



What Neighbourhood, Whose Neighbourhood? Contested Public Space, Active Citizenship and the Grassroots in the Cabanyal

Francesco Andriollo

Independent scholar, Rome, Italy
francescoandriollo@gmail.com

Abstract

This article aims to understand the geographical specificity of the repoliticized public space in the Cabanyal-Canyamelar—a neighbourhood in Valencia (Spain). The goal of this endeavour is to discuss how the struggles over public space reveal and expose hidden, latent, and wider tensions that produce different configurations of active citizenship; those, in turn, pose the questions of the access to and the uses of public space, which are mostly determined by class and ethnicity. To this end, the peculiar topography and history of the Cabanyal-Canyamelar, the practices, politics, and discourses through which the ‘publicity’ of space is produced, the differences in the social, cultural, and power capital among two antithetically polarised groups of grassroots associations have been considered and compose the discursive and empirical ground on which the research was based on. This research shows how within the abstract definition of public space as a space open to everyone, structured conflicts among unequal and plural publics pose questions of who is entitled to claim and assert control over space.

Keywords

Public space; active citizenship; grassroots movements; urban resistance; Spain.



Introduction

The Cabanyal-Canyamelar (henceforth only Cabanyal), a neighbourhood in the city of Valencia, was declared a “Cultural Interest Property” in 1993 under the typology of “Historic Quarter”. However, on July 24, 1998, in the congress of the Valencia Council, the *Partido Popular* (“Popular Party”) and its majority approved a draft (PEPRI¹) that planned the extension of the Avenue Blasco Ibáñez to the sea: the project would have involved the destruction of 1651 homes (approximately 570 buildings) as well as the one of the urban grid of the Cabanyal. In the words of the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal-Canyamelar-Cap de França, a grassroots association born with the intention of opposing the plan, “the project of extending Avenue Blasco Ibáñez contravenes culture, legislation and additionally the will and way of life of the people from this village”, which is why since 1998 a large part of the population started to gather and actively fight to protect the “*public space*” of neighbourhood.

In 2015, after a long civic, social, and legal resistance from the associations that constituted the forefront of the opposition, the PEPRI was declared illegal. Nonetheless, the plan had already caused irreparable damage to the neighbourhood, from the destruction and the walling of many houses to the heavy social and urban degradation of the area. It was then that a ‘new wave’ of grassroots associations emerged out of the renewed situation of the neighbourhood, the so-called *movimiento libertario* (“libertarian movement”) that included people close to the *okupa* (“squat”) and anarchic scene. This new wave of active citizens took upon itself the responsibility to watch over the future of the neighbourhood when the plan of the extension of Avenue Blasco Ibáñez was withdrawn, trying to address issues of multiculturalism, integration, urban degradation, and the problems concerning the incumbent gentrification they foresaw.

This article examines the discursive and empirical forms in which public space, active citizenship, and urban resistance get intertwined within the pre- and post-2015 grassroots groups, and the conflicting consequent views about access to (and use of) public space. For this purpose, data was mainly collected through participant observation—in the street, squares and other public spaces—and interviews, and most it stems from the participation in weekly assemblies held by the different associations. I will analyse the ways in which the ‘publicity’ of space is operationalised, produced, and contested (Lefebvre 1991b; Hou 2010), and I will delve into the local struggle over the resources and expectations about the future of the neighbourhood. Doing so I will nonetheless take into account the heterogeneous composition of the researched population—composed of artists, lawyers, activists, intellectuals, squatters, *gitanos* (“gypsies”), and others who engage in formal, informal, or everyday practices of resistance (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991a; Hou 2010)—and whose differences in social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1973; 1986)

¹ Plan Especial de Protección y Reforma Interior (“Special Plan for Protection and Internal Reform”).

affect the outcome of how the neighbourhood (and public space itself) should be configured (Low and Smith 2013). Building on six months of ethnographic fieldwork, I will also discuss the normativity that is intrinsic to public space (Fraser 1990; Habermas 2011), the underlying uneven power relationships among the residents, and its consequent outcomes.

In the first part, I will theoretically position myself within the current debate about public space and active citizenship, further explicating the concepts of “insurgent public space” (Hou 2010), urban resistance, and active citizenship. I will consider recent critiques of the public sphere for locally rethinking and understanding the one in the Cabanyal, and I will outline the methodology of my research. In the second part, I will describe the situation of the neighbourhood at large and the actors that were part of my research population. I will analyse the ways in which public space and active citizenship are produced and intertwined. Drawing upon the assemblies and interviews, I will illustrate the reasons and consequences of the conflicts examining questions such as the culturization of the *gitanos*, public time, public order—and how these are dealt with by the different grassroots groups. In the third part, I will then report some of the limits and the innovative experiments that I encountered in the Cabanyal that are possibly capable of imagining alternative possibilities and fashions for an active and sustainable citizenship in the city. In the conclusion, I will return to the question of what kind of social change and active citizenship the discourses and practices of the grassroots associations—drawing upon public space—envisage and produce in the Cabanyal, which goal is to enrich and deepen the debate about citizen participation, urban regeneration policies, and new ways for imagining and living the city.

Theoretical framework

Spatializing culture

In the last thirty years, a growing attention has been paid to the relationship between urban space and social change (Castells 1983; McCann 2002; Miller 2006; Holston 2009; Hou 2010). An anthropological approach to space—or, in Setha Low’s (1996) terms, “spatializing culture”²—has proved to be a formidable tool for studying culture, political economy, conflict, control, and many other contemporary issues. Essential to the development of this perspective was Henri Lefebvre’s (1991b) foundational work on the social production of space, in which he asserted that space is shaped through the interaction of the built environment with spatial practices and representations of space. From this frame of reference, a social study of urban spaces is simultaneously an economic, political, social, imaginative, and spatial processes; then, as Rodman (1993, 137) puts it, to understand them, we need

² “By spatialize I mean to locate, both physically and conceptually, social relations and social practice in social space” (Low 1996, 861).

“a synthesis of experience-based approaches ... with those that treat space as socially constructed and contested.”

Conceptualising “social space [as] both a field of action and a basis for action” (Low 2014, 35), public spaces—spaces of meeting, interaction, and conflict—have thus become the subject *par excellence* of this approach. Presented here as constantly and socially produced (Lefebvre 1991b)—individually and collectively, phenomenologically and symbolically—in opposition to the private and abstract spaces, I will address public space as something “always[,] in some sense, in a state of emergence, never complete and always contested” (Watson 2006, 7). Public space stands at the intersection of representations, politics, practices, meanings, and its built environment, and is here conceived as emergent “between civil society and the state” (Habermas 2001, xi). As spaces of meeting and exchange, public spaces are embedded in uneven power relationships that generate patterned effects such as organisations, inequalities, powers, and resistances (Law 1992), resulting open to greater or lesser participation, inclusion, and integration.

Insurgent public spaces

Drawing upon Lefebvre’s insights on “lived” spaces—“the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’” (Lefebvre 1991b, 39)—, Jeffrey Hou (2010) proposes a further addition to the concept of public space. He underlines its “insurgent” character, highlighting the practical and discursive modes of production of the ‘publicity’ of the space, namely “appropriating, ... reclaiming, ... pluralizing, ... transgressing, ... uncovering, ... [and] contesting” (Hou 2010, 13–14). The notion of “insurgency” will be used here to look at how (potentially) counter-hegemonic cultural, political, and social practices are negotiated and contested through spontaneous or planned, goal-oriented or not, fruition of the space (see also Foucault 1986; Holston 2008, 2009; Hou 2010).

Although the social production of public space can possibly be counter-hegemonic and benefit its surroundings, it can also be the cause of grievances and struggles over present and future resources. That’s the case in the Cabanyal, where the *gitanos* activate the publicity of space through everyday practices (de Certeau 1984) that challenge the symbolic distinction between inside and outside, the private realm and the public one. The issues caused by their production of public space generate social practices and discourses that in the Cabanyal are channelled in a consistent and multi-faceted participation in neighbourhood associations and grassroots movements. For this reason, scholars have started to regard public space as “an umbrella concept for previously disparate areas of activism, ... forging strategic linkages, mobilizing people not otherwise connected with activism, and providing a more accessible and generalized language for advocacy and citizen engagement” (Pask 2010, 231).

Different citizens, different public spaces

As Holston (2009, 246) notices, “the insurgence of urban democratic citizenships in recent decades has disrupted established formulas of rule and privilege in the most diverse societies worldwide. Yet the result is an entanglement of democracy with its counters, in which new kinds of urban citizens arise to expand democratic citizenships and new forms of urban violence and inequality erode them.” These new forms have taken the shapes of “citizen-consumers” (Newman and Clarke 2009), “active citizens” (Fuller et al. 2008), “respectful citizens” (Gaskell 2008), “aspirational citizens” (Raco 2009), “barely citizens” (Holston 2009), along with many others.

Isomorphically, according to Dickinson *et al.* (2008, 102), new configurations of citizenship “[have] been reconstituted at a new sub- and supra-national scales, leading to a profound shift in the discursive deployment of the term ‘citizenship’ as well as in the lived experience of its everyday practice.” These new, active and everyday kinds of citizenship are deeply embedded in the economic, political, personal and cultural spheres, which is why growing attention has been paid to the material environment in which the everyday and apparently banal practices have the potential to transform hegemonic and oppressive spatial and social understandings of social life (Kobayashi and Mackenzie 1989).

Nonetheless, the expression of this new kind of active citizenship may vary, and that according to differences in the cultural, political, social, and economic capital (Bourdieu 1986; Holston 2009); age, ideology, and ethnicity are also determining factors. The struggles over public space thus determine various theories and practices of (active) citizenship, that in turn structure the struggles about public space—and about the local public sphere at large (Staeheli and Thompson 1997).

Different public spaces, different publics

Following Eley’s (1990) definition of the public sphere in stratified societies as “the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics takes place,” I will outline the many publics of the Cabanyal, focusing on the two quasi antithetical groups of grassroots associations, the *gitanos* community, and the state. In fact, in the Cabanyal different groups of citizens constitute different (and to a certain extent separated) publics, and the circulation of discourses about the neighbourhood is often hindered by irreconcilable political and ideological differences, the structural inequalities between groups, and the material conditions in which those discourses are produced.

In a fashion that strays from the official and institutional public discourse (e.g. the one of the City Hall and of the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal), the grassroots associations of the *movimiento libertario* are proposing counter-hegemonic discourses and solutions that resonates with Hou’s definition of insurgent public space as “a mode of city making that is different from the institutionalised notion of urbanism and its association with master planning and policy making”

(Hou 2010, 15). Thinking in terms of plural publics, inter- and infra-publics relations, and of “subaltern counterpublics” as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 1990) will be a useful for understanding and examining the relations between different actors and the intrinsic contested—potentially normative and exclusive, but also counter-hegemonic—character of public space.

Ethnographic analysis

Local context: an overview of the Cabanyal

A brief history of the neighbourhood

Officially named “Cabanyal-Canyamelar”, the neighbourhood hosts 20544 residents in quite the same percentage of men and women, of which 8000 people under the age of eighteen (Padrón Municipal de Habitantes 2015). Around 15% of the population is not Spanish—mostly coming from other European countries such as Romania, but also from South America, Asia and Africa: as a result, the population is fairly heterogeneous, ranging from the prevalent Spanish residents (*pajos*) to the *gitanos* that have settled in the area. For the purpose of this research, though, I only focused on a small fraction of the population, composed of grassroots activists, representatives of associations, and the *gitanos* community—those that, as I will show, are mostly responsible for the production of public space.

Famous for its architecture, the Cabanyal appears as an original and free interpretation of the modernist architecture currents. Its popular style (most of the houses were built by the fishermen inhabiting the area in the late nineteenth century) is a manifestation of a spontaneous and unprofessional architecture, one in which the modernist influence can be seen in the pivotal importance of the ornaments. Yet, it was precisely the amateurish construction technique that caused many of the houses to not be considered fitting the safety criteria of the 1988 ‘Plan General de Ordenación Urbanística’ which, in 1998, functioned as a basis for the designation of the houses that were to be demolished by the PEPRI. It was then that some organisations started gathering together in a movement for the defence of the neighbourhood which was led by the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal, a neighbourhood grassroots association created with the intention of opposing and resisting the plan. Ever since and until 2015, the Plataforma organised social and political initiatives such as hunger strikes and demonstrations aimed at raising awareness about the destructive project, and started the legal opposition in court (Cerveró i Martí 2014).

During the years of the Popular Party’s administration led by Rita Barberá (mayor of Valencia from 1991 to 2015), the Cabanyal deeply deteriorated. The houses that hindered the PEPRI and declared unsafe were destroyed or walled, creating *solares vacíos* (large empty spaces between buildings) and leading to an

aesthetic and urban debasement. Some people supporting the struggle of the *Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal* then started to squat houses as a means of physical resistance to the incumbent demolition. Furthermore, it was a widespread opinion among my interviewees that it was the Popular Party's intention to also deteriorate the area from a social point of view, through a legal tolerance and a permissiveness that made the Cabanyal a no man's land for drug dealing and consumption. The awful conditions and the state of abandonment of the houses made them places in which the trade and use of drugs could go unnoticed. To this day, the Cabanyal still bears the infamous reputation of "neighbourhood of the drugs."

The battle against the extension of Avenue Blasco Ibáñez was won in 2015, but it left deep scars on the neighbourhood. After a clamorous defeat of the almost twenty-five years-long majority of the right-wing Popular Party, the new Municipality of Valencia took office in 2015. The votes from the Cabanyal were fundamental in the election's count, also because of the elected parties compromise with the *cabanyaleros*—specifically with the *Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal*—to reverse the attitude that, since 1991, the authorities have had towards the neighbourhood.

The perspective of the new local government thus slightly shifted, and new urban renewal policies (Plan *Confianza* and *ARRU*, for about 30,000,000€) were issued by Joan Ribó, the new mayor, with the purpose of rehabilitating the neighbourhood. The favourable streak continued in 2016, when the company *Va Cabanyal* won a European invitation to tender through its project *EDUSI*, a collaborative four-months-process of co-design and co-writing project between citizens and administration, for a total of 30,000,000€ to be invested for the urban and social rehabilitation of the neighbourhood within the next five years.

However, if the conflict in the 1998-2015 span was configured as a quite dichotomic situation (that is, the *Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal* against the *PEPRI*), in the most recent years it came to acquire more subtle and nuanced characteristics. The eradication of the communal and transversal threat and the recognition of the *Plataforma* as a legitimate interlocutor when dealing with the rehabilitation of the Cabanyal fragmented the united front and exposed latent tensions and grudges *within* the neighbourhood that were bred and incubated during the Popular Party administration. Furthermore, as I mentioned above, the long-awaited rehabilitation policies were also a cause of concern among certain areas of the population, markedly among the *movimiento libertario* (see below). *Cabanyal Espai Veïnal*, for example, is an association whose emergence coincided with the dismissal of the *PEPRI* in 2015, and whose most pressing priority is to highlight, criticise, and possibly counter the incumbent gentrification that might affect the area now that the new local government promised to rehabilitate it. The strife moved from outwards to inwards.

Presentation of the actors

Public space is socially produced in many ways by a variety of actors. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the associationscape of the Cabanyal may be divided into two opposite polarised groups. The first falls under the influence of the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal (including the Associació de Veïns y Veïnes del Cabanyal, the Comitad por el Derecho al Descanso, and the Associació Vendors Mercat), which I hereby subsume in the denomination ‘PLATA’. The other one bands together associations (mainly Cabanyal Espai Veïnal, Cabanyal Horta, the squats ‘Fusteria’ and ‘Samaruc’) in what those activists refer to as the *movimiento libertario*. The reasons for this divergence are manifold: principally differences in class and ideology—the PLATA associations seeming to be more conservative (although the composition of their members is quite traversal, as they individually embody heterogeneous positions), whereas activists of the *movimiento libertario* tend to anarchic and anti-capitalistic positions. Besides, the political polarisation also embeds a generational one, for which the members of the former group are mostly between 40 and 80 years-old, while the ones of the latter are mostly between 20 and 40.

Despite the claims of both those two conglomerates are strongly informed by the rhetoric of public space (Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal, Canyamelar i Cap de França 2015; Cabanyal Espai Veïnal 2016), the two groups struggle over almost every question concerning the neighbourhood, such as the acoustic pollution, the *viviendas publicas* (houses owned by the City Hall), the risks of gentrification, the judgment on squatting, the interpretations about the rehabilitation of the *barrio*, etc. Yet, interestingly, the most striking difference between the two poles is their attitude towards the institutions. As Alejandro, a Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal activist, stated, “The problem here is the lack of definition of public policies and the implementation of such policies. As time passes, nobody can see the results of the rehabilitation public policies. And it does not depend on us, it depends on the City Council.” Conversely, the associations of the *movimiento libertario* are trying to assert their own forms of spatial control and influence over the Cabanyal in a way that is occurring outside the institutional, planning and rehabilitation processes. This partially stems from the liminal legal positions in which some of them operate—that is, through illegally occupied squats—, but also from the firm belief that “You don’t have to ask, nor cry: we don’t think that the authorities have to give us anything, ... and that all you have to do is to take action,” as Clara, founder of Cabanyal Horta (an open-garden experience run by volunteers), put it during an interview. The associations of the *movimiento libertario* deny the legitimacy and the responsibility of the authorities, opting instead for a DIY approach that shuns bureaucracy and official recognition.

As I already briefly hinted at, the *gitanos* are among the key actors that contribute to the contamination of the public in the private. Their “colonisation” of the public through practices that I will address extensively in the following paragraph results in a hybridisation of the dichotomy between public and private space, and thus in the

production of public space itself. Far from being a homogeneous group, as many of them reported, the community may be divided into two sub-groups: the *gitanos españoles* (*gitanos* who have lived in the Cabanyal for two or three generations) and the *gitanos romanos* (*gitanos* from Romania who have taken up residence in the neighbourhood mostly since 2010). Loitering in the *calles*, leaning against the walls, sitting on sidewalks or chairs, some *gitanos* often come up with original and spectacular ideas—for instance bringing inflatable swimming-pools in the streets when the temperature gets too hot. This making the streets of the Cabanyal an open-air beachfront and other borderline activities such as the drug trade, the outdoor loud night parties, the scraps of lunches and dinners prepared and consumed in the open have created a growing discontent among some of the neighbouring population. Most importantly, the attitude towards the *gitanos* is a major polariser of the two different grassroots groups.

The social production of public space and active citizenship

How do public space and active citizenship get produced and intertwined? And what are the consequences of such link? In many interviews, the way in which the various members of the grassroots associations of the Cabanyal have been exercising a new meaning of the term “public” is through the definition of the neighbourhood’s space as a space of belonging—on which declensions of active citizenship have been shaped. Furthermore, the active citizenship displayed by both grassroots groups seems to be directly linked to the material presence of their activists in the space of the neighbourhood. The variety of banal everyday uses and symbolic practices, that I will here describe through a critical assessment of Hou’s (2010) categories, seems to operationalise the “public” connotation of space. For this reason, scholars such as Isin and Nielsen (2008) have proposed to consider citizenship in terms of its performative nature rather than in terms of the citizen-subject. Not focusing directly on the subject, they argue, allows a clearer understating of the modes of production and the disruptions in the historical patterns and relationships that contribute to forming citizenship. Insisting on the performative character of public gatherings in relation to the agency that being an active citizen brings (see also Butler 1997; Brownlow 2011), Butler and Athanasiou (2013, 178) point out how “[t]aking part in the multi-layered and multi-sited gatherings involves the corporeal vulnerability of fatigue, weariness, exhaustive obligation to pay the debt to capital, the life-threatening violence of profit extraction, exposure to police repression and brutality ..., but also a shared affective economy of motivation, endurance, changeability, and vitalization.”

Indisputably, the *gitanos*’ presence in space goes unrivalled—which in turn results in a striking visibility, presence, and in a strong impact on those living nearby. In fact, gathering in the *calles* and *plazas*, eating food, partying, playing football or board games, bringing chairs, tables and other forms of what could be defined as vernacular and temporary architectures expand the social(ised) space. Furthermore, the sounds, smells and sight they produce in the public space of the street often

intrude in and have implications for the private houses surrounding them. This challenges the symbolic distinction between inside and outside, the private realm and the public one—and thus become the very political stance that origins most of the conflicts in the neighbourhood. For these reasons, the *gitanos* function as a catalyst that triggers a social reaction (expressed in the forms of active citizenships), which results in disputes over the regulation and the “proper uses of *public* space”—a space only abstractly and rhetorically belonging to everyone. This “appropriation,” which in Hou’s terms portrays the “actions and manners through which the meaning, ownership, and structure of official public space can be temporarily or permanently suspended” (2010, 13), is also in relation with “pluralizing” the public space of the neighbourhood that refers to “how specific ethnic groups transform the meaning and functions of public space, which results in a more heterogeneous public sphere” (Hou 2010, 13). Interestingly, the *gitanos*’ activities also seem to fit Hou’s definition of “transgressing,” which represents the “infringement or crossing of official boundaries between the public and the domestic domains through temporary occupation as well as the production of new meanings and relationships” (Hou 2010, 13).

However, the *gitanos* are not the only actor appropriating public space in the Cabanyal. The *movimiento libertario* too produces public space through appropriating practices, but it also does so mainly through “reclaiming” ones—something that in Hou’s (2010, 13) terminology describes “the adaptation and reuse of abandoned or underutilized urban spaces for new collective functions and instrumentality.” This is the case of the Fusteria and the Samaruc, two former abandoned spaces that are now squats used for performances, assemblies, and other cultural events. “At first, we had a group that carried out sort of an appropriation of the public space, which was done through forms of collective works and events about the cohabitation between *pajos* and *gitanos*. We painted walls together, especially those signalled by the *rayas* (“stripes”) of the City Hall,” explained Matías, a Cabanyal Espai Veïnal activist. And he proceeded: “There are many spaces that are abandoned and very degraded, spaces that are empty; but they’re spaces you can use! ... For example, if the City Hall has been doing nothing for a year, then we say ‘Ok, let’s rehabilitate this *solar* on our own!’ ... We are trying to pursue this path, one in which we can have rehabilitation through a form of self-management and self-organisation. If we have spaces and we want to use them, we can just do it.”

An “uncovering” aim—representing the “making and rediscovery of public space through active reinterpretations of hidden or latent meanings and memories of the urban landscapes” (Hou 2010, 14)—characterise the attitude towards the above-mentioned *rayas*, which in the Cabanyal are deeply politicised. Those ochre stripes that marked *solares* and houses that were to be destroyed by the PEPRI constitute, in the words of many interviewees, “an abusive and stigmatising signalisation that has generated a major aesthetic degradation in the area.” Whereas the PLATA associations were pressuring the authorities for their remotion, activists of Cabanyal Espai Veïnal just did it on their own, organising an event that engaged the neighbouring population

for support and participation—exemplifying the grassroots polarisation about the legitimacy and the responsibility of the authorities when dealing with issues within the area. But the *rayas* are not the only contested feature on the walls.

The rich production of (political) graffiti also have a part in the production of a (politicised) public space. In fact, those graffiti are “meant for public consumption and therefore likely to be found in open, publically accessible areas” (Waldner and Dobratz 2013, 386–387), and embody an intrinsic contesting character. From the many explicit references to resistance (*el Cabanyal resiste*, “the Cabanyal resists,” in Calle del Rosari) to messages supporting the *gitanos* (*ninguna persona es ilegal*, “nobody is illegal,” written in both Spanish and Romanian in the area of Calle de Sant Pere), graffiti aim at “a radical interrogation of public territories,” and at “a questioning of the social relationships that define the public domain” (Brighenti 2010, 329). Those counter-hegemonic public statements, mostly written, sprayed, and painted during collective events organised by the *movimiento libertario* symbolically produce public space through the appropriation and the re-signification of neutral spaces such as walls and walkways.

While these cases represent a more symbolic aspect of the production of public space, other activities focus on its everyday and practical production, as the appropriative, uncovering, and reclaiming purposes of Cabanyal Horta exemplifies. In fact, on a sunny afternoon, Clara recollected how “this project began with a cleaning day, during which we discovered that the walking path [leading to the building of Cabanyal Horta] was a covered old street, that hasn’t been seen nor used for thirty years.” Stressing the transformation that space underwent, she expressed her happiness in seeing that “in a place where nothing happened and nobody passed by, now people are walking their dogs, or just coming to quietly sit and have a beer here, because suddenly this space is usable again.” Besides, she highlighted the markedly political character of the project: “Every stone that you move here is a political act.”

The creation of this public space (or in the case of Cabanyal Horta: a “collective space,” as I will discuss later; *ff.* 15) is here in relation with a radical critique of everyday life. As Marco, co-founder of Cabanyal Horta, pointed out during the first plenary assembly, the project is an attempt to “win back the space and time of [their] lives” through the imagination (and realisation) of a space that is not regulated by logic of profit. Lefebvre conceptualised modern power as something “stolen from the community (itself smashed and atomised into ‘private’ individuals) and turned into power over men, set up brutally above men, instead of being power over things. ... And it is precisely into things that it wishes to transform human beings, ‘depriving them’ of any real consciousness, and turning men into economic and political tools” (1991a, 252). Interestingly, the “collective work, social solidarity, and constructive entertainment” on which Cabanyal Horta is based on seems to retrace Lefebvre’s idea that “man must be everyday, or he will not be at all” (1991a, 127). His critique of everyday life pursues the goal of overcoming the alienation imposed by power through sympathetic and communal practices.

The strife against gentrification also informs the production of public space. “The current public space is a public space of consumption and capital transit. In another way, though, public space is also a space of meeting, participation, and construction of processes,” Santiago argued. Activists of Cabanyal Espai Veïnal often mentioned the growing opening of new fashion stores as a risk of a “gentrifying consumption,” and the repressive policies of the City Hall targeting the *gitanos* as a way to impose a configuration of public space that privileges order and transit over the lived experience that was essential to Lefebvre (1991b). “Public spaces are spaces that are used by people—and not just transited; and the Cabanyal has always been a neighbourhood with people outside the doors of their houses, that organised dinners, activities. ... Here you live like in a village. Well, obviously, we must try to preserve this, because if we don’t then public space becomes a space for consumption; then you can have leisure only where you pay, and not here anymore” said Juan, volunteer and among the founders of Brúfol, pointing out of the window and to the street. And he continued: “And I think that active citizenship is generated by public space. Or by making private spaces public.” This stems from the belief that “public space is a space of its neighbours, of its people. The streets are ours. They’re don’t belong to the City Council: they belong to everyone. But one must claim public space as a social, active one, a space for action,” as many activists from both grassroots poles—differently paraphrasing these words of Maria, a Cabanyal Reviu activist—repeatedly reported.

Indeed, as Juan noticed, the social production of public spaces “is also carried out in opposition to private ones.” For instance, amongst all the activities that were organised by the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal during the years of the resistance against the PEPRI, the flagship was the innovative experiment of Cabanyal Portes Obertes (“Cabanyal Open Doors”), an annual festival during which, for usually three weeks, some private houses of the neighbourhood became public showrooms for art exhibitions. This tradition, originated in 1998, stopped in 2015 with the dismissal of the PEPRI. As Cabanyal Portes Obertes came to an end, the Plataforma created Cabanyal Arxiu Viu, a project designed to develop a digital archive about the Cabanyal, and CraftCabanyal, a participatory “craftivism” art project started in 2013 that attempts to create a dialogue between private and public space based on the handcrafting and sewing practices that are generally carried out in the domestic sphere. The “transgressing” semantic shift here is twofold and specular: whereas Cabanyal Portes Obertes bring people in private houses that, throughout the festival, become open public spaces, CraftCabanyal invert this movement taking handicraft from the private sphere to the public one.

All the above-mentioned examples also fit in Hou’s most important category, “contesting,” meaning “the struggle over rights, meanings, and identities in public realm” (2010, 14), which explains the insurgent and conflicting different configurations of active citizenship in the Cabanyal. When asked about his thoughts on public space, Matías replied unexpectedly: “I understand it as that the neighbourhood belongs to all its neighbours, and that they should be in charge of

deciding what the Cabanyal is going to be. I agree very much with the people of the Plataforma about this. I do not think that the ideas we have for the neighbourhood are very different. What is different is the way we put them into practice.” As such, it seems that being an active citizenship for members of the *movimiento libertario* is a way through which counter and translate anti-capitalism, anti-gentrification and anti-establishment global discourses into their local and accessible context³. Conversely, the active citizenship pursued by the PLATA associations is politically transversal and heterogeneous; it is also narrower as a result of its already oriented and consolidated resistance against the PEPRI, and it now focuses on the immediate problems of the neighbourhood without any precise ideological orientation informing its agenda. The management of social issues such as the *gitanos*, the disputes over urban degradation and rehabilitation, the questions of access to public space and socially accepted practices, and the regulation of the economic activities constitute the core of the polarisation between the PLATA associations and the *movimiento libertario*, and would have profound implications for the identity and culture of the Cabanyal.

Exploring the conflicts

Clashing publics

“The forefront of the resistance in the Barberá’s years was the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal, and now the Plataforma is supporting the rehabilitation of the neighbourhood without any criticism of how it is going to be rehabilitated. For this reason, the other groups in the neighbourhood got together and said ‘Ok, with this new situation we will try to put up a resistance to the process of gentrification that may happen here, and we will try to bring this urgency to the rest of the neighbourhood,’” Matías, a Cabanyal Espai Veïnal activist, told me during an interview. Since the establishment of the new local government, the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal became the most legitimate and prominent interlocutor of the municipal authorities when dealing with the neighbourhood.

This implied the Plataforma’s radical change within the different publics at play in the Cabanyal. In fact, the Plataforma shifted from being a counterpublic at the time of the resistance against the PEPRI (a public opposed by the then mainstream media that, according to Sonia, defined them as “violent, and even as terrorists!”) to being a lawful and authoritative one. Furthermore, the ‘institutionalisation’ of the Plataforma and its compliance with the mainstream media—reporting mostly unfavourable and generalising news about the *gitanos* community and the *movimiento libertario* (Hortensia 2016a; 2016b)—led to a recantation of some of its previous course of action. For example, although squatting was regarded as a positive means of resistance at the time of the PEPRI, some activists from the Plataforma

³ In a way that is similar to Srnicek and Williams’ (2015) definition of “folk politics;” ff. 15–16.

Salvem el Cabanyal seem to have changed their opinion about it: arguing that more than half of the occupations don't have a political agenda, they only take into account the (negative) consequences that the occupations produce in the neighbourhood, urging the authorities to deal with the illegal status of the squatters.

Another reason of the polarisation between publics—a reflection of the polarisation between the opposing grassroots groups—is the gitanos community, which despite standing at the centre of many conflicts that polarise the grassroots associations is often deprived of the opportunity to speak for itself. Whereas activists of the *movimiento libertario* support the gitanos' integration with grassroots coexistence initiatives, the attitude of the local authorities, of many activists of the PLATA associations, and of some other residents is more inclined towards restrictive and repressive policies. In fact, in many newspapers and in the assemblies of the *Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal*, the homogeneously essentialised gitanos community is often considered a problem “for the public.” However, implicit in these ostensibly banal discourses about the public good is the exclusion of the gitanos from any notion of what constitutes “the public,” and as such they are rendered as something external, a foreign entity to a public that in the discourse of the PLATA associations and of the more conservative media is composed just of valencianos, the only legitimate depositories of the neighbourhood's public space.

In the Cabanyal, being a legitimate member of the public and a recognised citizenship status seem to be the only ways to get recognition, agency, and power (specifically in terms of the urban citizens' “right to the city”) in the structurally uneven urban democratic landscape. More importantly, status as a citizen “provides moral, political, and economic resources that underlie the ability to act and to shape the conditions in which citizenships are formed” (Staeheli 2010, 399). The conflicts over public space in the Cabanyal thus seem to reflect different hierarchies and conceptualisations of the community's membership, and most importantly of the gitanos' citizenship status.

Assisted by the mainstream media such as the *Levante*, *ABC Comunidad Valenciana*, and other Valencian journals, the PLATA group produce the perception of the gitanos as deviant non-citizens, impossible to socialise into the common, “public” norms of behaviour. Although the grassroots associations of the *movimiento libertario* try to argue for an inclusive definition of citizenship as open to integration and coexistence between different citizens, their being markedly outside of the official and legal political realm confines them to the role of subaltern counterpublic. Nonetheless, it seems the *movimiento libertario*'s definition as a counterpublic is not only an etiquette applied by the authorities. Rather, it seems to be actively (but implicitly) claiming this status, proudly affirming its autonomy from the official institutions. The *movimiento libertario*'s withdrawal from the mainstream public of the Cabanyal necessarily results in its configuration as a niche within the publics of the neighbourhood, which in turn causes some structural incompatibility (that I will discuss later) between the many actors and publics that are present in the neighbourhood.

“The difficulty faced by [every] counterpublic is that another public has greater power to control public space” (Staeheli and Thompson 1997, 36), which implicates that the discourses and initiatives carried out by the *movimiento libertario*, although potentially counter-hegemonic and more inclusive than the ones of the City Hall and the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal, have quite a limited effect—and often succumb, as I will show in the following paragraph, to the culturalized hegemonic narration.

The “culturización” of the gitanos

Undeniably, the *gitanos* community has proved to have a major prominence in the Cabanyal. Some have illegally occupied abandoned houses, they have a rather high school drop-out rate, and their late-night parties or the recent reports of cockfights organised in the streets generate a “coexistence problem” that causes dissatisfaction and complaints among some of the Spanish neighbours. In addition, as many PLATA associations’ activists repeatedly denounced, some *gitanos* are responsible for the large drug trade that is one of the major issues affecting the neighbourhood (see also Parrilla 2015b). And I could often witness it myself: it was not uncommon that people, mostly *gitanos* and North Africans, asked passers-by if they were interested in buying drugs, especially in the area of Calle de Padre Luis Navarro and Calle de Pescadors. According to many research participants, the abundance of drug trafficking is the most heated cause of conflict that impedes the “normality” (ff. 27–28) desired by many Cabanyal’s residents.

The topic was a keystone of many assemblies, of both the *movimiento libertario* and the PLATA group. The latter was indeed more critical towards it, as I could witness in many assemblies and initiatives of the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal. Depicting the *gitanos* as a problematic and almost alien entity, presuming their real or imagined resistance to integration (or rather: assimilation) in the *pajos*’ cultural norms and standards, PLATA members added an ethnic and cultural nuance to the social conflict occurring in the neighbourhood through the frequent reports and meetings with the local authorities. This resulted in ethnic biases in the police’s profiling and control based on some distinctive somatic traits, and, as I could observe in many PLATA associations’ assemblies in an undifferentiated scapegoating of the whole *gitanos* community that rarely considers any individual variables.

Interestingly, the *culturización* (“culturization”), as it was defined almost unanimously by members of the *movimiento libertario*, of the problems concerning the *gitanos* is one of the thorniest subjects at stake. In the words of some interviewees close to PLATA group, in some press releases, and in the assemblies of the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal, speakers and writers would always add an ethnic marker whenever reporting issues concerning *gitanos*—“niños” becoming “niños *gitanos*,” “mujeres” becoming “mujeres *gitanas*,” and so on. This addition employed to designate somebody’s deviance or fault thus results in a conflict pursued by ethnic and cultural means. “The campaign against the acoustic pollution is a dissembled racist one. Why aren’t people complaining about the noise coming from La Fabrica

de Hielo?” Clara pointed out in an assembly of Cabanyal Espai Veinal, referring to a nearby hipster place that plays club music until quite late at night. As a result, activist of *movimiento libertario* privilege reading the conflict in terms of class—and they brand the PLATA associations’ culturalized discourses as a “criminalisation of poverty.”

The (non-)integration of the *gitanos* in the Cabanyal’s community could then be analysed through a framework that does not overstate the importance of the ethnic division, but that focuses on the economic, political and social components through which the ethnic (and cultural) discourses are pursued and operationalised. Besides, despite the academic deconstruction to which culture and ethnicity have been subjected, these two concepts play a pivotal role in the gaining of the state’s political recognition through “ethnic” and “cultural minorities” statuses (see also Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). This is exactly the case of the Cabanyal, where a part of *gitanos* community wants to participate in the policies that will be drafted by the municipal government, and they want to be valid partners in the process based on the recognition “of [their] ethnic and cultural diversity” (Parrilla 2015a). Nonetheless, addressing inequalities through ethnic discourses risks to translate the claims for the present-day civil rights into ethnic ones (Baumann 1999, 2), thus creating and reinforcing, instead of blurring and overcoming, social boundaries that separate groups and people (see also Appadurai 1996, 12; Amselle 1990).

“You cannot deny that there are areas in the Cabanyal where there is noise. And you cannot make noise from Monday to Thursday—we can agree on that. Another thing is that the *gitanos* are criminalised for the noise. I think they are different things. People who do not respect the rules of coexistence are ‘people who do not respect the rules of coexistence,’ they are not ‘*gitanos* who do not respect the rules of coexistence’.” The question raised by Juan brings us to the discussion about the fran’s soundscape, its implication with public space, and the outcome of the conflict posed by the issue.

Soundscape and public time

The question of the neighbourhood’s soundscape seems to be deeply intertwined with the problem of public space—as Alejandro, artist and activist of the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal, confirmed in an interview: “Each place has a public space with its own characteristics. Public space is not the same here, in the centre, or in neighbourhoods like Rusafa or Benimaclet. Each public space has different characteristics. The Cabanyal has a very fragile public space, because most of the houses are low, and are very close to the street [see Fig. 1, 13]. Therefore, they have a very direct connection to the street, and they’re very sensitive to what happens there. ... So, this is an extremely fragile public space. And it’s subject to a series of degradations that still complicates the possible coexistence in the public space. It’s

a different public space, a very particular one, and very different from other contexts.”



Figure 1: The height of the buildings in the Cabanyal: in green the ones with one floor; in yellow the ones with two; in orange the ones with three.

(Source: http://vacabanyal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/posters/1.FISICO_complet2.pdf; Accessed March 21, 2017)

Sound has a pivotal role in shaping the environment. It transcends walls, windows—space itself—it's charged with a strong social(ising) power. As Merleau-Ponty (2002, 262) puts it, “[m]usic is not in visible space, but it besieges, undermines and displaces that space.” I thus started to consider those *gitanos*' night music and parties as one of the contested ways of making space public. But “words move, music moves / only in time,” chants T. S. Eliot in his *Four Quartets*: if the ‘publicity’ of the space is in relation with its soundscape (the “music” and the “words”), then the latter is in relation with time. I thus thought of the use of the concept of public time in addition to the one of public space, because, to some extent, the two are complementary: no space is given without time.

For public time, I hereby mean the temporal suitability imposed by power over certain social activities, which can be framed in terms of Foucault's “biopower,” “discipline” and “biopolitics” (Foucault 2003; 2007). Indeed, it is by no coincidence that most of the *gitanos* partying at night are the same whose livelihood is based on drug dealing. Being left out of the public policies has shaped the *gitanos* community as a forgotten public (and more importantly: as “forgotten citizens”) that, not having the same obligations and responsibilities of the others, has developed an alternative way of living. The exclusion from the public productive system results in their exclusion from the working hours that dictate the rhythm of the neighbouring population. Nonetheless, the *gitanos*' subjectivity, which I interpret in the sense suggested by Ortner of “the basis of ‘agency’, a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon” (2005, 34), seems to be lacking the politicised reflectivity that characterises the two poles of grassroots associations. For this reason, the resistance against their reduction to “docile bodies” (Foucault 1979) configures their deviant behaviour as an unstructured counter-hegemonic attempt, that, without pursuing a political agenda, challenges the biopolitics deployed to manage the population.

Adding a temporal connotation to space (and a spatial connotation to time) helps to understand the reasons of some of the main grievances at work in the *Cabanyal* and to enrich the discussion about public space at large. In fact, time (as space) can be subject to contestation and be the arena in which meanings, practices, uses, access, and regulations are questioned—which in turn poses questions of rights and responsibilities regarding citizenship. However, this question would require some extensive analysis that cannot be addressed in this article. Instead, the following paragraph focuses on the consequences produced by the violations within public time and public space.

Public space and public order

As the facts that I just mentioned above point out, the differences in the social, cultural, and power capital among the *pajos* and the *gitanos* clearly affect the outcome of how space should be configured. Undoubtedly, this unevenness calls for an analytical rethinking of the idea of the ‘publicity’ as a space of conflict and

exclusion, in which banal discourses can result into the consolidation of unequal power structures.

In November 2016, following a meeting between some representatives of the Plataforma and the municipal authorities concerning the drugs trade and the nocturnal acoustic pollution in the Cabanyal, there was an extreme intensification of police patrolling. This caused some agitation among some of the *gitanos* involved in the drug trade, but the traffic of illegal substances and the night parties proceeded despite the political shift. Indeed, the increasing police control issued by the policies of the City Hall (and the underlying *culturización*) seems to be a sign of an inclination towards a public space that sacrifices inclusion, dialogue and the possibility of coexistence in favour of an over-imposed coercion, control and normativity. Nonetheless, the project of tripartite City Hall seems to follow the PLATA associations' demands for restoring the "normality" of the neighbourhood. "I believe that the what we need is to pacify our local society, which has been suffering from this ill coexistence for many years, and which is tired of living like this and wants to recover a *normal* daily life. And for normal I mean normal for everyone," stated Sonia of the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal.

Implicit in this banal request there is an assumption regarding the definition of normality that conceals a political judgment. Frequently, during the assemblies of the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal, activists proposed "to think of the problems of the Cabanyal as not only affecting the member of our association, but all the residents of the neighbourhood," which posed questions about the representativity of each group's claims. The difference in the social, cultural and power capital among the grassroots associations results, instead of in a desired "normality," in a heavily politicised "normalisation" of each group's ideas about public space (see also Kingwell 2008).

Whereas the PLATA associations support the coincidence of public space and public order (or rather the *ordering of the public*), the *movimiento libertario* seems to echo Nina Power's words: "The police are not the public, and never were; public space, it turns out, is never ours and public order hangs like a ghostly shroud over all social life ... The public is dead! Long live the public!" (Power 2013). The struggle against a "normative and normalizing reduction of the political to juridical reason" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, 177) forms and informs new contested conceptualisations of public space and citizenship, and serves as a counter-hegemonic attempt expressed through collectivism, activism, and performative acts of insurgent citizenship. In fact, opposing the current policies and affirming that "the conflict between neighbours cannot be managed by the police," members of the *movimiento libertario* planned and organised social events with the support of Brúfol and Millorem el Cabanyal. The goal of such events followed the focus proposed in many assemblies of Cabanyal Espai Veïnal, which entailed a shift "from the necessity of the police and social services" to the fact that "the neighbourhood's grassroots associations might and should be responsible for the mediation, generating coexistence, sociality and community." Interestingly, the *movimiento*

libertario's pursuit of public space seems to fit Franck and Stevens' definition of "loose space," "a space apart from the aesthetically and behaviourally controlled and homogeneous 'theme' environment of leisure and consumption where nothing unpredictable must occur" (2006, 3).

Consequences, limits and possibilities of public-space-informed claims

The limits of bridging initiatives and counter-hegemonic alternatives

When asked about the nature of the Cabanyal Horta, Clara, activist and co-founder of the project, answered "It is a neighbourhood movement for the recovery of public space, that aims to turn it into a collective one." I was baffled by such a subtle distinction, and in the following meetings I asked if she could elaborate more about this nuance. "The characteristics of collective spaces are the sense of belonging and collectivism that those spaces are able to instil in those who participate in them, and the fact that they are markedly outside of the official political realm," she explained. And indeed, Cabanyal Horta's experience exemplifies it perfectly: an everyday collective work, an "ethical" space in which time is spent together relaxing or participating in workshops, projections, and other social, political, and cultural events.

This "collective" nuance could easily be applied to most of the initiatives of the *movimiento libertario* at large. Despite their originality and ambition, though, those strategies are far from being the antidote to all the problems of the Cabanyal. The *movimiento libertario*'s activities seem to fit Srnicek and Williams' (2015, 11–12) definition of "folk politics," those forms of horizontalism, contemporary anarchist-tinged politics, political localism, ethical consumerism (to name just a few) that "typically remain reactive (responding to actions initiated by corporations and governments, rather than initiating actions); ignore long-term strategic goals in favour of tactics (mobilising around single-issue politics or emphasising process); prefer practices that are often inherently fleeting (such as occupations and temporary autonomous zones); ... and express [themselves] as a predilection for the voluntarist and spontaneous over the institutional (as in the romanticisation of rioting and insurrection)."

As the two authors notice, "folk politics is necessary but insufficient for a postcapitalist political project" (Srnicek and Williams 2015, 12). The limits of such initiatives in the Cabanyal are the admittedly minor impact on the whole neighbourhood and their long-term inefficacy on a broader scale, the risks of "cultural paternalism" for speaking up for the *gitanos*' rights, a stigmatisation for being so radical and anti-establishment, and of course the personal costs for such a totalising life choice such as squatting. Furthermore, the so proudly claimed autonomy causes complications in creating transversal alliances with any institution that receives public support.

Also showing a sensibility for collectivism, the EDUSI was configured as a collaborative four months process of co-design and co-writing of a strategy between

citizens and administration. Despite the sampled spectrum of opinions, the goal of an adequate representation that would have accounted for the true heterogeneity of the neighbourhood in the decision-making process only partially succeeded. As Ignacio, spokesperson and one of the responsible of the EDUSI, recollected, the participants in the co-writing and co-design process were around 300, a small fraction of the more than 20,000 residents of the Cabanyal. Furthermore, four months were not enough for building rapport and establishing a fruitful cooperation with all the groups that were mapped during the preparatory phases—especially with the *gitanos* community and the *movimiento libertario*.

In fact, many activists of the *movimiento libertario* did not recognise the authority and legitimacy of the EDUSI platform, thus refusing to participate on their associations' behalf and implicitly withdrawing from the mainstream public. However, some activists joined the process on an individual level, and mostly to express their concerns about the possible gentrification that the rehabilitation of the Cabanyal could produce. This, Ignacio reported, caused heated discussions, as some representatives of the PLATA associations mildly rooted for the consequences that the gentrification would bring, while some others completely denied the possibility of gentrification in the area.

The implications of this irreconcilability thus seem to ask: whose claims are authoritative? Besides, in regard to the *gitanos*, the EDUSI raised concerns about the reasons for which the participation of certain sectors of the population was not achieved. Are only the ones who participated entitled to shape the future of the neighbourhood? Why did not everybody participate? The answers to those questions are to be found in the politicisation of participation, responsibility, and inclusivity, and in the uneven power relationships in which the citizen participation in the Cabanyal seems to stagnate.

Different imaginations (or Few notes on citizen participation)

This investigation provides another ethnographic example of the exclusion of a part of the population from public space, the community and the public at large. What has proved to be most difficult throughout the whole research was to identify who is excluding whom. The intrinsic complexity of the issue poses questions that regard the means through which create an inclusive community, questions that compose the core of the debate about citizenship, citizen participation and public space itself. For this reason, it appears that the associations of the *movimiento libertario* are trying to establish their identity as members of a public, but without participating in the *de facto* mainstream public community of the neighbourhood (see also Staeheli and Thompson 1997). The *movimiento libertario*'s absence in bridging initiatives such as the EDUSI or in the general assemblies and initiatives of the Plataforma Salvem el Cabanyal is motivated by its non-recognition of the institutions' legitimacy and by the interpretation of the municipal rehabilitation as an attempt to impose a neoliberal scheme over the public space of the Cabanyal. The *gitanos* community, which, as I showed, is systematically excluded from the public

by the PLATA associations and the media, is expected to remain constrained between the two grassroots poles' claims if it doesn't effectively start to speak up for itself.

The confusion pertaining questions of who has access, rights and entitlement to claim the 'publicity' of space is the semantic and political arena in which practices, meanings and policies are negotiated. For this reason, the concept of public space functions as the last bastion of a grounded, physical resistance to the impositions, controls, and regulations of the state, capable of imagining unprecedented alternative possibilities for a sustainable and inclusive citizenship. However, at a theoretical level, both grassroots groups' claims about the publicity of space "highlights a common theme in contemporary political discourse in which the rights of citizenship are contrasted with the responsibilities of citizens. Political discourse is full of embracing terms such as community, citizenship, participation, and membership; ... But these warm words conceal fundamental differences in the ways citizenship is conceptualized" (Staeheli and Thompson 1997, 37; see also Mitchell 2003).

As I have shown, the *gitanos*' accountability in the production of public space, the question concerning their citizenship status, the *movimiento libertario*'s configuration as an anti-establishment counterpublic, the culturalized frustration of the PLATA associations' activists and the restrictive policies of the City Hall are the ground in which the conceptualisations of public space and citizenship are formed, expressed and contested. The continuous debates over the significations of those rights and responsibilities tell the ongoing strive between an open, inclusive, and socially diverse public space versus another that privileges conformity, transit and order.

Conclusion

This article set out to address the research problem of the contested character of public space as a way through which propose and activate active citizenship practices that aim to condition the urban and social rehabilitation of the Cabanyal. By problematising the abstract and rhetoric publicity of space and the consequent different conceptualisations of active citizenship, this research calls for a broader and more problematic analysis that stresses how those two concepts are necessarily—and not just contingently—articulated by power.

For this reason, I explored the practical and discursive means by which public space gets operationalised by different actors and grassroots associations. I then outlined some of the reasons for which the "public" connotation of space may result in a trigger for active citizenship(s). However, as the influences and disjunctures between powers, capital and economy show, public space and active citizenship are something whose definitions can be shaped according to different interests and social and cultural capital—and, most importantly, by those who are already in the higher hierarchical position to make choices about it. By looking at public space as a composition of uneven publics all claiming their share of ownership, I examined the polarisation between the grassroots' imaginations of the neighbourhood, which raises issues and conflicts about the citizenship status of some members of the

community and their legitimacy within the public sphere. The parallel questions of public time and public order served to explore the normativity inherent to public space, and the potential normalisation of customs and behaviours as an expression of hegemonic power. Finally, I analysed the limits and possibilities of those public-space-informed claims, which led to broader reflections about citizen participation and representation.

“Still an ideal worth striving for” (Asad 2003, 184), the claims informed by public space in the Cabanyal have functioned so far as a renewing, innovative and aggregative tool through which form and substantiate the aspirations and frustrations of its residents, along with new configurations of active citizenship. Despite its intrinsically potential normative character, public space can be thought of as an unevenly structured multi-vocal sphere always on the edge of turning into an exclusionary place: therein lies the struggle of continuously producing and reproducing it through practices of active citizenship that try to overcome the ethnic, cultural and class boundaries.

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