...) but now the cities are losing their human side and therefore we should demonstrate to those at the top, that altruism is a genetic feature; there is evidence for this (...) One woman phoned this morning to tell us that her sister had died the day before. It is phantastic to witness how people, like in the villages, keep company with the relatives. Here many elderly live alone...and therefore it is so important to mobilise the network, so we did and she got some company (...) We have to recognise that, often, more than demanding a service our neighbours are asking for company. But neighbous are not always demanding things. Actually, one of our problems in 'La Xarxa' is that we have more offers than demands. Only by offering people feel rewarded. But it has nothing to do with charity...(Casimir)

There was at one time a feeling that you could turn to people for help, a strong feeling of security was there because you knew that you could ask for help... now this has changed . If you are lucky to have a strong family, everything is ok, but if you don't have it, you are very alone. The experience of loneliness for people living in big cities is a classic topic...(Nèlia)

The objective of 'La Xarxa' is to promote solidarity. It is a relational network. 'La Xarxa' is providing individuals with relational resources for those who have little family (Anna).

'Spontaneous' solidarity and human warmth is becoming more and more difficult in the urban context, but it is a real need for the neighbours in l'Esquerra de l'Eixample and Poblenou, where many elderly often live alone in their flats and where many young families are finding integration difficult. As Anna and Nèlia show clearly, the lack of family ties (the most traditional and powerful resource against exclusion in Spain) is a strong ground for the success of initiatives like 'La Xarxa'or 'La Broca'.

As Casimir puts it, one of the tasks of 'La Xarxa' is to 'organise solidarity' by turning to the 'modern' tools of our scientific and technological society (the network, the phone), and to convince the policy-makers (through 'statistics') about the advantages of being altruist. The episode of the neighbour phoning the Association to communicate her sister's death is illustrative enough to understand how 'La Xarxa' tries to keep to the 'old' solidarity principles and combat loneliness only by reconverting the means, that is, using the phone. Casimir's enthusiastic evaluation of the neighbourhood network emphasises the irrelevance of the means, compared with that of the aims.

Reciprocity, though, is not always easy to achieve in 'La Xarxa'. As Casimir and others recognise, the balance between offers and demands is uneven. This is the reason why we hypothesised that solidarity in 'La Xarxa' is based on a voluntary rather than on a reciprocity principle. Charity, though, seems to be a term rejected by a variety of people involved in the network. It is understandable if one looks at the history of the politizised Neighbours' Associations in the last years of dictatorship, in the sense that they played an important role in opposing the official 'cohesion' of Franco's Spain based on the catholic values of charity and resignation to one's fate.

The comparison with 'La Broca' throws some more light on this question. Indeed, 'La Broca' seems to put more stress on separating the (often unclear) borders between voluntariety and reciprocity. Charity is in this case a missing term.

In other experiences in Barcelona, like that of the Esquerra de l'Eixample, other criteria are followed (...) they act on a voluntary basis, the contract is unequal. In the LETS system, in contrast, we give more importance to reciprocity and usefulness. In our network nobody expects to find a solution for his or her life problems, we do not offer these kind of solutions...(Pep).

I think it is a good option to let people know that many persons are well-disposed to exchange what they have or know, it is a good opportunity for many people, especially if we take into consideration that it is an exchange without money.The advantage of 'La Broca' is to go beyond the idea of solidarity for it

is a term which has been misused, as in those cases of many NGOs which have become businesses. What we do can be interpreted as self-help (Nèlia).

Everybody generates culture in different ways, what we want to do is to meet, to get to know each other...and this is a type of culture as well (...) the reason why we participate in such initiatives is similar to other such schemes for exchanging services: in a few words, it is about how to manage things without money (Paco).

According to Pep's and Paco's words we could interpret 'La Broca' as making a serious attempt to get away from the world of voluntariety, and to prioritise the interchange of goods and services on a basis of reciprocity and instrumentality. In other words, 'La Broca' seems at a first sight to be more pragmatically-oriented than 'La Xarxa'. However, a further argument put forward by Pep himself leads us to relativise the pragmatic aspects of 'La Broca':

In all kind of networks there is the more 'ideological' group and another one which is just concerned with having a nice time together over coffee. I belong to the first group, but maybe in the end the relational side is more important than the practical one(...) as basic as getting the minimum income is relating to others (...) the important thing is that the result of the network is social integration, regardless of the reasons why individuals join the network (Pep).

While Barcelona is losing its traditional social bonds, there are many people who are very much engaged in these kind of projects. It may well include people with money who want to relate to each other and do things in a different way (Paco).

By analysing the strongly argumentative tone of the interviewees of 'La Broca' we can see that they are voicing expectations of not only finding alternative ways of doing things, but of achieving social change through the network. We might hypothesize that they conceive this experience as a kind of utopia.

I think that the labour force won't be fundamental any more. For this reason we are facing two risks: people's marginalisation and undervaluation. If we are able to engage more people in 'La Broca' it would be possible to imagine a non-monetary society. We must find a way of living together without being afraid of living together (Paco).

We were wrong: we expected the State to cover all our needs, and the State has failed even though considering itself as omnipotent. We are all involved together in the crisis of the Welfare State while politicians only reproduce an electoral logic. For these reasons I think that 'La Broca' can be an alternative, a way to wake up (Nèlia).

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'The neighbourhood -network approach'

Despite their different emphases, though, both initiatives converge on the need for considering the territorial and social borders of the neighbourhood as the most appropriate context to practice the rules of solidarity/reciprocity.

Proximity is very important to people(...)at the beginning we accepted people coming from other suburbs of the city, since we knew that no similar initiatives were practiced there, but now three or four suburbs have similar projects and we prefer to limit the network to inside the borders of l'Esquerra de l'Eixample. It is much easier for a grandmother to cross the street and be at the neighbour's place than have to take the bus or the underground to get there. Our network embraces the whole territory of l'Esquerra de l'Eixample(Casimir) .

The future lies in the networks. The present circumstances favour the creation of networks. If networks work, it means that there is a need for them. Individualism is very expensive, consumption is our first ecological problem, and poverty is related to isolation. When family and kin networks are broken nothing exists, new links must replace them...however I have to say that in our network excluded people are not participants(...)it is another level...we are not suffering a lack of material needs, but our aim is to relate to each other and fulfill everyone's emotional needs...this is our reality (Pep).

The good thing is the possibility of exchanging things as well as certain aspects of daily life in the micro- sphere(...) this is the innovative aspect. Some years ago the innovative thing was to be involved in big projects, this has changed. Now, everything I do is with a few neighbours, in this way it is more difficult for things to go wrong (Paco).

This neigbourhood is like a box. I have the feeling that Poblenou is a well delimited area with its own historical memory, its own character. I think that the feeling of community has been recovered. I believe that some people are in the process of understanding that their relationships can be extended beyond kin links (Nèlia).

Starting from a different perspective, all interviewees stress the importance of the local scale for social action. In effect, one of the most important elements for these kinds of networks to operate is proximity, as a means of combating isolation. It is obvious that the territorial criterion is crucial in both initiatives, since their origins are located in the Neighbours Association. But besides this, another important reason to maintain a 'neighbourhood network approach' is the link to the Social Services of both suburbs, which are playing a significant role in the promotion of both cases.

The following topics are not a product of the free flow of the narrative, but relate to specific questions ('external questioning') put by the interviewers, and therefore follow the concerns of the researchers.

'Caring': invisibility vs. potentiality

Even though the 'official' scope of offers and demands in 'La Xarxa' is open to any kind of interchange, most of the activities have to do with the practice of 'caring'. Beside this, the vast majority of the members of ´La Xarxa'are women. Perception of it, though, seems to be a different.When directly asked about this, Casimir answers:

I would say that help generally and services to the elderly are the things which are exchanged most in our network. It's quite natural , we have more women than men in the network because they have more free-time than us, more availability (...) One of the problems regarding the interchange of caring activities is that some people want to establish contacts with previous members, and too personal links are not good for the network (Casimir).

Apart from the perception of female caring as natural and their availability to do this work taken for granted, which is a common feature in gender-blind discourses, Casimir puts forward evidence of the ambivalence and complexity of caring as a moral and cognitive practice. In other words: since caring for someone as well as being cared for by someone contains an emotional dimension (love, affection, agressivity...), caring cannot be simply considered as a labour relationship, and therefore simply as an exchange of a service. This aspect could be seen as an internal contradiction at 'La Xarxa'. On the one hand, they leave space for caring practices to be carried out, and on the other hand they fear the network becoming a friendship network.

Instead, in the case of 'La Broca' the caring dimension is rather presented as a potential for enriching the network, as well as a potential for enriching themselves as human beings.

I see the network as a way of taking care of human beings and naturally for me there is no division between both types of care(...) In the LETS system there is a great diversity of offers and demands.The interchange may involve massage, bricolage, ironing, sewing, or exchanging books or doing translation work. We also have situations of bereavement or divorce, where a member of the network simply wants company (Pep).

I remember how my mother used to tell me how people lived in Poblenou. Some mothers in the building took care of the children of other mothers, there was a strong collaboration among them. In Poblenou as in the rural world, if children were abandoned, some woman soon took charge of them 'La Broca' represents an attempt to restore this caring tradition (Nèlia).

Through Paco's and Nèlia's narratives we can appreciate another significant element, namely how the network, through specific activities, can offer the possibility of reconverting the traditional gender roles.

As a man, everything around me is linked with employment. This is the only basis for being recognised in this society. For this reason men don't know how many other kinds of abilities they have. Women are richer than us. I'm in the group because I want to develop my female side in order to be more balanced (Paco).

I have always enjoyed mechanics, repairing cars, watches...'La Broca' can be an opportunity for me to do such things (Nèlia).

Competition with the Local Administration: a conflictive topic.

When asked about the participation of the Social Services some of our interviewees showed themselves very aware of the benefits of collaborating with 'La Xarxa' or 'La Broca', both for the Local Administration and for their respective networks.

The local policy-makers should make our lives easier. Since the Catalan government has realised the potential of our initiative they haven't stopped giving us funding. But above all it is the Local Administration which is the one more interested in promoting this kind of initiative. In fact, many of the people asking for information come from Social Services (Casimir).

They (Social Services) *don't know how to cope with the problems they have. The network is a way of preventing problems and creating local richness, and it is something which starts from people's own initiative. If they know how to deal with it, they can get a lot of advantage from it...By this I mean that the role of the Services is to foster such initiatives* (Pep)

But the acceptance of the intervention of the Social Services does not impede some members of 'La Broca' from being very critical of the policies and burocratic approach of the City Council:

The State won't solve our problems...I defend the principle of subsidiariety, by which all of what we can do ourselves at a community level, does not need to be addressed by the State...The Local Council often generates dependency and nothing else (Pep).

You ask me about the reluctance to accept responsibility of the City Council in covering social needs? Absolutely, absolutely, it is like that, and when they see that 'La Broca' succeeds, they will profit from it. Of course, they

are saving money and headaches, but for the moment we keep enough distance from them...until when we don't know (Nèlia).

It is obvious that the Social Services are exempted from many responsibilities, that's why they want to help us...as soon they see that this is well organised, they will become the protagonists and will plan a conference of network-experiences (Ferran).

I think that there are different spaces. 'La Broca' should not interfere in the claims of the neighbours and their fights or negotiations with the City Council. If this were to happen I would leave the network immediately (Paco).

But what do the Social Services tell us about their links with 'La Xarxa'?

As we shall see the three interviewed social workers converge in their perception of community work as absolutely necessary in their field of action. They present the individual-assistentialist approach as having strong limitations for providing welfare and social integration. However while Carles focuses his narratives on the potential for participation by the Social Services in these agencies, the narratives of Anna and Lourdes show the conflictive dimension of the links between Social Services and the agencies. In Lourdes' case this turns out to be simply a narrated excuse to make a strong complaint about the professional role of technical staff.

First of all, I want to say that we (the Social Services) *are a community as well. In this sense, I think that there is no competition between 'La Broca' and social policy. 'La Broca' is a progressive project based on reciprocal links. The users of the Social Services are more and more people with standard histories who are dealing with break-down, and networks like 'La Broca' are a means of preventing marginalisation* (Carles).

The historical collaboration with 'La Xarxa' has been very weak, they were very unhappy with us(...) it has been hard work to establish a basis of confidence with them(...) we have tried to re- orient them; they think everything is politicized (...)in any case since December 1997, with the new director of the Center, the will to collaborate with them has been very strong. We have reached a very good understanding. They send us the cases that they cannot accept, and we send them some users from here as well (Anna).

When especifically asked about the implications of this kind of 'collaboration' Anna quickly justifies her words by adopting a defensive attitude. A patronising tone can be detected in the expressions of the interviewee, thus providing evidence of the unequal relationships between Social Services and 'La Xarxa'.

We have alerted them ('La Xarxa') *on many occasions to the risks of*

playing the 'social assistants' with the members of the network...and from our side we only send those users who are lacking in relational resources. They offer 'normalised' resources, not touched by the stigma that our users get when they come here. By going to 'La Xarxa' they often get a more integral help than the one we can provide them here. What's wrong with that? (Anna).

For me 'La Xarxa' or other community-born initiatives are as important as my work with the clients. Or even more so. Maybe there is no point in trying to substitute the personal approach, but rather to complement it. I'm desperate about being in a structure with 'no-way-out'. We are becoming burocrats who only have to do with files (...) We are not allowed to take decisions, even if we see things which could be changed or improved. All this will explode, we should build a city contract, a province contract, the pressure is too great (...)We will explode here...we are a female collective, with a strong involvement but lack of self-esteem (...)What are the guidelines to be followed? The more 'cases' we have, the more successful our work is considered. It is the quantity of users and not the quality of the treatment which matters for the direction. The 'Pla' (Municipal Planning of Priority Attention) is being misinterpreted. How can I be creative with such an amount of work ? A group has its own trajectory and evolution...it takes more time to ' follow a network' than to 'treat a case' (the inverted comas are ours). *I claim more time to work with community projects* (Lourdes).

The words of this social worker reflect not only her perception about an urgent need to rethink the structuring political principles of Social Services in a broader context ('a city contract'), and ask for reflexivity within their collective (in gender terms, in professional terms) but show also how dichotomised the welfare approach is: the notion of trajectory, of evolution or a dynamic approach seems only to be possible when dealing with a collective experience. Instead, the person (the user or client of welfare services) seems to be regarded as a static 'case'. No diachronic references are expressed here. The alternative of considering biographical trajectories of individuals seems to be an approach missing within the field of Social Services.

Competition with the labour market: another conflictive topic.

The relationship between the networks and the collective of unemployed people is basically presented as a conflictive issue. The arguments expressed by some members of both agencies reveal how the unemployed are abandoned and are not profitable subjects either for the Local Administration or for local initiatives. While the dangers of undermining the political committment towards the unemployed is expressed by Francesca, Paco and Anna show the potentialities of the networks for providing the unemployed with useful relational resources. Here again a consensual perception on the role played by the agencies is difficult to find.

By looking into the files of the Association (of l'Esquerra de l'Eixample) I realised that we had hundreds of unemployed people with serious needs. I then decided to organise a meeting with them. This was two or three years ago, and we have now a 'group of unemployed' within the Neighbours association. Some are young, among them graduates, but most of them are middle-age women with little experience in the labour market. Maybe there are more women because they are less ashamed than men to be unemployed. Our unemployed men in the Association have serious problems of alcoholism. Other drugs are not so evident. And many of our unemployed women are victims of domestic abuse. So we have serious problems...and what is happening? The network is absorbing all the possible jobs that our unemployed could do, such as taking care of the elderly, cleaning, picking up the children from school. Our President (Casimir) *is investing all his efforts in 'La Xarxa', in the elderly, but what about the young unemployed? Even the social Services have sent people to us...only the future can say, but I'm very suspicious about the advantages of 'La Xarxa' for us* (Francesca).

'La Xarxa' won't solve social problems like unemployment, but in some way, if the individual feels good about himself/herself, and is able to develop contacts he or she will be more prepared to look for a job (Anna).

We would be interested in attracting unemployed people to 'La Broca', because nobody cares about them. The City Council offers some measures for the elderly and immigrants but not for the unemployed. I do not see any kind of competition. On the contrary, I think it might be an opportunity to organise a political basis for further actions (Paco).

4.2. Contrasting voices

This section has the purpose of contrasting the (already heard) voices of the protagonists of the agencies with the voices of the protagonists of the current welfare debate. Our two main sources have been the insights gained through the policy meeting and the insights gained through the attendance at the two-day Conference on 'Subject and Social Networks', organised by the Association of Social Psychologists, Social Workers and Social Educators.

Out of the policy meeting three questions seem relevant for the contrastive work with the insights gained from the agency studies. Firstly, the **usefulness of the exclusion-integration paradigm** for understanding current strategies in risk societies was discussed. Secondly, the **potential of biographical methods** for revising social intervention were included in the debate. Finally, the **limits of the individual-assistentialist approach** in social policy was addressed.

When focusing on the paradigm **exclusion-integration**, two strands could be distinguished: some people regarded education and employment as the

only axes through which to understand and combat exclusion. They were extremely critical of the concepts of integration and exclusion as a new way of labelling traditional problems of inequality. They criticised the weak development of this paradigm in considering the class nature of processes of exclusion. They expressed their reluctance to introducing subjectivity in social policy. This (materialist) approach contrasted with those who conceived the core of exclusion as linked to psycho-social processes of welfare, which to a great extent are centred on the questions of identity (e.g. social visibility and usefulness, spheres of identification beyond the market , citizenship rights). For them the terms of exclusion and social risk were potentially fruitful for understanding new and more subtle forms of inequality beyond the marxist-structuralist paradigm.

The potential of **biographical approaches** for introducing more accurate knowledge about social strategies and insights for policy intervention was therefore evaluated in different terms. Whereas one group admitted the necessity to incorporate this perspective in social policy, others considered the introduction of subjectivity as a risky element for our present system of welfare. This risk was understood in terms of psychologisation of social problems, and therefore in terms of individualisation and assistentialisation of welfare. This group expressed their fears about losing the universalistic achievements of Spanish social policy. In effect, the dialectics between the **universal and the particular** when thinking in social policy terms was the background to the whole debate. Practitioners and policy-makers, among others, recognised the challenges and risks facing this dilemma in their daily work.

Finally there was a general agreement in the perception of how social policy is still trapped in providing answers to 'problems' often constructed by social policy itself (actuarial risk approach). It was argued that 'solutions', therefore are limited to a specific field of action, and constitute far from biographically sensitive attitudes. This opened up a criticism of the rooted tendency to categorise and undervalue the complexity and diversity of life situations. Social policy initiatives based on the categorisation of individuals' needs seems to produce inertia, which impedes a global understanding of individual strategies.

This last point was complemented by an appreciation of the need to combat the rhetoric of fatalism about the end of employment and the desperate need to fight for employment at any cost. Mass media and politically constructed discourses are having important effects on policy-making. Consequently, social policies are strictly focused on thinking of ways of integrating through employment.

It was recognised that social policy in the Spanish context is still very young (and in some aspects underdeveloped) when compared to other European countries. However, the social and political framework was presented as a reason why the present moment in Spain can be a good moment for **reflexivity**.

After the transition to democracy Spain has a consolidated State of Rights and the possibility of critically evaluating experiences from the past and facing the future, by learning from the successes and failures of different experiences in other European countries.The focus, at the above mentioned Conference, on the new challenges of social policy is an example of the necessity for reflexivity.

One of the main points expressed at the Conference was the denounciation of the mechanisms through which the creation of spaces for reflexivity never reaches the level of practitioners and front line work. Indeed the Conference itself was a clear example of how spaces for reflection are mainly attended by the highest levels of staff in social policies (since social workers have difficulty leaving their daily work for participating in these kind of forums).

The general direction of the Conference clearly showed the need to overcome the **dichotomy individual-community**. According to the organisers: *The dichotomy individual/collective conceived as a dilemma has become an obstacle for the analysis of the social reality which our daily professional work deals with (...) In order to re-think the relation between subjects and social networks, traditional definitions of community intervention and prevention are not fruitful anymore. We are confronted with the need to revise these concepts in the light of the recent global changes and in the light of theoretical and methodological contributions in the field of social intervention. The prevailing model of the Municipal Planning of Priority Attention is only half-satisfactory in our view and we are aware of its limits. Any social phenomenon has a social dimension, a subjective dimension, but also an ethical one. Our challenge is not to dissociate these dimensions.*

A further element expressed by the participants (and more specifically by the family workers) was the need for working with the emotional side of the users of Social Service. According to their words: *We as professionals often forget personalised attention, the commitment to the emotional state of our client, the recognition of him/her as a person with a capacity to decide (...) in some way our assistential model leads to worry about the appearances of intervention and ignores the well-being of the user. Intervention is given priority over the symptom.*

These fragments reveal not only the reflexivity of the protagonist actors of Social Services, but the conflictive gap between their daily praxis and the normative model they conceive for this praxis. General agreement was reached in conceiving the **'network-approach'** as one valuable strategy to combat the current individual-assistentialist approach, the unwanted effects of which are burocratisation, medicalisation and psychologisation among others.Working with community -born networks was presented as a means of overcoming the gap between the individual and the collective, without losing the achievements of universalisation. Furthermore, the network-approach was perceived as powerful in preventing risk situations, capturing the dynamic dimension of social practice, as opposed to the more static, stigmatising and controlling

nature of individualist policy approaches. Significantly, the biographical approach as a resource for Social Services and social policy in general was missing.

As we saw in the told life of some of the social workers involved in the agencies, the personal costs deriving from the gap between professional praxis and the normative policy model are very high. In this sense promotion and collaboration with the networks institutionally regulated with the new Municipal Planning from 1993 has become an incipient solution for the professionals, and a means of being creative which reaches beyond the burocratic nature of their practices.

Despite the positive evaluation of the potential offered by the 'network-approach' in the professional practice of Social Services, the participants were alerted to the risks of romanticizing the community. Another risk to which the participants alerted the audience was the fact of considering the community experiences of the 90s in similar terms to the ones in the 70s. The historical transformation of social movements does not make available the reference point of an homogeneous community only that of a fragmented and diversified one.

5. Evaluation and final remarks: biographical committment towards 'network-welfare'.

The historical transition of Spanish society from an authoritarian Welfare State to a democratic Welfare State was the political framework for the emergence of the **Neighbours Associations**. In this report the biographical trajectories of the protagonists of the agencies are conditioned by the experience of community activism during the political transition. This community activism, after a long gap in the 80s, has developed in the late 90s into the creation of network initiatives within the framework of the Neighbours Associations. 'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca', as two of the existing social networks of services in Barcelona, have been our object of study.

Though the nature of the involvement of members of the agencies is notably different, the high intensity of involvement is a shared feature among them. Most of them share the above mentioned 'working class activist past'. That is, they participated in the political and economic claims of the young democracy, together with trade unions, students etc. From a lived dimension they biographically present themselves as a fighters for collective welfare. In other words, we have witnessed their **biographical trajectories** as community activists, with a high degree of sensitisation. We could therefore interpret their commitment in terms of **biographical continuity**. What does change is the reconversion of this committment into new forms of social organisation and political participation.

From a present perspective they are committed to the search for ways of

reconstructing social relationships, and offering their neighbours the possibility of finding a **space for social participation** beyond the constraints of an institutionalised organisation. Through this space ('La Xarxa' and 'La Broca') there is a strong emphasis on promoting empowerment within a relational context. The empowering potential of these initiatives lies in the capacity to gain control and social recognition above the needs of everyday life.

The studied agencies are directly immersed in the sphere of **welfare**. From a perspective of 'welfare mix' initiatives such as 'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca' may act as a source of welfare diversification and a less burocratic social participation. As derived from the comparative analysis of 'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca' two different strategies define the praxis and mission of both networks. Whereas the first practises a form of 'assistentialist solidarity' and is basically oriented to give a response to the needs of 'here' and 'now'; the latter seems to be practising a concept of 'reciprocity' and is working for developing alternative communities for the future. This means that 'La Xarxa' is less politicised than 'La Broca', even though both of them are generating mechanisms of social integration. Significantly, both of them share a manifest will to reject ideas of charity and compassion. This may be connected to the Franco heritage of social policy based on religious categories of Catholic charity.

In effect, 'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca' can be defined as two rich initiatives in terms of promoting **social integration** in a context of fragmentation and individualization, in which loneliness and isolation negatively affect people's lives. They can be conceived as solid attempts to (re)create the philosophy of the 'good neighbourhood' and the reciprocal exchange of services and emotional support. Their creative potential lies in how 'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca' manage to transform traditional community resources into modern ones.

'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca' propose to recuperate a sense of **usefulness** and **meaningfulness** rather than to strictly cover material needs. Beyond the specificities of the exchanged activities, the members of the agencies share a style of life and values based on more balanced social relationships.They offer a space in which individuals are understood as relational subjects with more abilities and capacities than those recognised by social policy concepts in capitalist market society. Reciprocity and non-monetarization of the exchange process implies not only the de-commodification of social spaces, but the possibility of re-visioning the emotional dimension of social relationships.The chief role of caring activities within the network constitutes a clear example of this.

One of the most relevant effects of the **caring** practices within the network is that the unpaid and socially unrecognised work of care and reproductive work in general is made visible, thus allowing the role of women in the community to emerge. Interestingly, women are the ones who seem to have promoted or started these networks. Women, as 'responsible' for the

reproductive work are probably more permeable to the idea of exchange in domestic tasks. It is also the 'traditional female' mediating role, which makes it possible for women to initiate contacts with other women, thus finding a way out of the public sphere. Another significant effect of caring is the possibility of men and women exploring, and rendering flexible and even reconverting traditional gender roles, thanks to the open nature of these networks.

Last but not least 'La Xarxa' and 'La Broca' can be understood as two serious attempts to (re)construct **collective identity** within the framework of the community. In this case the neigbourhood is the social-territorial platform which acts as the point of collective identification and reference. It could therefore be defined as a laboratory which provides individuals with a space for experimenting with new forms of social action. Both the principle of proximity and the existance of previous social networks constitute a fundamental resource for allowing this to happen.

Finally, we can consider the studied agencies as an actual exercise of **'citizenship'** based on the concept and praxis of interdependency rather than independence or autonomy. However, when looking into the membership of these agencies, the praxis of citizenship seems to be restricted to specific sectors of the population, these being mainly committed people and the 'precariously integrated'. Even though we should not undermine the value and impact of including the 'precariously integrated', as shown in the cases of 'La Xarxa' and ' La Broca', it is true that those collectives qualified as 'excluded' or in an extreme risky position are still the subjects of institutional social policy. Some authors (Mingione, 1993) have alerted us to the fact that innovative communitary experiences favour stable, medium-size families against non-orthodox, unstable families who are new to the community.

The potential presented so far, though, should not lead us to under-estimate other **conflictive aspects** contained in this kind of initiative. Agencies like 'La Xarxa' or 'La Broca' may be invading the space of parallel activities which work towards better living conditions and working opportunities. An example of this is the tension perceived by the 'Unemployed Group'of l'Esquerra de l'Eixample, which contrasts with the conflict-blind discourse of the members of 'La Xarxa'. The competition with other local initiatives both from the social policy and from the community itself seems therefore to be an undesirable feature of this kind of agency.

The competition with the Public Services must be looked at critically. Experiences such as 'La Broca' or 'La Xarxa' clearly occupy a different social space from that of the Social Services, since they are providing the neighbours with a relational and emotional and even political space, which goes beyond the fulfillment of material and psychological needs. For instance, the current Public Services cannot compete with the utopian dimension contained in the experience of 'La Broca', or with the networking and mobilising resources provided by the actors themselves. The manifest aim of maintaining an autonomy in relation to the Public Services (which does not imply rejecting any

kind of mutual collaboration) locates these kind of agencies in a position of non-competition.

However, the lived and objective risk of the relationship between these community initiatives and the Public Services is that the first gets absorbed by the latter. As some interviewees of 'La Broca' recognise, the interest of institutions (Local Council and Regional Government) in getting involved in such projects, could lead policy-makers to be (or to feel) exempted from implementing more ambitious policies for the community (such as policies for the unemployed, children, the elderly and families). In economic terms, this inhibition implies reducing the budgets for welfare.

To conclude, we face the question of to what extent initiatives like 'La Broca' and 'La Xarxa' are innovative, and even model-building. The flexible structure of the networks of exchange such as ´La Xarxa´ and ´La Broca´, seem to facilitate their growth and territorial distribution. The fact that the origins of the initiative of 'La Broca' come from Canada, and that it is working in different societal contexts in Catalonia, is an example of its capacity for dissemination and adaptability. One of the reasons for this is that the exchange networks focus on universal values such as the needs for social relationships and for covering welfare needs. In this kind of network the question of leadership for organising the initiative is not a primary question. On the contrary, the most important element for the success of these networks seems to lie in the presence of a pre-existing network or associative movement (even if in a primary form) and in the existance of informal channels of communication.

Last but not least, we consider that the innovative potential of these agencies lies in their capacity for re-implementing traditional forms of the 'good neighbourhood' into a changing context. In spite of their reduced visibility for mainstream public discourse and praxis around social participation and initiatives for exchange networks, they seem to be emerging as a 'new' opportunity for re-constructing social bonds and roles, as well as individual and collective identities.

6. "Policy Statements": the need for a politics of communication in biographically changing contexts

Some of the findings derived from both stages of the Sostris research could be translated into questions opened up by the current social policy debate in Spain (and elsewhere). Taking into account the fact that the work developed by the researchers of the team has not focused on interaction with the policy field, and considering that the nature of the whole project cannot be framed under the label of a 'research/action' or 'activation policy' project, the following statements are only of a general and approximate nature. The reader can decide on their usefulness in the field of social policy intervention.

Social Service users or clients (but also practitioners and other Social

Service agents) in Spain perceive and experience personal-oriented policy approaches as burocratised and assistentialist. A strong rejection against assistentialism follows from this perception. Current attempts in Spain to give support to community and/or network-approaches should neither exclude social protection nor the opportunity of developing biographically-sensitive approaches in social policy.The actual challenge for policy action seems therefore to promote and integrate a diversity of lines in policy action by finding **a balanced praxis between social protection, a network-centred approach, and treating clients as persons.**

The existence of **community experiences offering both a space for individuals to make transitions, and a broad field of orientation** (as we learnt from interviewing lone mothers or the early retired in the first stage of the research, but also from interviewing non-category focused groups in our second satge of research) reveals the possibility of a biographically sensitive approach which deserves to be taken seriously at the level of policy. Rather than policies of activation (which in most cases end up as policies of intervention and control) the task for policy at a local level would be precisely to **encourage those initiatives and experiences which are already activated.**

Emotional needs and emerging anxieties are part of the biographical processess experienced by individuals who, for instance, have been or are being expelled from the labour market, or who have never had access to it, and go beyond the material needs consequent on exclusion from the labour market. In general terms, though, our 'cases' have been made vulnerable by broader processes of destructuring and individualisation. In this sense 'innovative' policies could simply imply offering a **space for individuals to express and deal with their actual needs**, instead of starting from pre-conceived notions of what these needs are. This could be understood as evidence of the shift from a materialist and productivist basis of social relationships and social policy to a post-materialist way of structuring them. For this to happen, **active listening** and **taking communication between individuals seriously** is a task which policy action should take into account.

Individuals (as we have learnt from both stages of the research) seem to be articulating new forms of relating to politics through diverse ways of being socially involved. These forms are manifestly opposed to the formal channels of political participation. An important task of the policy agents would be therefore to **recognise and learn from the political dimension of social action at the more informal level**.

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