Can Social Innovation be the Answer? The Role of Citizen Action in the Face of Increasing Socio-Spatial Polarization

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Introduction
The burst of the housing bubble in 2008 signalled the beginning of a long and profound economic crisis with dramatic social consequences in Spain. Several studies have highlighted some of these consequences, such as the massive loss of jobs, a significant increase in different modalities of poverty (income, food, energy), housing exclusion and a sharp growth in income inequalities (see FOESSA, 2013). However, the spatial dimension of the crisis remains largely unexplored. This paper addresses this gap in the literature, coping with two set of questions directly related with the urban impacts of the crisis and with the social responses that emerge in urban areas.

The first set of questions has to do with the impacts of the crisis upon the socio-spatial configuration of cities, focusing our attention in the case of Catalonia (Spain). Which is the reflection of phenomena such as unemployment, poverty and housing exclusion on the urban space? How the social costs of the crisis are distributed across different types of urban areas? Which are the particular effects of the crisis in disadvantaged neighbourhoods? How social and spatial inequalities interact under these circumstances? We approach such type of questions through a systematic analysis of the dynamics of urban segregation in Catalonia in the period 2001-2012. Such analysis allows us to contextualise the impacts of the crisis in the frame of the residential transformations that took place in the country during the years of the housing bubble (García, 2010; Coq-Huelva, 2013).

By analysing this type of question, the paper engages with the international debate on the spatial dimension of social inequality and injustice (Cheshire, 2007; Soja, 2010; Secchi, 2013). We show that the increase of social inequalities in Catalonia has gone hand in hand with a growing socio-spatial polarization of the population. Such process of polarization intensified in the years of the housing boom as a result of the combined effect of a sharp increase in housing prices and a rapid growth of immigration. The crisis has seriously aggravated the living conditions in the areas that specialized in the concentration of the population with fewer resources, and it has widened the gap between the poorest and the richest urban areas. The case of Catalonia allows us to state that social inequality dynamics are far from being neutral in spatial terms. This case also shows that ‘austerity urbanism’ (Peck, 2013) not only entails growing social inequality but also an increasing separation of different and unequal social groups across the urban space, threatening urban social cohesion levels reached in the past.