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The citizen platform Bosque Urbano Málaga: A socio-territorial movement?

The present work seeks, in the first place, to contribute to the debate in the field of social sciences around the studies of social movements and collective action from a spatial analytical perspective, making axis in the concepts urban public space, territory and its disputes, as well as in the notions of urban social movements and socioterritorial movements. Secondly, it is proposed to describe and analyse a process of organisation and specifically urban citizen mobilisation, in defence of the creation of an urban forest in the city of Malaga, Citizen Platform for an Urban Forest in Malaga (BUM), a phenomenon that has not yet been addressed and we consider that it can be understood as an urban socioterritorial movement.

We understand space as a social space (LEFEBVRE, 2013), contained within the geographical space, or, what is the same, the space generated by human relations within the physical or natural space, continuously transformed by the hand of the human being. We distinguish the concepts of place and territory, while recognising the complexity of their multiple dimensions. In the definition of the concept of place, subjective experience predominates, the creation of bonds of belonging and identity by the subjects in action, on a local and daily scale. Both the notion of experience and the so-called sense of place are central elements that will help us to understand the spatiality of social relations and their impact on the identity configuration of the subjects, through the concept of place. The concept of territory, on the other hand, is combined from the relations of domination, of power; situations of conflicts and struggles for their definition and control (TORRES, 2011). This construction of territories and places is the answer to social interactions and experiences, allowing their control and subjective appropriation. We believe that the combination of both concepts is what allows us to understand spatiality as a central and constitutive dimension of collective identity configurations. Specifically, the social construction of territories is, then, an exceptional analytical gateway to account for contentious collective action (TILLY, 2000), since it introduces dispute, conflict and the struggle for the differential appropriation of space by organised collective subjects that, in many cases, can be analysed under the category of social movements.

Within the literature on social movements, we review the two major paradigms that have given account of their study: the paradigm of resource mobilisation and the paradigm of identity; and we agreed to point out, with other authors (FERNANDES, 2005 and OSLENDER, 2002), the sustained absence in both perspectives of references to space as a central and defining category for understanding social action, the development of society and, therefore, the emergence, interactions and characteristics of social movements.

Specifically, our field of debate centres around conflicts over the various possible uses of urban public space. We consider the idealizing conceptions of public space as an area of equalisation and free access to be fallacious. These have been criticised by various authors who find that it is not only difficult to define the public space (GORELIK, 2008), but also has the risk of objectifying it and assuming it as a neutral and objective container space (ESTÉVEZ VILLARINO, 2012). We rely on classic

authors on these topics such as Henri Lefebvre (1978), Manuel Castells (1986) and David Harvey (2008). Under the idea of the "right to the city", Lefebvre describes the demand for the right of citizens to regain control of the urban forms of their daily life, both against the market and against the state. The organisation of space orders, prescribes, proscribes and hides the social order where there are beneficiaries and excluded.

A case study on BUM is presented, under a qualitative, descriptive and interpretative research modality, which is based on some of the ideas of grounded theory (GLASER and STRAUSS, 1967). Especially his notions of constant comparison and theoretical saturation are recovered. Following a research period developed during 2017 and 2020, and with subsequent follow-ups, we carried out participant and non-participant observation in different actions and practises of the organisation daily and extradaily. We conducted interviews, in-depth interviews and countless informal conversations with various members of the organisation during participant observation days. It also called for the survey of secondary sources, official data of public institutions related to the subject of studies, as well as local newspapers and material prepared by the organisation itself.

BUM's analysis refers to the dispute over the use of a large area of land in the middle of the city of Malaga, which belonged to REPSOL. This space is in two of the most densely populated districts of the city of Europe and that have a few times of green areas per inhabitant lower than the recommendations of the World Health Organisation. The movement began with a citizens' initiative of two neighbours (Ana and Javier) who decided to propose on the online platform change.org a collection of signatures to transform this area of the city into a real green lung necessary for such a saturated space. The success of the collection of signatures in a short period led to the creation of the citizen platform to request the revocation of the project contemplated in the municipal urban planning for this space: the creation of several skyscrapers, housing blocks and a large shopping centre. This citizen proposal has made us reflect on the city model that is being pursued for Malaga and what is the role of citizen participation in urban processes. It seems that this circumstance is aggravated when the local corporation deactivates a citizen consultation on what the neighbourhood wants for the land of the former REPSOL under the cover of an argument based on the affectation on the public treasury since there is a real estate speculation on these lands and their report to the municipal coffers in the current uncertain times for a megalomaniac project. It

should be added, the support received from multiple local entities and collectives in the field of environmentalism, neighbourhood associations, political and trade union formations, professional groups, and university associations, among others. Currently, the platform carries out a series of activities that link the rest of the neighbourhood with this sustainable movement. These activities are organised through its Assembly and the Table through an urban forest, where the collectives that support the platform participate. Among them have been cycling marches, tree plantations and irrigation or meetings with collectives and public representatives to achieve the objective proposed by the platform.

The composition of the members of the organisation Bosque Urbano Málaga is exclusively voluntary and is structured in two entities for decision-making: the Assembly (citizen participation) and the Table for an urban forest (participation of representatives of groups that support BUM). Both structures are horizontal and open to any person and collective. The financing channels start from voluntary contributions to the sale of merchandising elements of the BUM itself such as T-shirts or ecological shopping bags. Through this decision-making and this way of financing the collective has organised numerous events such as cycling marches, campaigns to support small businesses, discussion, and exhibition forums, etc.

Through the reconstruction and analysis of the practises and senses starring BUM, we consider that it can be understood as an organisation that responds to the definition of an urban socioterritorial movement, considering the centrality of the dispute over the appropriation of an urban territory as its defining data. In response to the proposal of analysis developed in Halvorsen, Fernandes and author (2019) regarding the analysis of the four axes (strategy, institutions, identity and political sociability) through which the construction of territories by organisations can be problematised, we deploy below the conclusions of the analysis of its processing in the case study of this paper.

The characteristics that define the BUM platform allow it to be considered a horizontal organisation, with an open and flexible operation that allows it to coordinate actions with diverse and heterogeneous actors: university, political parties, NGOs, professional associations, neighbourhood organisations, etc. In this coordination, the search for organisational resources, legitimacy and mobilisation capacity to give visibility and strength to the main demand, that is the construction of an urban forest in a certain location available in the city of Malaga prevails. A city with particular characteristics, very densely

populated and crossed by different problems around its occupational and economic structure. The strategy has as a clear horizon the dispute for a space, in pursuit of its territorialisation for the configuration of a green space, public, horizontal, accessible: in the conquest of this space focuses the triumph of the movement, the construction of an urban forest, where others intend to carry out a lucrative project.

The process of territorialisation of demand allows the creation of an organisation in which different political and ideological actors converge, but they share the same worldview around that territory, the same worldview around a sustainable city. On the other hand, they have also reached certain operating agreements among which the respect for the self-denomination of the organisation as a citizen and, therefore, nonpartisan and autonomous, stands out. A form of political socialisation has been configured that has in the definition of this territory its raison d'être.

The activities and mobilisations that the platform has staged have covered a wide spectrum, making use of peaceful protest in public spaces, combining it with institutionalised actions in legislative or university frameworks and a graphic dissemination campaign through social networks. The institutional form of the citizen platform allows the consolidation of the collective as such and outlines its organisational configuration, providing the movement with rules and norms that constrain its action, but at the same time, allow its maintenance over time.

We can identify that the indicated heterogeneity of actors and subjects that converge in the same objective, is possible because they have managed to discriminate an element that people of different ages, genders, work trajectories, political ideologies and social classes have in common: a territory and an identity that is associated with it. The struggle for an urban forest is the struggle to define a space as a territory: with features, forms of use, conceptions and social practises that define it as a social space for public and free use, and that configures a path to an accessible, democratic and sustainable city.

We consider that, from the experience of the BUM, the dispute over public space results in the dispute over the appropriation of the territory, meaning appropriation as the power to define the space according to its uses, its practise and its conception: the construction of a social and democratic space that must be at the service of the community, seeking a healthy, shared and public use environment. In this definition the organisation is built as part of a socioterritorial movement because it defines the uses of a space in contradiction and dispute with other possible uses and that in the success of that dispute its success is coded: hence the territory, the constitution of its territory, in this case the makeup of the urban forest, constitutes the triumph of the movement.