AALBORG UNIVERSITY COPENHAGEN

Master's Thesis in Techno-Anthropology

Citizen participation in a neoliberal context: 'empty ritual or real power'[1]?

Analyzing the project to redesign *La Rambla* avenue in Barcelona

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[1] Arnstein, 1969.

"Je participe,

tu participes,

il participe,

nous participons,

vous participez,

ils décident."[2]

(Anarchist slogan)

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[2] I participate, you participate, he participates, we participate, you participate, they decide.

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Resumé

Konceptet og spørgsmålet vedrørende borgerinddragelse er i stigende grad blevet diskuteret, teoretiseret og anvendt i mange byer gennem det sidste årti. Der er kommet flere eksempler på inddragelsesværktøjer udviklet af byråd eller anvendelse af værktøjer og metoder inden for særlige områder, der har til formål at skabe kommunalpolitik i sammenråd med andre interessenter og byens borgere. Involveringen af borgerene i beslutningsprocessen bliver i stigende grad set som en måde at forbedre demokratiet, at skabe åbenhed og transparens i beslutningsprocessen samt at tilpasse udviklingen til borgerens behov og virkelighed. Samtidig er konceptet i høj grad et eksempel på et abstrakt begreb uden nogen klar definition eller stor ilæggende beslutningskraft. Begrebet bliver ofte misbrugt af byråd, der begrænser mulighederne for inddragelse og indflydelse, eller som bruger konceptet som argument til at legitimere den endelige beslutning, der herefter bliver belagt med den sociale acceptable etiket for borgerdeltagelse. I et sådant tilfælde opstår behovet for en kritisk analyse, der ser på borgerinddragelsesprocessen ud fra kriterier om mål og virkninger.

Denne afhandling analyserer den åbne inddragelsesproces afholdt i Barcelona vedrørende et re-design af deres gågade *La Rambla. La Rambla* er et eksempel på et offentligt felt, der i stigende grad bliver påvirket af private aktører, og som kan ses som et eksempel på paradigmet om den neoliberale by. Denne *case* vil blive brugt til at forstå, hvordan en borgerinddragelsesproces bliver gennemført – og til hvilken grad – i en sådan kompliceret kontekst. Formålet med nærværende undersøgelse er at skabe en refleksion over, om hvorvidt Barcelonas inddragelsesproces er et eksempel på et "empty ritual" (Arnstein, 1969) eller en måde at tildele borgeren "real power" (Ibid.)

I opgavens analyseafsnit vil ekspertteamet, der styrede *La Rambla Project*, blive brugt som kilde til at følge inddragelsesprocessen. Analysen vil undersøge, hvordan der blev skabt et netværk rundt om gågaden og de *interessement* enheder, der blev brugt til at tiltrække relevante aktører – de potentielle deltagere. Analysen af disse mekanismer vil rejse en række spørgsmål, der vil blive besvaret i diskussionsafsnittet. Spørgsmålene her vil omhandle begrænsningerne af *interessement* enhederne, teamlederens legitimerende rolle og metodens indflydelse på processen. Derudover vil analysen se på, hvordan borgerinddragelsen forløb i *La Rambla Project* ved en beskrivelse af en workshop for borgere afholdt af ekspertteamet. Til sidst bliver den digitale platforms, kaldt *Decidim.Barcelona,* rolle i inddragelsesprocessen analyseret, samt hvilken betydning ekspertholdet tillagde den. Denne del relaterer sig til spørgsmålet om byrådets intentioner, hvilket vil blive behandlet i diskussionsafsnittet.

I diskussionsafsnittet foretages en kritisk undersøgelse af den brugte inddragelsesmodel som beskrevet i analysen og vil derefter besvare de før stillede spørgsmål ved en refleksion over de gældende forhold givet for borgerinddragelse. I afsnittet vil også ekspertholdet og Barcelonas Byråds roller blive diskuteret, samtidig med at der vil blive sat spørgsmålstegn ved deres mål og agenda i forhold til deres respektive diskurser og praksisser.

Ved en analyse af *La Rambla-casen* er afhandlingens intention ikke kun at forstå, hvad borgerinddragelse i en kompleks neoliberal og urban kontekst er, men også at vise interesser og *inputs* fra en række af de gældende stemmer, der findes i feltet – fra den offentlig fortælling til de mere kritiske røster.

På baggrund af undersøgelsen kan det konkluderes, at selvom Barcelona-*casen* viser en interessant udvikling i forhold til borgerinddragelse skabt af ekspertholdets tilgang og deres perspektiver på konceptet, er der stadig lang vej til en tildeling af magt og indflydelse til borgeren, som er den beskrevne intention hos en række teoretikere (Arnstein, 1969; Lefebvre, 1996 [1969]).

Abstract

The issue of citizen participation has been increasingly discussed, theorized and tested in many cities during the last decade. There are more and more cases of city councils developing participation tools or areas within their structures with the aim of co-producing municipal policies jointly with other stakeholders and citizens. However, the concept has become one of those abstract categories with no particular meaning and a great invoking power. It tends to be misused by governments who give very limited conditions for participation or who use it to legitimize whatever decision is finally taken, which becomes coated with the socially acceptable label of citizen participation. In this situation, the development of a critical current that analyses citizen participation processes to thresh their goals and effects becomes necessary.

This thesis analyzes the open participative process in Barcelona to redesign its main avenue *La Rambla*. La Rambla is an example of a public realm that is being increasingly intertwined with private forces, and it is the paradigm of the neoliberal city. In that sense, the case is used to understand how citizen participation takes place –and to what degree– in such an intricate context. The aim of this project is to reflect on whether the Barcelona case of citizen participation is an "empty ritual" (Arnstein, 1969) or a way to actually transfer "real power" (Ibid.) to citizens.

The analysis of the case will take the expert team who leads the *La Rambla* project as a guiding element to follow the participative process. The creation of a network around the avenue and the *interessement* devices used to attract the relevant actors will be analyzed. The way in which participation takes place in the *La Rambla* project will be also addressed, reflecting on the given conditions and limitations. The role of the digital platform entitled *Decidim.Barcelona* in the participative process and the use that the expert team made of it will also be analyzed.

By analysing the case of *La Rambla,* the intention of this thesis is not only to understand what is citizen participation in such a complex neoliberal urban context, but also to gather the inputs of some of the different voices surrounding it, from the official ones to the most critical ones. The project concludes that while the Barcelona case brings some interesting improvements to the notion of citizen participation thanks to the approach of the expert team and their perspective on the concept, it is still far from the transfer of power to citizens that some authors (Arnstein, 1969; Lefebvre, 1996 [1969]) describe.

Keywords

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1.Introduction

Citizen participation has become during the last years in one of those abstract categories with no particular meaning and a great invoking power. It is frequent to hear city councils and governments' representatives talking about the concept of citizen participation. The process to involve citizens in the decision-making of cities is being increasingly seen as a way to improve democracy and make it more open, transparent and adapted to citizen's realities. More and more participation tools, channels or areas within the institutions' structures are being created. However, the concept is not always combined with the proper approach and conditions to implement it.

The notion of participation enables several opportunities to achieve changes and improvements in the government of our cities. But as many other hyped concepts and mechanisms intended to adapt democracy to our times, there are also misuses of the concept. Participation is sometimes exploited as a way to legitimate political decisions by affirming that citizens have been heard and they have *participated* in those decisions, or even to eliminate opposition and rebellious movements by absorbing and channelling them into participation.

The conditions given to that kind of processes are in many cases limited and constrained in a way that citizens are only consulted and the final decisions become coated with the socially acceptable label of 'citizen participation'. The misuse of the concept tends to focus solely on the methods of the process, creating very specific and detailed mechanisms to centralize participation. In some occasions, for instance, the use of technology monopolizes the processes and is presented as a solution by itself, pretending that the mere creation of a digital tool will automatically make the process transparent and contribute to a direct democracy. The side effect of this wrong approach is that citizen involvement, which is the crucial part of this concept, is left aside. To focus on the methods over the content and participants tends to contribute to a poor debate on who should be involved. It is a way of answering a *who* with a *how* (LaCol, 2016). If the final goal of participation is to empower those unheard voices, the tools and methods should be subordinate to that end and contribute to achieving it, instead of be seen as a goal in themselves. In that regard, questioning the end of the concept is a relevant fact as well.

In this situation, the development of a critical current that analyses citizen participation processes to thresh their goals and effects becomes necessary. The articulation of a discourse

to define the concept and establish the conditions that surround it might contribute to making better processes. Also, it might ensure that such mechanisms contribute to empower citizens and to co-create policies with them instead of just being used to legitimate decisions made by the administration.

This thesis focuses on a participative process that takes place in the city of Barcelona, where the City Council opened a public competition in the spring of 2017 to redesign its famous avenue *La Rambla*. The goal of the project was to develop and apply a urban plan that was approved by the previous government of the city. The process is framed within the city's renovated participation area, which main novelty is the digital platform *Decidim.Barcelona*[3]. The platform is intended to centralise all participative processes of the city in a tool in which citizens can sign in and create an account to contribute to the different open processes, both online and offline. The details of the tool Decidim.Barcelona will be addressed in the 'Analysis' chapter of this thesis.

The transdisciplinary team called Km-Zero –further described in the next chapter– won the public competition to run the La Rambla project, and started working on it in November 2017. Their goal was to map all the affected actors and getting their input on the problems and possible solutions of the avenue. Then they would co-create a final project document with them that would include the strategies that will supposedly be applied by the city council in 2019. More details of the La Rambla project are described in the next chapter, 'Introduction to the Field'.

One of the reasons for using this case is the fact that Barcelona in general and the avenue La Rambla in particular are taken in this thesis as an example of an intricate context for citizen participation. They represent the hazy notion of a public realm that is increasingly intertwined with private forces, which will be addressed throughout this thesis. Therefore, the critical analysis and discussion of this case might contribute to understand the notion of participation in detail in order to question its most 'official' and constrained version.

1.1 Outline of the thesis

This thesis starts by approaching the open participative process in Barcelona. Its context is described in the 'Introduction to the field' chapter, including the particularities of the La Rambla project and its main actors and structures.

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[3] 'We decide. Barcelona'.

The 'Methodology' chapter describes the development of the focus that took place in the initial phases of this thesis. It also lists the ethnographic methods used to collect data from the La Rambla project and describes the field of this project, explaining those areas in which observation was done. Lastly, this chapter introduces the informants interviewed in the context of this thesis and their relevance for the investigation.

The 'Theoretical framework' chapter starts with the presentation of the debate that has surrounded the notion of citizen participation in the last decade, and brings back the thought of some authors that discussed the topic more than forty years ago. Moreover, their relevance in our current context is shown as an argument of the need for revision that the concept needs. The critical thought of some authors such as Arnstein (1969) or Lefebvre (1996 [1969]) is used in this thesis to question what is referred to as the 'official' definitions of participation, which are those given by governments and other public authorities. The debate addressed in said section articulates a grid that determines the way of approaching participation used in this thesis. Therefore, the above authors' theories are complemented with the thought of more recent authors that continue the same line of critique and some others that hold what in this thesis is considered a more conciliatory approach, halfway between the 'official' definitions of the concept and its most vehement critiques. The 'Theoretical framework' chapter also describes what is seen as the context for participation: the public realm and the neoliberal system. The former is described to clarify which understanding of it is used in this thesis since it is the *battleground* where participation takes place. The latter is explained due to its relevance and impact on the public realm and the way it frames a very specific version of citizen participation. The theoretical chapter also describes other related debates on participation, such as that of Co-Design, and their relevance to this thesis. Lastly, it describes the techno-anthropological perspective used in this thesis and the relevance of further theories such as Actor-Network Theory.

The 'Analysis' chapter addresses the creation of a network that takes place in the La Rambla project, taking the Km-Zero expert team, who leads the project and will be described in the upcoming section, as a guiding element during the participative process. The interessement devices used to attract citizens to the network are analyzed too, which will raise a set of questions regarding the legitimizing role of the expert team leader and the impacts of the methods on the participative process. The way in which participation takes place in the La Rambla project is described as well, with the analysis of one of the open workshops with

citizens held in the avenue. Lastly, the role of the digital platform entitled *Decidim*.Barcelona is also addressed in the 'Analysis' chapter, which will open some questions regarding the role of Barcelona City Council.

The 'Discussion' chapter of this thesis problematizes on the type of participation described in the 'Analysis' chapter. In order to do so, it addresses the questions raised in the previous chapter and reflects on their impact on participation and its conditions. Consequently, the roles of the expert team and the City Council are described, together with their goals and agendas. Their practices and effects on the process, such as the use of the digital platform, will be compared with their discourses.

The thesis will end by concluding, on the one hand, that the Barcelona case brings some positive examples that can contribute to improve the way in which citizen participation is used. That is the case of the expert team, whose methods promote a transparent process and capacitate citizens to participate in a deeper way, understanding the project in its entirety and the mode of operation of the city.

On the other hand, the results of this case are considered as still far from the understanding of participation promoted by the authors above. It is not a case where "real power" (Arnstein, 1969) is transferred to citizens who will in the last term affect the decision-making of policies. It will be concluded that the analysis of La Rambla project might contribute to continue articulating a critical discourse of participation and a revision of those processes entitled as that.

At this point and after the outline of the thesis, the links of the Barcelona case with the broader debate on citizen participation will be addressed in the following section.

1.2 Problem formulation

Responding to the above-mentioned interest of this thesis in the discussion on citizen participation, and in relation to the La Rambla project, the focus on the case was established as follows:

How and to what degree does citizen participation take place in the project to redesign La Rambla avenue in Barcelona?

In relation to the problem formulation, a set of sub-questions arises as relevant to the case. They revolve around the different understandings of participation, according to Barcelona City Council, to the expert team leading the project, and to the different actors surrounding the case. The given conditions for participation to take place will be also questioned.

1.3 The connection with the broader debate

La Rambla –further described in the 'introduction to the field' chapter– represents one of the most critical areas of Barcelona city as it gathers many different actors and stakeholders: commercial guilds, neighbours, and a disproportionate amount of tourist, among others. Altogether they represent the perfect example of a public realm increasingly intertwined with private forces –addressed in the 'theoretical framework' chapter–. According to some authors (Arnstein, 1969), *real* and deep participation can only take place in bottom-up processes where private stakeholders do not have a previous particular interest to invest in. The analysis of La Rambla case might be a good way of understanding how participation takes place in the opposite type of context, probably in one of the more complex ones.
In order to do so, the open participative process will be followed and some of their elements will be analyzed. Those are the role of the team Km-Zero and the city council, the creation of a network of participants to be included in the project, and the conditions of participation given in the process.

By analysing the case of La Rambla, the intention of this thesis is not only to understand what is citizen participation in such a complex urban context, but also to gather the inputs of some of the different voices surrounding it, from the official ones to the most critical ones. With this research, the project aims to reflect on whether the Barcelona case of citizen participation is an "empty ritual" (Arnstein, 1969) or a way to actually transfer "real power" (Ibid.) to citizens. The reflections that come out of it will be used to discuss the notion of participation and thus contribute to the broader debate on the same topic.

2. Introduction to the Field

This chapter addresses the case that will be analyzed during in this thesis. It is a first approach to the field that will frame the research. The context of the avenue and the situation that gave place to the participative process will be described, as well as the team that leads the project to redesign the avenue. Lastly, the process details such as the time frame and the expectations of the project to redesign the avenue will be briefly introduced.

The aim of this chapter is to contextualize the concept of participation in its given frame within Barcelona city. Thus the particular case analyzed in this thesis will be understood on its context, with a description of the avenue itself.

2.1 Terminology

La Rambla or *Les Rambles*: The official name of the avenue is La Rambla. The word in Catalan and Spanish means dry riverbed. The avenue is popularly known as *Les Rambles* in Catalan or *Las Ramblas* in Spanish, which is the name in plural.

The official name of the participatory process of the avenue is Les Rambles, taking the popular version of the name.

In order to avoid confusion and due to the number of times that the name will be mentioned in this thesis, both the project and the avenue will be referred to as La Rambla, without the use of italics. Some of the quotes, however, might contain the name Les Rambles as most of the informants refer to the avenue by that name.

(Km-Zero) Expert team: It is the name that will be used to define the group of professionals named Km-Zero who lead the project of redesigning the avenue. It is the English translation of the name used by Barcelona City Council to refer to the team.

Cooperative citizen groups: In Catalan *Grups Cooperatius Ciutadans (GCC)*. They are made out of public servants, external professionals, and expert citizen coming from a diverse range of entities such as associations or social movements. There are four groups: 'movement', 'labour and economy', 'culture and equipments' and 'community and public space'. Altogether they represent the core structure that operates the cooperative project of La Rambla, with the expert team. These will be defined in more occasions during the thesis, due to the length of the text.

The (participative) process and **the project**: Process in the particular case of Barcelona will be used to refer to the participation area that hosts La Rambla project. The later, instead, will be used to refer to the particular project that the expert team Km-Zero is developing.

Decidim.Barcelona: The name of the participation platform or tool that Barcelona City Council created, that hosts La Rambla project among many other participative processes in the city. Due to the number of times it will be mentioned in this text, the use of italics will be avoided.

2.2 La Rambla Avenue

La Rambla or *Les Rambles*, as it is popularly known in Catalan, is probably the most famous avenue in Barcelona (see Figure 1). It traverses the city center from *Plaça Catalunya*, the central square, all the way down to the sea.

Figure 1. La Rambla Avenue. (Image courtesy of: Mathieu Marquer).

As its name indicates –dry riverbed–, it was once a riverbed that limited the old city in its west side. When the walls of the city were built in the XV century, the stream of water was redirected so the avenue could be built. From its very beginning it was a wide avenue that invited to promenades. Many convents were progressively built along the avenue, attributing it with a more urbanized appearance (Romea Castro, 1994). The famous Spanish event of 1835 when several convents were burned in Barcelona in the middle of the Spanish Carlist Wars (Ibid.), and its consequential liberal confiscation of the lands, made that many of those

liberated spaces were used to build public equipments that are still present in our times. The above are the more important historical events in the formation of the avenue, that from that moment on went through different urbanisation processes.

During the last fifteen years, the commercial operations conducted in the avenue have been almost entirely directed to the touristic business, which contributed to decrease the presence of local population living in it. It has also been progressively avoided by Barcelona citizens and almost exclusively transited by tourists. There has also been a recent conflict regarding the situation of the old kiosks along the avenue, which made that commercial guilds fought with the city council for the control of those kiosks.

The conflictive situation reached to a top in the last few years, which made that the former government of the city approve a urban plan demanded by the economic lobbies and neighbours. Said plan is going to be applied through the development of the aforementioned participative process opened by the actual government of the city. The project to redesign the avenue will be lead by Km-Zero expert team, described below.

2.3 The Km-Zero expert team

The public contest open by the city council called for a holistic approach to the urbanistic plan, which had to restructure the avenue but also create some new policies that would regulate its use. In that sense, the public contest for architecture and urban planning consultancies had very specific requirements related to that holistic and transdisciplinary approach. The group called *Km-Zero* won the public contest. It is composed of more than twenty people who come from very different disciplines such as architecture, urban planning, sociology, geography, philosophy, economy, engineering, business, law, history of art, biology or design (Figure 2). That is why the present themselves as a transdisciplinary team with the additional element of having a large knowledge about La Rambla avenue and its citizen dynamics (Decidim.Barcelona, 2018). A majority of their members had previously worked with the administration within the frame of Ciutat Vella[4] district, where La Rambla is found, or in Barcelona in general. The lead of the team, Itziar González, is one of the informants that I interviewed during this Master's thesis.

The team has a strong connection with the association called SOS Rambla, whose work is intended to improve La Rambla avenue and make it more accessible and liveable for

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[4] Old city, the name of the district.

Barcelona citizens. Moreover and as the team states, they are a technical prolongation of the citizen initiative SOS Rambla (Ibid.).

Figure 2. The Km-Zero team on La Rambla avenue (Image courtesy of: Decidim.Barcelona, 2018).

2.4 The project

The information below, about the technicalities of the process and its time frame was taken and translated from the document detailing the regulations of the process, shared online through the digital participation tool of Barcelona City Council (Decidim.Barcelona, 2018b).

The so-called Las Ramblas cooperative process has a duration of six months, from January to June 2018, and is articulated in three phases. Each phase has a checkpoint, at which a final document has to be presented. The three documents have been named after characteristic spaces on the avenue: Canaletes, Miró and Principal[5].
The final plan which the team must present to the City Council consists of the 'document of action strategies' –DEA in Catalan– along with a 'preliminary draft project' and an 'executive project'.

The **phase 0** or 'kilometre zero' of the project was initiated a few months before the actual process started, at the end of November 2017. It consisted in establishing the first contacts with the network and collecting information and previous work relating to La Rambla, both from public authorities and from citizens. It also enabled the expert team to share their

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[5] A fountain, a mosaic and an old theater building, respectively.

methodological approaches with the other finalist teams that participated in the public competition for the project, with the aim of bringing in other visions, perspectives and individuals.

Within this phase, the Central Group and the Citizens' Cooperative Groups (GCCs)[6] were created. The GCCs are mixed groups comprising public servants, external professionals and citizens with special expertise from a diverse range of entities such as associations or social movements. The phase ended with the drawing up of the base document or *Document Canaletes*, which constitutes the starting point of the process.

The **phase 1** or 'shared diagnosis' started in February 2018. After creating the base document in the previous phase, the goal of this first phase was to define the basic elements of the participative diagnosis on the present situation of La Rambla, in terms of issues, needs and opportunities.

During this stage, there are two seminars with the presence of the four Citizens' Cooperative Groups, and two open workshops with the presence of any citizen or visitor of Barcelona that wants to participate. In addition to the seminars and workshops, each GCC can foster other complementary participation actions in which they may call in associations or expert citizens, and conduct street actions or consultations.

The milestone of this phase is the final document entitled *Document Miró* or 'criteria and goals document', together with the previous 'intermediate milestone' *Document Virreina*. In order to achieve these milestones, results from the analysis and synthesis carried out by the Km-Zero team and results from the open workshops are validated, thus creating an agreement document. This information is shared again with the two technical sections of the expert team: strategy and urbanization.

The final document of this phase was presented at the end of March.

Phase 2 or 'co-production of proposals' began in April 2018, and its main goal is to define the working guidelines of the strategies to improve La Rambla, as well as the proposals that will be included in the final plan. These will be brought together in the final 'document of action strategies', which will include: a management plan for spaces attracting large numbers of people, a community and temporary revitalization plan, a cultural and amenities management plan, and a draft redress plan. All proposals will be presented with side maps to

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[6] *Grups Cooperatius Ciutadans (GCC)* in Catalan.

allow participants to understand everything in the architectural and spatial context of the avenue.

The GCCs work in seminars as in the previous phase, and more open workshops with citizens are made. The final document of this phase, which is the last to be submitted and serves as a trial 'document of action strategies', is the *Document Principal*, presented on May 17th, 2018. All these phases are presented in the official calendar of the project, which is also available online (Decidim, 2018). Figure 3 below shows the calendar with the phases and hand-ins of documents.

Figure 3. Calendar of La Rambla project (Image courtesy of:Decidim.Barcelona, 2018)

3. Methodology

The interest of this thesis was triggered by the participation platform Decidim.Barcelona, created by Barcelona City Council. Through my first approach to the tool and the different participation projects brought together in it, La Rambla project struck me as one of the main possibilities in which to conduct research, for the following reasons.

First, the relevance of such a project seemed greater than the other open processes of the platform. It touches on the renovation of the most popular avenue in the city, which is the centre of an important debate in relation to the various important actors, all with their respective interests, that surround it. The current condition of the avenue, almost *abandoned* by local people and *taken* over by tourists in the last few years due to the over-exploitation that the city authorities have contributed to, is another element of interest that makes the project relevant.

Second, the project touches the issue of citizen participation, highly referred and discussed during the last years. The concept has a political aspect of great relevance in the neoliberal context of our times, which will be addressed in the 'Theoretical framework' chapter, and a socio-technical aspect that opens up a relevant debate around the methodological approach and the inclusion of citizens in participative processes.

Third and last, the time frame of La Rambla project fitted the period of this thesis, in such a way that both projects could evolve almost in parallel, as the participation process was officially scheduled to run from January to June 2018.

Therefore, the initial interest in the digital platform Decidim.Barcelona shifted and centred on the particular case of La Rambla. However, it became apparent in the first stages of the process that the role of the tool was in some ways different in this project. As will be further analyzed throughout the thesis, a series of factors caused the expert team leading the process not to use the tool as a key element in the project.

The shift in interest from the digital tool to the particular project of La Rambla also redirected the focus of this thesis, and the notion of participation gained greater relevance. Consequently, the political aspect surrounding it had a more important position in the case. In parallel, the debate surrounding Co-Design and the public realm that will be described in the 'Theoretical framework' chapter was the final element that attached importance to the critical understanding of participation as the basis of the thesis.

In order to conduct this research, the focus was put on the La Rambla project, including both the expert team leading the process and some of the citizens participating in the process. Other voices surrounding the case were relevant for this thesis, some of them because of their experience in participation processes and some others because of their critical opinion on the topic. Therefore, the fieldwork for the research was La Rambla and its context –its surrounding areas– and other areas of Barcelona city. During the course of this thesis, qualitative methods were used for the data collection. The fieldwork primarily consisted in the conduction of seven interviews and the observation –both participant and non-participant– of the field, described below.

Out of the first seminars with my supervisor, it was concluded that the fieldwork phase of the project should take place simultaneously to the writing of the text. That way, the later would not depend exclusively on the fieldwork, which would have put the project at risk in case that the access to the field was not entirely guaranteed. It was therefore a way of starting the project without need to wait for the fieldwork phase. As a matter of fact, this mechanism became a good balance as the observation of the participative process in Barcelona was not exactly as intended. The fact that the field was abroad and considering the limited time to conduct the thesis made it difficult to assist to all the desired activities. The planning of the fieldwork was articulated into two complete weeks to be spent in Barcelona. The first one was from March 1st to March 9th and it was intended to conduct three interviews and the observation of one of the activities held in La Rambla. The second period took place from April 3rd to April 12th, and it included three more interviews and two days of observation.

The observation of the final open workshop planned by the expert team was supposed to be done within the second period of fieldwork. However, the date was changed in the last moment, which forced me to plan a third field trip.

The concrete methods used and the events observed are described below.

3.1 Observation

Two different situations were observed during this project. On the one side, the ultimate field of the participative process of La Rambla, which is the avenue itself. The decision to observe the street carried some doubts regarding its relevance for the research. The most suitable field to observe was the series of meetings and workshops conducted in the course of La Rambla project. However, it was finally decided that the context for the participative process, which is the avenue that is going to be redesigned, was relevant for the case as well. As it will be

explained in the 'theoretical framework' chapter, the city is understood here as some sort of battlefield where private and public forces take place simultaneously in a complex blend that makes them difficult to distinguish. Therefore, in order to have a glimpse into the current situation of the avenue, the observation of its dynamics and flows was conducted.

As the following statement of my field notes states, La Rambla is a big avenue to observate and requires to choose a concrete observation point:

> "La Rambla is a 1,2 km long avenue and that makes it a complex place to observate. That is why I decide to focus my observation on a specific point, next to the small square called Pla de la Boqueria and approximately at a distance of sixty meters from La Boqueria famous market." (Field diary, Appendix 1, p. 1).

Nonetheless, besides the size of the avenue, the complexity of observing La Rambla relates to its very nature, mentioned above, and to the difficult task of separating the merged private and public forces that come together in the street. Finding that intricate nature within the movement of its passers-by is a hard exercise.

3.1.1 La Rambla

The observation of the avenue was held in two non-consecutive days of April, in two different weeks, and with a total of two hours of observation.
The goal of this exercise was to identify the different movements taking place in the avenue, such as the interaction of locals and tourists, which is one of its most noticeable dynamics (See Appendix 3, Field notes).

3.1.2 The 'chairs' action

This was one of the first activities that the cooperative citizen groups held in the avenue, along with Elisava Barcelona School of Design and Engineering, and the cultural association GÒ. Both entities are part of the GCC's as relevant actors of La Rambla.
Cadires a Les Rambles[7] is a performance that has been done by students from the Barcelona design school Elisava for 27 years. Around 150 chairs are settled along the central part of the avenue for passers-by to use as they wish. This time, the action was framed within the cooperative La Rambla project. It was used as a chance for citizens and tourists to sit and chat about the current situation of the avenue. In order to boost dialogue and collect the answers,

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[7] 'Chairs in Les Rambles' in Catalan.

students were provided with written questions and notebooks. All the results were afterwards handed to Km-Zero to contribute to the project.

As the observation of the action coincided with the interview of one of the informants of this thesis, the interview took place in the frame of the performance, using the chairs placed by the students (see Figure 4). Therefore, the method used in this case was participant observation as I was part of the experiment conducted by the students. The interview took place in some sort of metalevel of the action where the observed –myself– was observed by the object of study –both the students and members of Km-Zero–.

Figure 4. My interview with one of the informants in La Rambla. It was conducted during one of the actions that the expert team performed in the avenue with the Citizens' Cooperative Groups. (Image courtesy of Elisava Design School)

3.1.3 The final open workshop

La Rambla project had three open workshops or seminars during the whole process, besides the different meetings held by the cooperative citizen groups, which were not open to citizens in general. The reason for choosing the final open workshop was primarily its date. It was also the longest one and it would serve to the expert team to show and discuss the process evolution with citizens.

It consisted of a small tour along the final section of the avenue, with some activities in which citizens could participate –a complete description of this workshop will be done in the 'analysis' chapter of this thesis–.

In this case, participant observation was also the method that allowed me to take part in the workshop while reflecting on its content and the conditions in which it took place. For instance, while I participated in some of the exercises of the workshop, I also asked the facilitators about the goals and expectations of those tasks. In that sense, Mortari's *Reflectivity in Research Practice* (Mortari, 2015, p. 2) was useful to be aware of my "own inquiry acts", which shaped the phenomenon I was observing.

3.2 Semi-structured interviews

This type of interview helps the researcher to have a clear direction during the conversation and at the same time, gives space to informants so they can relate to the thoughts and ideas they consider relevant for the conversation (Schensul et al., 1999, p. 149).

Therefore, while the main questions and themes were defined before the interview, the conversation was not constrained to them.

Seven interviews were held, six of which were in Catalan and one in Spanish. All of them were voice-recorded and later transcribed. Regarding the transcription, after consulting with the coordinators of the Master's and considering the number of interviews conducted, it was decided to transcript them in their original language and translate only those excerpts quoted in the main text. Only one of them was entirely transcribed in English (González, Appendix 2, p. 11).

As this point has been clarified here, the quotes from the interviews used throughout this thesis will be written in English without specifying that they were translated.

3.3 Informants

As stated in the previous section, seven interviews with a set of informants were conducted during this thesis. The transcription of the interviews –to be found in the Appendix attached to this thesis– was done in their original language, Catalan, and one of them in Spanish. Only those parts quoted in the main text of the thesis were translated to English. This was consulted to the coordinators of the Master's, who gave their approval.

What follows is the sample of informants with a brief description of their profile and relevance to the thesis. Only the names are shown due to the confidentiality of the informants, with the exception of those who are public figures in the Spanish context.

Itziar González

Leader of Km-Zero expert team, the group who leads La Rambla project. She is an architect with a background in politics and urban activism. She was councilor within the city centre district of Barcelona for two years –this topic will be further addressed in the 'analysis' chapter– and she has worked as a mediator between the administration and citizens in previous projects. She was chosen as an informant to represent the expert team and their line of thought and action in this research.

Manuel Delgado

Anthropology professor and researcher at Barcelona University. He is one of the eminent voices in Spain on the topic of urban conflict. He conducts research within the research group on exclusion and social control, and within the urban conflict observatory, both framed within Barcelona University. He was chosen as an informant due to his extensive work on cities and urbanism, focused in Barcelona city.

Jordi

Philosopher and member of an alternative radio association, *Contrabanda FM*, situated in *Plaça Reial*, a famous square next to La Rambla avenue. He was chosen as an informant as a member of the cooperative citizen group called 'culture and equipments'.

Nadia

Architect, PhD. According to the public information about La Rambla project, she was part of Km-Zero expert team. However, during the course of this thesis I realized she was 'only' participating in the project as one more participant. This issue will be further addressed in the 'analysis' chapter. She was chosen as an informant because of her participation on the cooperative citizen group called 'movement'.

Iñaki

He is part of the collective cultural association and library called *El Lokal*. He is one of the most well-known activists within Barcelona, more particularly in *El Raval* neighbourhood in the city centre. His name was found as member of the cooperative citizen group called 'culture and equipments', however, during our previous contact to the interview, he claimed that they were not involved in the process at all. This issue will be addressed in the 'analysis' chapter of this thesis. He was chosen as part of the GCC's. Even if he clarified that point before being interviewed, I decided to maintain him as an informant precisely because of his unclear inclusion in the project and his decision to not be part of it.

Lucia

Landscape architect, co-founder and member of the neighbourhood cultural association GÒ, based in Barcelona. I met Lucia during the first action observed in La Rambla avenue, which was co-organized by Elisava design school and Lucia's association. She was chosen as part of the GCC's.

Albert

Activist, member of the assembly of *Vallcarca* neighbourhood in Barcelona, that represents one of the most active and combative assemblies of the city. They fight with the aim of stopping the urbanist project that has demolished most of the old buildings of the neighbourhood during the last thirteen years. He was chosen as informant as one of the critical voices surrounding the concept of participation in Barcelona. While he is not involved to La Rambla project, he had experience in other participative processes conducted by the same government in the last years.

The above informants are seen as a fine sample of voices regarding the concept of participation in Barcelona: the 'official' testimony of the project leader, three participants of the participative process –with different levels of commitment and *faith* on the project–, and three critical testimonies that are not directly involved in the project.

Once all the methods have been described, the following conclusion relates to the fieldwork planning of this thesis.

As described at the beginning of this chapter, the fieldwork phase was articulated in two periods. The two field trips were decided according to the programmed interviews and the activities set up by the expert team within La Rambla project. The additional fact of applying for fundings from Aalborg University made that a definitive fieldwork plan needed to be done according to a specific timing. Finally, an extra trip had to be done due to the last minute change of the open workshop held in Barcelona. Moreover, it was not possible to arrange the field trips in a way that more workshops or meetings in Barcelona were attended. This was a relevant lesson about the importance of planning the fieldwork of a given project on time and with space for unexpected changes. In that regard, more observation could have been done with a more thorough planning of the fieldwork.

In the following chapter, the debate surrounding the concept of citizen participation will be approached in order to explain the starting point from which participation is analyzed in this thesis.

4. Theoretical framework

This thesis has sustained a wide theoretical approach to the object of study. As will be stated in the end of this chapter, the techno-anthropological perspective allowed me to bring together different types of theories and authors to articulate a discourse around the analyzed case of the project. Thus, while the debate around citizen participation is used as the basis of this thesis, other concepts from diverse theories will be eventually related to specific parts of the process. That is the case of the debate of Co-Design and the public realm, which contributed to the first research phase of this thesis, or some elements of Actor-Network Theory that will be brought to describe the construction of the network done by the expert team of the La Rambla project.

What follows is a compendium of the different authors, perspectives and currents that will be used in this thesis. The current debate on the issue of participation will be described, putting together the work of some authors from the 1960s with the one of more recent authors. The social and political context in which participation takes place in the Barcelona case will be also described in order to understand the complexity of such a framework and the contribution of this case in the broader debate.

4.1 Participation

The issue of citizen participation has been increasingly discussed, theorized and tested during the last decade. There are more and more cases of city councils developing participation tools or areas within their structures with the aim of co-producing municipal policies jointly with other stakeholders and citizens. However, as will be seen in this section, this concept is nothing new for some authors that already discussed it more than forty years ago and whose thoughts will be gathered in this thesis.

The 'official' definitions tend to describe citizen participation as a process in which ordinary people –which may include the local population, neighbourhood or association representatives, etc.– take part, with the ultimate goal of contributing to decision making or even co-producing policy alongside elected representatives (André, 2012; Citizen Participation, 2018). As is apparent in that definition, the type of involvement of the local population in these political processes tends to be defined as 'influence' or 'contribution' – and also 'co-production' in some cases –, a fact that is itself significant for the content of this project.

The use of such nuanced terms to describe the level of grassroots involvement, together with a general and simplistic definition, encourages an 'easy' consensus, and as Sherry Arnstein[8] (1969, p. 216) observed of this popular concept, makes it something like "eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you.". That is, such a vague definition cannot be contested in principle as it is only positive. Arnstein's own definition of the concept posits it as a "categorical term for citizen power" (Ibid.). The typology (Figure 5) of the different levels of participation that Arnstein drew up constitutes one of the most popular critical analyses of the issue. Her approach dismisses as effectively worthless the version of participation that tends to prevail within government bodies and emphasizes the need for *real* participation: "There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process." (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216).
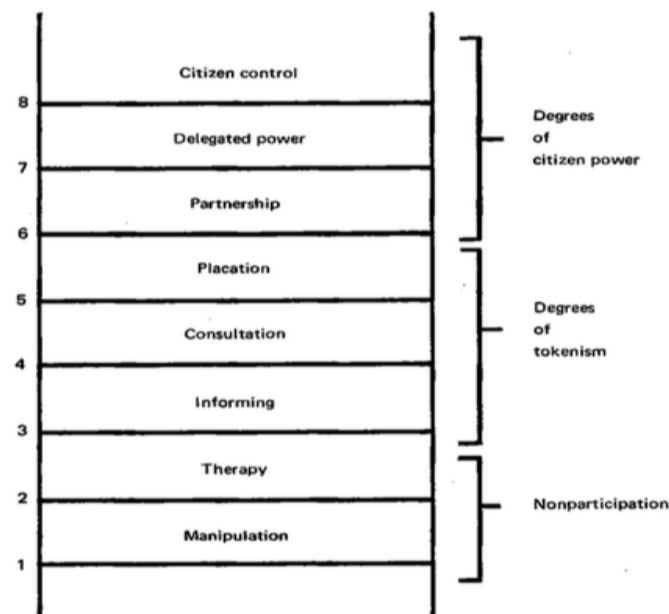
Figure 5. "Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217).

As can be seen in Figure 5, Arnstein describes eight types of participation, ranging from 'manipulation', at the lowest level, to 'citizen control', at the highest. Between these two she places other levels of participation such as 'therapy', 'informing', 'consultation', 'partnership' and others.

At the same time, Arnstein recognises that in practice there are probably hundreds of different rungs, with imprecise distinctions. For example, employing the unempowered in

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[8] Famous for her ladder of citizen participation and her work within the US Department of Housing, Education and Welfare (HUD).

planning programmes can be placed on any of the eight levels, and it may not always be clear if it constitutes a legitimate or an illegitimate characteristic of participation (Arnstein, 1969). In a line with this, the present thesis will consider below how one of the informants claims that his inclusion in a participatory process was only intended to legitimate the process, without him being aware of this (Delgado, Appendix 2).

Despite the relative imprecision of Arnstein ladder in relation to the many cases of the "real world of people and programs" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216), it can serve as an initial guide to understanding the more frequent types of participation, which apply perfectly to the present research. But the relevance of this critical approach to the subject as regards to this thesis is that it questions the nature of the 'official' definitions of citizen participation. Such definitions essentially date from the late 60's, but they are still very relevant to our current context, since the present state of participation continues to match the same set of levels. For all that it is presented as the ultimate democracy tool, its nature and results are still at least questionable at best. This being so, it seems useful to analyze the specific case of Barcelona and to identify what type of participation, and to what degree, takes place within a neoliberal context, as well as how that participation is enacted. Furthermore, the final goal of the project is to contribute to the discussion of the role of processes of participation and their effects on democracy, politics and the public realm in general within that neoliberal context, in which scholars have been engaged in recent years.

Other authors from different disciplines –including architects, geographers, sociologists and anthropologists– have contributed to the debate that questions the nature of the concept of participation itself.

In parallel to the work of Arnstein, the French Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre's work on cities since 1969 represents one of the first and clearest oppositions to a particular democratic version of participation 'publicized' by governments. As such it helps us to draw a critical line that separates 'actual' participation from other experiments:

> "In practice, the ideology of participation enables us to have the acquiescence of interested and concerned people at a small price. After a more or less elaborate pretence at information and social activity, they return to their tranquil passivity and retirement. Is it not clear that real and active participation already has a name? It is called *self-management*. Which poses other problems" (Lefebvre, 1996 [1969], p. 145).

This perspective describes the most widespread concept of participation as a way of using citizens in which there is no real political change at the end of the process, or at least no real

contribution to or authorship of any possible change by citizens. This is not to say that Lefebvre does not defend the right to participate, but that he calls for a completely different understanding of the concept.

The thinking of both Lefebvre and Arnstein is still very valid in our present moment, thanks not only to the prescience of their ideas but to the fact that the power relations which govern our society have not advanced in a more progressive or open direction but quite the opposite. As this project will describe in due course, the neoliberal version of capitalism has contributed to limiting decision-making power to private actors and market forces, to the detriment of citizens, who have only limited opportunities to contribute actively to political change.

The Spanish anthropologist Manuel Delgado follows Lefebvre in defining participation as a process in which the dominated are given the opportunity to participate from their domination (Delgado, Appendix 2). Delgado frames this kind of processes within what is known as the concept of *citizenism* (Delgado, 2018), which he defines as a version of leftist liberalism that aims not to overcome capitalism but to participate in it; it does not condemn capitalism as such but only the most ruthless neoliberal version of it (Ibid.), as will be further explained in the next section.

Last but not least in this stream of vehement critique of the idea of participation, the French sociologist Jean-Pierre Garnier, considered the natural successor of Lefebvre (Delgado, Appendix 2), represents the most contemporary version of this current of thought. The following quote, an anarchist slogan with which he commenced an article on participatory democracy in 2010, gives an idea of his approach to the concept: "*Je participe, tu participes, il participe, nous participons, vous participez, ils décident.*"[9] (Garnier, 2010a, p. 1).

Moreover, Garnier is particularly relevant to this project by virtue of his adaptation of Lefebvre's thought to our present times, supporting one of the initial premises of this thesis, which is that Lefebvre's ideas on cities are still fully relevant today:

> "[…] the claim for the 'right to the city', a concept coined by the French sociologist Henri
> Lefebvre, continues more than ever in force. The original meaning was, as is well known,
> the right to access everything that defines the quality of urban life and also the right to

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[9] I participate, you participate, he participates, we participate, you participate, they decide. The original slogan says 'they profit' instead of 'they decide', but Garnier used a different version.

change the city according to the needs and desires of most people, and not, as until today, according to the interest of a minority."[10].

The reason for taking these ideas as a starting point is to analyze the actual content of an overused concept such as participation and to understand what is hidden behind its apparently bening façade: emptiness, goodwill, "real power" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216), or a methodology that is anything but innocent.

Combining Lefebvre and his disciples with Arnstein, two important critical blocs can now be distinguished. Although they agree on the distinction between virtual and empty processes on the one hand, and actual and empowered processes on the other, they vary on the way of applying these processes and in their respective definitions. While Arnstein has a more positive or constructive approach to how participation might take place, Lefebvre and his followers are more pessimistic about the possibility of real participation taking place under the given political conditions. These two blocs mark the following currents and cases below in the sense that all of them can be particularly framed within one or the other.

Recent authors have described participation as something that intentionally situates attention on the tool instead of on the goal. The Catalan architecture cooperative LaCol talk about the new threat of *participationism* at a moment when many city councils proclaim participation as a central axis in their ideologies. If in other times the issue was the denial or manipulation of participation, the problem now is participationism and its tendency to give technological answers to political questions, answering a *who* with a *how* (LaCol, 2016). In other words, this type of democratic process focuses on how to organize a decision in technical terms rather than on who should do the deciding. This relates to the role of technology, which tends to be presented as central in processes of this kind rather than as something that can make a significant contribution if it is aligned with other actors and first subjected to in-depth analysis. As will be seen throughout this project, technology is obviously important in these processes, but it is not the core element.

This last position, unlike those of Lefebvre or Delgado, regards participation as possible in the current political situation, and seeks to be a starting point from which to define the concept in a way that can actually transform society. Members of LaCol state that most

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[10] Translated from Spanish by the author of this thesis. The original quote: "Por eso, la reivindicación del «derecho a la ciudad», concepto acuñado por el sociólogo francés Henri Lefebvre, sigue más que nunca vigente. El sentido original era, como es bien conocido, el derecho de acceder a todo lo que delimita la calidad de la vida urbana y también el derecho a *cambiar la ciudad* según las necesidades y los deseos de la mayoría de la gente, y no, como hasta hoy, según los intereses de una minoría. (Tello, 2017, p. 204)

participative processes should be called 'consultative processes' as they do no more than ask citizens for their opinion and leave the final decisions to be made by technicians and politicians; the definition of participation that LaCol uphold is concerned not with opinions but with the cession of power (LaCol, 2016). As they point out in their contribution to the compilation *La participación en la construcción de la ciudad[11]* (Blancafort and Reus, 2016), the 'deepest' participation is found within bottom-up citizen initiatives where no stakeholder had any interest or actual budget to invest (Ibid.).

Therefore, the main particularity of this vision is that even if it shares some of Lefebvre's and Arnstein's ideas and recognises that 'typical' participation projects are normally decided by 'experts', it still considers that the issue can be solved 'from the inside' by improving said processes. As will be seen again later in this section, within the debate in the field of Co-Design, the LaCol team call a for re-politicisation of such processes, the empowerment of citizens and generation of communities, and critical participation (Ibid.).

The Spanish geographer Josep Vicent Boira represents another example of this conciliatory approach, which states that it is possible to achieve a measure of actual change within cities while waiting for the 'final revolt' (Boira, 2011, p. 2). From this perspective, participation is seen as the logical consequence of a particular way of understanding cities and their space as something subjective, experienced and with multiple visions and variables. It also takes into account the inherent plurality of a city (Boira, 2011). Boira suggests that the phenomena of participation should become normative and include similar procedures to those in the environmental sphere, where sustainability reports are required in order for certain plans to be developed. Boira even conceives the figure of 'public architects' or 'public geographers', which would be the equivalent of public defenders and would offer assessment and advice on urban and territorial matters (Boira, 2011).

Once the debate on participation that frames this thesis has been described, at this point is necessary to define the concepts that surround the participative process in the Barcelona case, described below.

The former is described to clarify which understanding of it is used in this thesis since it is the *battleground* where participation takes place. The latter is explained due to its relevance and impact on the public realm and the way it frames a very specific version of citizen participation.

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[11] Participation in the construction of the city.

4.2 The context for participation: the public realm and neoliberalism

Before going any further, it is necessary to describe the frameworks that *host* participation in the present moment. The definition of the public realm is relevant for this thesis since it is the arena in which citizen participation takes place. It is then necessary to clarify what understanding of it is used in this thesis.

Regarding the neoliberal system, it has an obvious impact on the public realm, especially considering that such political and economic system finds its maximum representation in cities. It is also what frames the 'official' version of participation that most governments stand for. In this sense, neoliberalism's definition is a key element to understand some of hidden effects of the use of participation done by the public authorities. Citizen participation is occasionally used to legitimize capitalism and make it appear as softer.

Both concepts are addressed below. Moreover, the post-Fordist era in which the concepts are framed is also described.

In our context, that of a post-Fordist era, fewer distinctions are made between private and public. Regarding this 'post-Fordist' context, it should be noted that there is a risk in labelling historical periods and schools of thought with prefixes and suffixes: they are sometimes used as mere evolutionary consequences of the previous state of affairs or as primal frameworks of what will imminently come to pass (Bologna, 2006; Martínez, 2011). Some authors claim that post-Fordism tends to be used to describe the way in which highly precarious and flexible employment (Martínez, 2011), came to take the place of contract-protected waged employment. The fact is that post-Fordist is not everything that has happened since Fordism in the matter of employment conditions.

If Henry Ford created the model of production in which waged workers on a production line, each performing a specialized task, would be able to afford the products they were manufacturing, then post-Fordism refers to the period beginning in the 1970s with the socio-economic and political crisis that dismantled the productive, organizational, social and cultural models of the Fordist period (Ibid.). A series of social, political and technical processes gave rise to a new model of flexible accumulation, in which other processes such as relocation, production outsourcing and globalization, together with the central role of communication and information technologies would create a new paradigm in which resources formerly extrinsic to the interests of capital, such as communication, creativity or information, would become central. The post-Fordist 'factory' would expand its borders to those places where experiences, gestures, language or initiative are generated (Ibid.).

Post-Fordism is inextricably bound up with the public realm and more particularly with the city, which is the field of practice of this project and is addressed below.

4.2.1 Public realm

In this particular context, the hazy notion of the public realm becomes a key element for the project, as one of the frameworks in which participation takes place.

The use of the concept of the public realm in the context of this thesis is that of the 'playground' of participation; that is, the arena in which citizen participation takes place. That arena is embodied here by two different categories of space, both physical and abstract. Public space in its vast significance would be one of those categories. It is, on the one hand, the place where citizens, technicians and civil servants meet to give form to participation by holding meetings in the street or in 'public' facilities –in quotation marks here because we are talking about meeting rooms that are semi-public–; on the other hand, it is the place on which the City Council seeks to act, the area that is to be redesigned and restructured through the participative process, which in this case would be the avenue of La Rambla in Barcelona. Public space is therefore understood in the latter case as a space of generalized access whose users probably do not know each other in advance and who enter into unstable short-term relationships; the space that results from the practices that pass through it, in the sense that public space *is* not there but is precisely the product of the uses it receives (Hernández, 2013).

The second category within the public realm would be the local authority, Barcelona City Council, which runs the participative process and is the body that gave permission to the expert team leading the project –selected in public competition–, and will be ultimately responsible for applying, or not, the final plan. In this process, then, the administration creates the abstract frame in which participation can occur, deciding and limiting the conditions together with the expert team.

The concept of the public realm, therefore, is used in this project to refer to those social processes that take place between citizens in public places (Lennard, 2015), and it includes those processes related not only to public space but also to other services, systems and policies, such as mobility or communication infrastructure, for instance; processes in which citizens are regarded as consumers rather than users by the neoliberal system.

The public realm directly reflects the neoliberal system insofar as the latter frames it and shapes its conditions. In the context of this thesis neoliberalism is a relevant concept, as it is

the landscape in which participation takes place, with the city being the actual area. That is why, before going any further, the understanding of neoliberalism is explained below.

4.2.2 Neoliberalism

In order to analyze the notion of participation in the specific case of Barcelona, it is crucial to understand what frames it; namely, a particular political and economic system. It becomes even more important considering that this system finds its maximum representation in cities. There are many definitions of neoliberalism adapted to different focuses. As a relevant sample of definitions in relation to this thesis, the descriptions of French economist Bruno Amable will be useful:

> "It is an ideology which legitimates individual competition and questions collective structures; it is a political project of institutional transformation, against any attempt to institute 'collectivism' and against the types of capitalism which had resulted from the various socio-democratic compromises [...]." (Amable, 2010, p. 7).

There is a common misinterpretation of neoliberalism that reduces it to the principles of classical liberalism and *laissez-faire*[12], which believe in the market order as given by nature and thus advocate against state intervention in the economy (Amable, 2010). In fact, neoliberal principles make the state responsible for the market order. As Amable states, quoting Hayek,

> "The state in neo-liberalism is, therefore, not a weak and inactive state, the 'night watchman' of classical liberalism. On the contrary, it is a state that establishes and preserves, through its constant action (...), a competitive market order which is an artificial human creation and not a product of nature." (Amable, 2010, p. 10-11)

In contrast to classical liberalism, neoliberals hold that the market and capitalism are artificial constructions that need a particular institutional framework to exist and can therefore be linked to a specific political agenda (Ibid.). Furthermore, some of the topic's specialists state that public intervention may be seen as inspired by neoliberal ideology, since it does not only influence the politics of the conservative right but also those of the so-called 'modern' left (Ibid., p. 4). It is this modern left which nowadays attempts to instil morality into the market and politics, which as Amable states can be interpreted "as another facet of the domination of

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[12] "Let it/them do" in French. An economic concept that defines a market in which the state does not intervene in any way in economic transactions.

neo-liberal ideology and as such contribute to reinforcing the legitimacy of capitalism."
(Ibid.). This morality primarily refers to delegitimation of any collective action that puts free
competition at risk, which introduces redistribution and protection into the economy.

Therefore, the contribution of neoliberalism to classical liberalism is the issue of 'equality of
opportunity' versus non-intervention, which gives space for friction between right and left
neoliberals. The notion of equality of opportunity relates to the basic principle of individual
competition, which becomes the basis of the system, shifting from the classical concept of
exchange from liberal thought. The main risk involved in basing societies and economies on
individual competition is that "if everybody is expected to win in exchange, some may lose in
competition" (Amable, 2010, p. 8).

In parallel with this, limiting the discussion to the duality of non-intervention or equality of
opportunity and the addition of moral principles into it also reduces and weakens the debate,
avoiding questioning the very nature of neoliberalism and its adequacy as a system and taking
for granted that society must be based on individual competition. Therefore the risk of
focusing in an ideal 'improvement' of capitalism with neoliberalism is that instead of dealing
with its problems and finding drastic solutions such as ending capitalism (Amable, 2010) it
accepts its political and moral principles and consolidates it as the prevailing system.

In a similar line, one of the informants of this thesis, professor Manuel Delgado of Barcelona
University stated during our interview that 'modern' left parties try to present themselves as
an alternative to a savage capitalism, in the pretence that there is a type of capitalism which is
not savage (Delgado, Appendix 2). These distinctions between different 'levels' of capitalism
relate again to Amable's analysis: "The introduction of an ethical aspect to the quest for
profit makes capitalism socially acceptable." (Amable, 2010, p. 14).

Summarizing, the definition of neoliberalism that interests this project is that which might
present participation as one of the tools that capitalism uses to present its most kind and
democratic face; a tool that allows people to *participate* in the system and to have the
delusion of contributing to a political change by *deciding* along with the powerholders.

This particular definition is also relevant due to the fact that in line with the rise of
neoliberalism and the permeation of its logic to urban planning, cities have taken a crucial
position within the interests of real-estate capital (Aricó et al., 2015). Therefore,
neoliberalism becomes a key element in the equation along with the city –in this case,
Barcelona– and participation. It becomes what Delgado describes as the capitalism of the
'good tone' (Delgado, 2018).

However, this premise does not conclude beforehand that participation does not have any real consequences or that it is not possible to make political change through it, it just reveals how neoliberal governments present this type of concepts. It is the intention of this research to show what participation looks like and how it takes place in the context of Barcelona.

Once that the context for citizen participation has been drawn, the following debate from the field of Co-Design might contribute to the theoretical approach of this thesis. What follows is another input to the broader debate on participation that has been opened in this chapter. The novelty of the following debate, however, is that it focus on the role of the designers –or developers, eventually– within the discussion about citizen participation. In any case, this debate also questions the nature of participation that prevails in our current moment, and it is therefore be connected with the theoretical approach of this thesis.

4.3 The debate of Co-Design and the public realm

There is a current debate within the field of co-design around the role of participative processes –from a design perspective – in a neoliberal and post-Fordist context in which the traditional distinctions and nuances between the public and private spheres are no longer clear, as described above.

The importance of the debate in relation to this thesis rests on the fact that it points to an interesting development in the same line as that presented before, which questions of the role of participation and its effects in a very particular context. Even if this debate *only* touches on the issue of participation from the specific perspective of co-design and the influence –or lack thereof– of the field on the final achievements of participation processes, the following debate serves as a starting point from which to reflect on the issue of participation, and it is also related to the techno-anthropological perspective in the sense that it reflects on the importance of bringing together users and developers of a given process; and also about bringing together a wide range of actors in order to analyze, understand and improve products, services, infrastructures, etc.

This open debate was the first approach to the topic of this thesis and it gave a particular insight into the phenomenon of participation from a techno-anthropological view. While it indicates a similar path to the one described by Arnstein, Lefebvre, etc. by questioning the existing participation structures, it also brings the design perspective, which aims to include

the developers into the picture. It is in that sense that it can contribute to an ideal notion of participation with improved structures and clearer goals.

In order to understand the context of this particular debate, a short description of the Co-Design field is given below.

4.3.1 The field of Co-Design

Co-design as a method consists in engaging consumers and/or users of products and services in the design process "with the idea that this will ultimately lead to improvements and innovation." (Yacwa.org.au, 2018, p. 3). This methodology is also known –with some nuances– by some authors as 'co-creation' (Sanders and Stappers, 2008) and it was initiated with the measure of user inclusion in the process, even if at first the users were mere passive contributors who had to conduct some instructed tasks or give their opinion on particular concepts or products. This early version, known as 'user-centred design', where the user is seen as a subject, was mainly developed in the US during the '70s (Ibid.).

On the other side and more or less in parallel to that, 'participatory design' was developed in the Scandinavian countries, bringing another approach in which the user was seen as a partner and thus had more involvement and responsibilities in the process (Sanders and Stappers, 2008).

It is from the mixture and contraposition of these methods that other broader fields, such as co-design, arose.

After this short explanation of the field, the following is a description of those particular points of the debate that relate to the approach of this thesis.

4.3.2 The debate

The journal CoDesign started a discussion on the role of the field within the public realm in its 13th volume (Huybrechts et al., 2017a), in which scholars raised a number of questions regarding how said role was supposed to be. These questions range from the consequences, tensions and challenges of engaging with a public realm increasingly intertwined with private forces, to the relevance of mobilising design to challenge the marketisation of the political, or questioning the division of public and private (Ibid.).

Co-design is nowadays being applied to very different fields, from political activism to activities to increase consumption, and the disparity is, again, mainly due to the disappearance of the old distinctions between public and private (Huybrechts et al., 2017a).

One of those areas of interest is participation. According to co-design scholars, participation may supposedly be used to promote a more transparent and 'deeper' form of democracy, but it can be the case that it is not always applied in such a way that truly diverse and relevant societal groups are involved (Kaethler et al., 2017). It can equally well be used to "create coercion and sugar-coat autocratic processes with a shimmer of 'collaboration'" (Kaethler et al., 2017, p. 177).

More bluntly, some other authors in the field of design find the achievement of social change incompatible with engaging with the market (Papanek, 1971). Although the present discussion about co-design and the public realm has a 'softer' perspective on the topic, it still highlights the importance of analysing with precaution the significance and nuances of participative processes in the present.

This approach is thus based on the premise that there has been a tendency among designers to minimize or to ignore the meso- and the macro-levels of institutional frameworks and to focus on micro-level activities. It is in this context and in responding to this tendency that co-design scholars have worked on the concept of *institutioning*, which aims at re-politicizing the processes by re-engaging with institutional frameworks and thus re-articulating the existing frames (Huybrechts et al., 2017a).

The concept of *institutioning* has some relation to the thought of Lefebvre, Arnstein, and others in so far as it tries to give meaning back to participation by politicising the process, accompanying it with the transfer of power, voice and control to those who do not have them.

Summarizing, the notion of Co-Design brings an interesting perspective that contributes to the theoretical research of this thesis towards a critical understanding of citizen participation. Lastly, the techno-anthropological perspective and its relevance for this project will be discussed below.

4.4 The techno-anthropological perspective and further approaches

While the aforementioned debate surrounding the political notion of participation will guide most of this thesis, other theoretical contributions will be used for the analysis of the participative process taking place in the La Rambla project. In that regard, the techno-anthropological perspective serves here as a basis from which include other relevant theories. This perspective brings a unique approach to analyze this participative process as a socio-technical cluster of elements, including such human and non-human actors as participants,

associations, administration, expert team, digital platform, avenue and so on. It provides the necessary toolkit with which look at the process from both inside and outside, and it also serves as a very relevant way to analyze and describe the network of actors that is built up during the process. In a way, it is also useful for constructing an outer network surrounding the network being created by the main actor in the process, the expert team, and the rest of existing networks around La Rambla avenue.

As a result, although this project might have a more sociological perspective on the participation phenomenon in comparison with my previous Master's projects, the techno-anthropological background has been present during the whole process and has contributed to the perspectivation, the analysis and the discussion of the case as well. It has also served as a dynamic approach to the project that allowed me to connect it with other perspectives, theories and authors.

In that regard, one of the elements that will be analyzed throughout this thesis is the network of actors that the expert team in charge of the project to redesign La Rambla aims to build up during the first phase of the process. A central actor –Km-Zero expert team– tries to attract citizens and other potential participants towards the network that they are constructing around La Rambla and its local community.

Actor-Network Theory or ANT (Latour, 1990; Law, 1992) will be used in certain phases of the process in order to understand what elements are being used to attract those actors and what kind of power is exerted upon them for that purpose. The efforts of the expert team to centralize the goals, demands and other networks of the relevant actors will be also addressed and ANT will contribute to that analysis.

The ANT perspective on non-human actors in social relations and networks also relates to this case, in which the use of the digital tool to promote new ways of citizen participation and engagement will be questioned. Determining the role of technology within this socio-technical process will be of interest in this thesis, with the intention of showing how this particular process is not centralized by technology, in contrast to the case in other types of participative process. Therefore, the core analysis of this project will be related to other forms of citizen participation such as face-to-face meetings, debates and discussions, which represent the most important part of the La Rambla case. These will be analyzed as influential in the network that shapes the relationship and demands of citizens, policy-makers and other stakeholders.

Once all the theoretical perspectives relevant for this thesis have been presented in relation to the different phases of the project, the analysis of the participative process to redesign La Rambla avenue will be addressed below.

5. Analysis

This chapter looks in greater depth at La Rambla project and the participative process that frames it, both led by Km-Zero expert team introduced in the first chapter of the thesis. It begins by addressing the initial phases of the project, in which the expert team dug down into the context of the avenue and collected the previous work done by various associations with a deeper knowledge of La Rambla. Their definition of the preliminary networks will also be explained along with the working structures they have built and their first search for relevant actors.

After the first approach to the network, the way in which the expert team has attempted to attract the actors and mobilise them in a solid network will be treated. The use of certain elements by the City Council and the expert team to attract participants will be analyzed as interessement devices (Callon, 1999). The concept that Callon describes in his translation process will be useful to understand what are the strategies used to bring participants to closer to the network of La Rambla. That is the case of the advertised opportunity for citizens to participate and decide, or the figure of the expert team leader. The innovative methodology of the expert team will also be explained as one more element used to attract the actors. These three elements will raise a set of issues regarding their impact on participation. In the case of the interessement devices mentioned above, they contribute to create very limited conditions for participation. Regarding the figure of the expert team leader, from the analysis of her role it will be stated that her figure serves to legitimize the La Rambla project in the eyes of Barcelona citizens.

The final two sections of this chapter will address the notion of participation and the role of the tool Decidim.Barcelona. The former will be analyzed in terms of the expert team's own understanding of it, and it will be compared to the way in which participation takes place in their project. In addition, the open workshop held with citizens, observed in the fieldwork phase of this thesis, will be described in detail. The analysis of participation will mirror the conditions given by the City Council and the limitations caused by the interessement devices above-mentioned.

Regarding the use of the tool and the way in which Km-Zero understands it, this will be explained by analyzing their use of the tool and their reasons for doing so.

5.1 La Rambla network

As described above, one of the first moves of Km-Zero expert team was to approach the context of La Rambla in order to collect the existing knowledge of its problematics and absorb this to define a common set of issues for the avenue and its actors. In parallel to that, they conducted a preliminary research to identify the existing networks of La Rambla context and to build some relationships with them.

5.1.1 A first approach to the context

The Km-Zero team lead by Itziar launched the process from the problematization of La Rambla that described in the 'introduction' chapter of this thesis. Their ultimate goal was to collectively rescue La Rambla from the tourism monoculture and its dynamics, with their impoverishment of the social, cultural and economic fabric and the quality and comfort of the urban public space (Decidim.Barcelona, 2018b).

By analysing the description of the first phase of the project done by Km-Zero, one can conclude that their approach to the process raises a key question to the neighbours of La Rambla. It would be something as: how to redesign the avenue in a way that its present dynamics radically change towards a more liveable and transitable avenue?. This mechanism that starts with a common question that applies to all neighbours and citizens recalls to the translation process described by Callon (1999), in which the 'problematization' stage is one of the first steps of building a network. This question would include a previous set of questions regarding the identification of the current problems in greater detail, but the issue can be summarized as the process of rescuing La Rambla from its current situation (Decidim.Barcelona, 2018b).

The team began by compiling the previous work done in the context of La Rambla by the SOS Rambla association, formed by ordinary citizens – residents of the avenue united by their concern about the current state of the avenue. In basing their project on that work the expert team not only took the local residents' manifesto and made it their own but also incorporated the association into the team. That inclusion was not merely symbolic, in that two members of the association were actually brought in to work on the day-to-day tasks, sharing an office with the rest of the team.

However, as will be explained in more detail in the discussion section of this project, although the team invited those actors to be part of the project, that does not necessarily mean that they automatically became team members. Thus, some of them decided not to become

fully involved in the process but to *participate* in one way or another in the course of the process. The true degree of involvement of these actors only became clear after I conducted the first sample of interviews with them in the frame of this thesis. However, the available information about the project and its main actors and participants, gave the impression that they were all taking an active part in it. The issue of taking actors' involvement in the process for granted, which will also be discussed further in the course of the project, by no means insignificant. The presentation of a particular set of actors as part of a solid or defined network gives the public a concrete idea of how the project is going to be and what can be expected of it, since each entity or individual *sends* a specific input about what type of process it will be. It clearly serves to legitimate both project and process, depending on who is presented as part of the team.

Back to the work of SOS Rambla, it contributed to the discourse and vision of Km-Zero team in a theoretical way, as their particular idea of what type of avenue the local people wanted and how this could be achieved merged with the ideas of the expert team.

In addition to the work of the SOS Rambla association, the expert team defined a preliminary network in which the following actors were included (see Figure 6): other teams participating in the open invitation made by the City Council, the two groups in which the expert team is divided –strategies and urbanism–, citizen agents, representatives of the administration, and the so-called 'driver group' which is composed of representatives of the various Citizens' Cooperative Groups[13]. On the other hand, the network shows the following non-human actors: complementary studies about La Rambla, the base document created during the preliminary phase of the project, a map of agents and an information map, and lastly the analysis of the existing documents on the subject.

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[13] This term is described in the 'introduction to the field' chapter. It refers to those groups formed by citizens, public servants and external professionals.
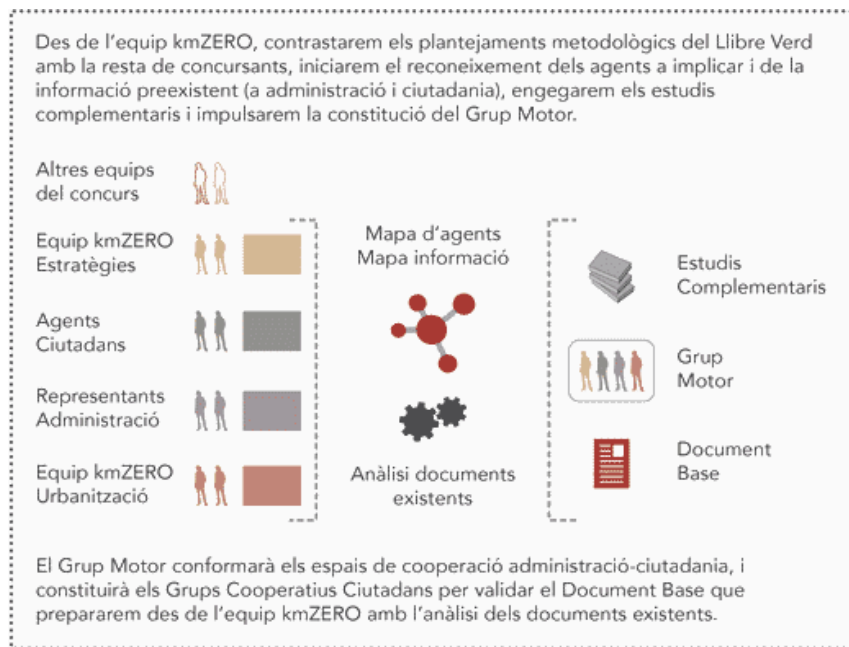
Figure 6. Preliminary network from the team Km-Zero (Decidim.Barcelona, 2018). Like all the information in the Decidim tool, it is only available in two languages, Catalan and Spanish. This particular image could only be found in Catalan. All the actors shown are referred to in the above paragraph of the thesis.

Once the preliminary network was proposed and the main documents stating the strategies and line of work had been defined, the next step was to draw a bigger network that would include all the participants of the process.

The team carried out the first mapping of relevant actors according to their own knowledge of the district, which relates to what is supposed to be one of the strongest points of the team, its 'localhood'. The name Km-Zero refers to the concept of proximity normally used in the ecological agro-food industry, which in this case describes the importance they want to give to the fact of being native to the city they are working on, as the leader of the team explained in one of the interviews conducted during this project (González, Appendix 2).

This mapping included not only the actors that would be involved in specific moments of the process but more particularly those who would form the so-called Citizens' Cooperative Groups, which would constitute the base structure of the project together with the driver group. The most important set of actors needed to form the groups were those described as expert citizens.

Regarding the expert team's first research of actors, as the leader explains during our interview, the first selection was based on the expert team's knowledge of the social fabric of the avenue and the neighborhood that frames it:

"I choose some particular people out of knowledge, and otherwise, I ask. Some of them are already chosen, as my team, and the part coming from the administration was also given. But the expert citizens are determined by looking at social movements: NGOs, associations, activists, universities, professional associations… Well, all this is where I come from. At this point, I put them together and I ask them 'who is missing?'. I ask that to each group. That is, the first thing I do is get them to do an 'off-camera'[14] to find out who else is missing." (González, Appendix 2, p. 15-16)

Therefore it becomes a process of bringing different sets of actors into the network and getting those actors to decide which others might join the network according to their specific knowledge of their area of work or the activity they perform. Each actor joins one of the four Citizens' Cooperative Groups or GCCs, again depending on their ambit. The following are the four different groups: The 'Movement' group addresses mobility-related issues, then 'Labour and Economy', 'Culture and Equipments' and 'Community and Public Space'.

Once the first 'general' network was defined it already included the four GCCs and the other actors relevant to the process, who contribute in different degrees to the project (see Figure 7). As the informant explained during the interview, in the centre of the image –the core circle– there are the four GCCs along with a number of other actors, all of whom together constitute those who the team describes as in 'cooperation regime'. They are the ones with more responsibility and those who carry out most of the work, which is done cooperatively, hence the name. Continuing out from the centre, the next circle
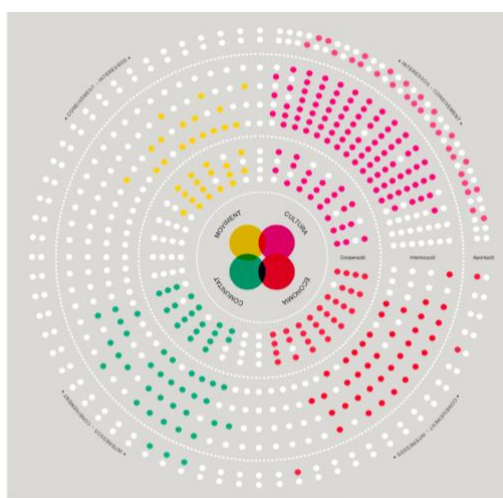

Figure 7. Agents map of the first phase of the La Rambla project. The color code indicates the four ambits of work. The different circles indicate different levels of contribution to the project. (Image courtesy of Decidim.Barcelona).

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[14] A cinematographic concept that refers to everything that is out of the field of action.

includes the actors in what the expert team defines as 'interlocution regime', the actors that the team leader seeks out and talks to in order to bring them into the network. They thus have a form of non-continuous interlocution with the inner circle.

The next and last circle includes the actors in what the team defines as 'contribution regime'. This circle refers to academic knowledge[15], research, etc. and also to other types of interest such as trade unions –the hotel guild is placed in that circle, for instance–.

As the informant explains, the distribution of the actors in these three circles defines their level of involvement in the project. The core circle, for example, entails weekly meetings and a higher amount of dedication, which is one of the reasons why not all actors are in it. The small number of actors also guarantees a better quality of work. In order for the network function, those included in the core are supposed to inform the ones in the adjacent circle and so on. As Itziar says of the actors in interlocution regime situated in one of the outer circles:

> "I can't place them in the 'small kitchen' because this happens every week and requires time, so not all of them can physically come since it would be difficult for them and I couldn't have this quality of communication. But the ones in the first circle have to inform the ones on the next one." (González, Appendix 2, p. 16).

This is how the network operates to include all the actors in the process, regardless of their level of commitment. The network is 'alive' in the sense that it is supposed to keep mutating in such a way that all of the actors become more involved in the process and continue to move from one circle to another. Their system is also intended to prevent actors entrenching themselves in their positions:

> "One can move from the centre to the outside and the other way around. These are not fixed, no one can *patrimonialize* their position. I tell all of them: 'You can come and you can also disengage from the process, it's okay'. The fact of joining their first meeting establishes a place, it creates a space. If a particular person is not filling that space, another one will come along." (Ibid.)

The network described above is the ideal that the Km-Zero expert team is working to stabilize. The functioning of the network has been described as well. However, before reaching the point when the network is stable, they have the task of attracting those actors that were approached in the first phase. In order to do so, some elements will be used directly or indirectly to mobilise the actors into the network. These elements are addressed below.

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[15] The informant gives as an example the fact that the present Master's thesis would be included in this particular circle, since it might contribute to a general knowledge layer of the project.

5.1.2 Attracting the actors

In order to create and propose a 'final' network from which the actual project would start, the expert team needed to make the process interesting for those who were supposed to be involved. While it is true that the involvement of many of these actors was effectively taken for granted before starting due to the fact that they were part of the professional network of the team members, others would need to be encouraged and/or convinced.

The way in which the expert team attempts to involve actors in the network can be analyzed according to the main procedure that Callon (1999) describes in the translation process within Actor-Network Theory for bringing a particular set of actors closer to a network, which is that of *interessement*. ANT and the translation process provide an effective way of describing the means by which an actor seeks to attract and stabilize a set of actors. The process by which the central actor attempts to absorb the parallel associations and links of other actors is relevant for this case.

In the case of La Rambla, the first interessement device for all participants would probably be the opportunity to **participate** and to *decide*[16] on how one of the most important avenues of the city will be in the future. In fact, the whole participation channel created by the City Council known as 'Decidim.Barcelona' could be seen as an interessement device. The name of the platform contributes to this vision, even if it is in an anecdotal way. The Catalan *Decidim*, is an imperative first-person plural which can be translated into English as 'let's decide'. It encourages citizens to participate by seducing them with the idea of actually making decisions about their city. However, it might also have a second reading in terms of the imperative mood in some sense being a command or an order by which a plural public would be called or even 'obliged' to participate and decide together with the administration. The limitations that this centralised way of participating implies will be addressed more fully in the 'Discussion' section of this thesis. Meanwhile, the description of participation to be found in the next section of this chapter will reflect the limitations that this way of participating entails. This will also be a proof that the Barcelona case is not an exercise in which real power is transferred to citizens.

If the chance to decide on the development of the city is interpreted in this thesis as a powerful element for attracting citizens onboard, there is a second element that repeatedly came up in conversation during the interviews with the informants of this thesis, which could

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[16] Wordplay with the name of the tool developed by the City Council. The qualifying *decide* should be treated carefully here, since it is known that citizens are not the ones who finally take decisions but it is the administration who does.

also act as an interessement device: **the figure of Itziar** as leader of the project. In order to understand the relevance of the leader's political background in relation to La Rambla project, it is described below.

Itziar was an independent councillor on Barcelona City Council for the district of Ciutat Vella[17] from 2007 to 2009, and she became famous for her fight against corruption in a case in which she received intense pressure from a powerful economic lobby, including surveillance of her movements and threats. After a long process, she finally resigned her position on the City Council as a protest. Before that, she also ordered the closure of an illegal tourist apartment on La Rambla and uncovered 1200 more tourist apartments whose owners were not paying taxes. She subsequently received a series of threats, her apartment was broken into and documents were stolen, and she was given full-time police protection for a period of time.

Because of those well known episodes, which were reported in the Spanish press (Navarro, 2018), Itziar is regarded by many in Barcelona as, amongst other things, what the Spanish anthropologist Manuel Delgado (Appendix 2, p. 35) describes as "the most dignified and honest aspect"[18] of the administration. From the interviews conducted during this thesis, it is possible to determine that Itziar seemed to transmit a particular view of the participative process of La Rambla to most of the citizens that were eligible to participate in it. As an example of this impression, one of the first interviewees, Jordi, who participated in the entire process as a citizen and member of an alternative radio association located near La Rambla, states that "We received an email notifying us of the process and I got involved in it because Itziar was… I felt she was a guarantee that a different process could be made." (Jordi, Appendix 2, p. 45); or Nadia, a member of the association SOS Rambla who was invited to be part of the expert team but decided to participate in her own way: "Yes, I think that the issue of the personal network has been important in this case. The connection they [the team] had, also to select the people." (Nadia, Appendix 2, p. 55). Even those who decided not to be part of the process and who do not have very high expectations of its results had some positive feelings. Iñaki, from a libertarian library association in El Raval, a neighborhood adjacent to La Rambla, states: "However, these are significant things: that a debate opens up,

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[17] 'Old City' in Catalan, Ciutat Vella is the central district through which La Rambla runs.

[18] It should be noted that during our interview, Delgado was actually making a critique to the administration and to the project of La Rambla in that particular answer. He states that although Itziar represents the honest face of the administration, "after all, what we have won is just that: we have left blatant corruption behind but the structural question that affected La Rambla will not be modified." This quote was translated from the transcription of the interview in Catalan by the author of this thesis.

the fact that it is precisely the Rambla, and the fact that it is Itziar [who is leading the process], when everybody knows and it is of public known what happened to her because of the Rambla problem." (Iñaki, Appendix 2, p. 57).

The importance of the choice of project leader noted above, have the side-effect of acting as a legitimizing element of the La Rambla project. Such effect will be addressed in the 'discussion' chapter of this thesis. The influence of the expert team leader is connected to the subsequent selection of actors done for the construction of the network.

As informant Nadia observes in the above quote, the personal and professional network of the team was important in the sense that they already had links with actors of a certain type, who could potentially be included. While they were also supposed to include some actors on the basis of their nature and relation to La Rambla, such as the lobby 'Amics de la Rambla', they also invited an important constellation of actors who shared similar visions of the city in terms of ideals or methodology.

On the other hand, they also attempted to include or to showcase as 'included' certain particular actors whose presence in the project might attract other actors of a similar type. This was the case with the Anthropology professor, who expresses some misgivings about the manner some actors were contacted. Although he talks about it in an informal manner, as a mere impression, his comments leave room for doubt. When asked his opinion of the way in which Km-Zero finds and involves actors in their project, he states: "Well, maybe [the other actors were contacted] just like I was, almost without knowing. I don't know, ask them and see what they say." (Delgado, Appendix 2, p. 33).

After the analysis of the project leader figure in relation to the involving of actors in the network, the methods of the expert team will be addressed below as a third element that may have contributed to the drawing-in of actors.

The **innovative methodology** of Km-Zero team may indeed have acted as another interessement device for the public. One of the reasons why most of the actors involved in the process as 'participants' believed in the role of Itziar was because they thought that the process could be different in one way or another, as has been seen in one of the informant's quotes. And that quality of difference was to be found in the methods of the team, which Itziar presents as mould-breaking. However, the importance that the expert team gives to their methods has the unexpected effect of leaving the citizen-involvement aside. As it has been mentioned in the 'Theoretical framework' chapter, some authors have talked about the issue of focusing on the methods over other relevant elements of participation, such as who

should be involved in the process (LaCol, 2016). This will be further addressed in the 'Discussion' chapter.

Back to the importance of the expert team methods, they talked about cooperation from the very beginning, trying to differentiate it clearly from participation. This distinction is repeated by the team in their actions and communications: "This collective work as a basis for participation leads us to talk about a cooperative process (instead of a participative process)." (Decidim.Barcelona, 2018b).

Cooperation, according to Itziar's description, "is a cultural process." (González, Appendix 2, p. 18). The cooperative approach of the team is based on the four cooperation groups mentioned above, composed of public servants, external technicians and what is described as the differentiating element: expert citizens. The fact of including expert citizen in the very core of the network might appeal to citizens as a way of ensuring their power in the process, since, in Itziar's words, "When you add in expert citizens you automatically take hierarchy away from the other two [public servants and external technicians]." (González, Appendix 2, p. 15).

What Itziar and the team claim to be important in their cooperative approach is the way in which these cooperative groups work: they conduct actions in the street –on La Rambla–, and they work around materials such as maps in the room that the City Council gave them in its Culture institute in a neoclassical building on the avenue. That room, dubbed a cooperative citizen's space, is a key element in the process, "an infrastructure that was missing in our city" (Ibid., p. 16). Working hands-on the actual space that is to be changed thanks to the project, both on the sidewalks of the avenue itself and in the closed space that also faces onto the street, is attractive to participants. It becomes another artifact that, as Law states in relation to the translation process, is also an active part of the process: "So the projector, like the shape of the room, participates in the shaping of our interaction." (Law, 1992, p. 382).

The type of work that Itziar describes is in sharp contrast to other regular meetings between the City Council and citizens, where there is less interaction and a lot of one-directional talk inside conference rooms. The different types of activity –mentioned above– that the Citizen's Cooperative Groups engage in, which include working as a group with physical elements such as worksheets and other files, and performing actions in La Rambla surrounding –for instance, inside the famous La Boqueria market– is seen as "skills-enhancement or training activities" (González, Appendix 2, p. 17). As Itziar puts it:

"people don't come here to give, they come to receive. That's also a change. The mechanism [in 'classical' participation] normally works in the form of citizens coming to tell the administration things that it doesn't know, or what is missing, or just to confirm what the administration 'thinks'. But not in our case: our construction is not an avenue, it is a story or an essay that we make together.[…] If we win the imaginary, La Rambla will start to be possible; otherwise, it will not." (Ibid.)

As can be seen in Figures 8 and 9, one of the materials they work with are maps, due to the importance that the leader of the team gives to the element of cartography, because of her training in architecture: "I always work with cartographies. Since I tend to work alone, I developed a methodology that makes it possible to have 300 people coming by without me having to be there all the time." (Ibid., p. 21)

Figure 8. Picture of the room that the City Council gave the expert team as their headquarters, in the Institute of Culture building on La Rambla, Barcelona. (Image courtesy of Itziar González)

As shown in Figure 9, the cooperative groups worked together around maps, which are marked with coloured stickers in order to differentiate the avenue's problematic areas from those which have more potential or are well regarded.

Figure 9. Picture of one of the sessions held with the Citizen's Cooperative Groups.
(Image courtesy of: Decidim.Barcelona).

In relation to the importance of cartography in the construction of networks, Storni argues in his revision of ANT and design:

"[…] maps are active actors in the process of drawing things together (both in the sense of depicting and attracting) through visual (yet not managerial) problematisation and interessement.[…] Maps can, thus, act as *phonation devices* (Latour 2004a, 2004b) that give voice to collective annotations." (Storni, 2015, p. 172).

5.1.3 The ideal network of the expert team

All the factors above contribute to the way in which the main actors are 'drawn in' or convinced to join the network of what is intended to be La Rambla community and thus serve to develop the four Citizen's Cooperative Groups that will sustain the core part of the project, mixing together actors that before the process started –and perhaps after it ends– were separate and in some cases even opposed. This would be the case, for example, of the local business lobby Amics de la Rambla, and the association reclaiming the avenue for the citizens, SOS Rambla. Their relation, their motivations and their inclusion in the network can be explained in terms of Callon's description of the interessement moment:

"But these allies are tentatively implicated in the problematization of other actors. Their identities are consequently defined in other competitive ways. […] To interest other actors is to build devices which can be placed between them all and other entities who want to define their identities otherwise." (Callon, 1999, p. 71)

The commercial lobby is in all likelihood implicated in demands that directly affect the small citizen's association and shape its identity, and vice versa. To give an example, this would be the case with the licences for bar terraces, a subject that generates a complicated debate in the neighbourhood. In the same line, if we consider the mission of 'rescuing La Rambla from its prevailing tourism monoculture' (Decidim.Barcelona, 2018b) as the final goal of the project, as described in the 'introduction' chapter of this thesis, the question of whether all the different actors share that interest clearly emerges.

Thus, by putting them together in the cooperative groups and within the setting of the workspace and actions of the project, Km-Zero centralizes the demands, struggles and/or identities of those actors, which at the same time helps the team create a common knowledge on the topic. Once actors are in the network, the team claims that they make no distinction between them, which is reminiscent of Latour's point about the multiplicity of forms that knowledge takes, particularly in what is called *second-order objectivity*: "[which] is based on agnosticism and suggests that one ought to collect as many viewpoints as possible, with no apriori assumption about which knowledge is more relevant or superior to informing or evaluating a design […]". (Storni, 2015, p. 174). An example of this mechanism is seen in the case of the business lobby of La Rambla, who expected to have a more important role within the process:

"I have people like Amics de la Rambla […] And they tell me 'Itziar, you are treating us as regular citizens and we are not that, we know more about Les Rambles […]. I mean, I find situations where people are not used to being treated like the rest of the actors. […] But my method doesn't allow them to influence *from above*." (González, Appendix 2, p. 22)

According to the team, the outcome of this way of assembling actors and pieces of knowledge is the following, in relation to the effects of the translation process:

"This way the discourse gets shaped. The clichés of the businessman, for example, are nuanced with the answers from the residents and vice versa. Therefore you start with 'tourists' [for instance] and 'residents' as mutually opposed, and you end up with 'travellers' who are probably also residents in a different city, so they can be allies if they

become politicized and ask our City Council to make commerce better, etc. All of a sudden, the tourist becomes a political agent who could help residents." (Ibid., p. 17-18)

That is, by attracting the relevant –and very diverse– actors into the network and making them address each other and compare their discourses, the expert team makes that their discourses shape and complement one another. In the end, surprising outcomes can appear, as in the example above of tourists helping locals to improve the city by contributing to the call for a better kind of tourism. The goal of Km-Zero is therefore to encourage the actors to enhance each other's discourses and demands.

The network of La Rambla project, with its actors and their different goals and motivations, will condition the participative process that starts from the very moment in which the actors are contacted. The participative dimension will become 'merely' a part of an intensive process with a hectic rhythm and a specific methodology that gives relevance to the tools and materials used, and to the physical spaces –the rooms, the street–, as well. Such a process is intended to create a common knowledge and a community around a city avenue that becomes an artifact and acts as the axis that shapes not only the urban morphology of the city but also the mental structures of the different actors in the process – actors that will also shape their opinions, goals and demands through their friction.

In addition to the pre-established outcome of designing and applying a plan to improve La Rambla avenue in many different respects, what the expert team aspires to create with the citizens is, in parallel to the community, a slot in which cooperation can continue to take place even after the formal project comes to an end: "What we are creating now is the Rambles community, which is a space, it's not people. […] And we can imagine, since we only have this room until May, getting abandoned premises on La Rambla […] and taking over a ground floor so the cooperative spaces can continue." (González, Appendix 2, p. 24)

It is difficult to assess what will occur after the formal project ends since it is not due to finish before June and the subsequent works on the street are scheduled to start in 2019. This means that the creation of a body of common knowledge around a given Rambla community will only be partly recognisable.

On the other hand, the question of whether the interessement devices have succeeded in creating a solid network by actually mobilising the relevant actors of the city, which in this case would entail rich participation taking place and citizens and other entities moving on from their initial positions, will be addressed in the Discussion chapter of this thesis. The

risks of this participative process focusing too much on the methods and tools instead of reflecting on the crux of the issue will also be addressed.

The creation of a network has been analyzed in this chapter together with the mechanisms intended to attract participants. What has been described becomes the previous step that opens the door to participation, framing and shaping the very specific conditions in which it will *have to* take place. In that line, the way in which participation has taken place in the La Rambla project will be analyzed below.

5.2 Participation

This section will address the expert team's position regarding the notion of participation and their way of promoting it. On the other hand, their approach will be compared with the actual conditions in which participation takes place in the La Rambla project will be analyzed in relation to one of the open workshops held with citizens in the avenue.

5.2.1 The expert team's understanding of participation

On the basis of my conversations with the expert team of La Rambla project, I was able to deduct that they understand participation as a notion that has already been absorbed by power –incarnated in this case by the City Council– in the sense that it has lost its original meaning and has been put at the service of the administration to prevent it from transforming reality (González, Appendix 2). The following excerpt from one of the interviews can serve as an example of this interpretation: "Finally, after fifteen or sixteen years of work, I wanted to talk about cooperation. When I started out, I talked about participation, and now I talk about *cooperation*. Why? To avoid getting caught. To avoid being captured by the system." (González, Appendix 2, p. 14). Similarly, the informant directly points to the administration as something from which this other way of working needs to be protected: "Cooperation has some important principles, it tries to be a defence against capitalism or the extractivism of human processes carried out by the administration […]" (Ibid.).

This point of view might seem paradoxical at least , given that the informant's project is framed within what is literally entitled the participation platform of Barcelona City Council and is dependent on the administration in the last term. In other words, and as Delgado pointed out during his interview, "In the first place, Itziar *is* administration, don't forget that." (Delgado, Appendix 2, p. 37).

In any case, it is interesting to observe the fact that the expert team is trying to move away from the overused concept of participation and position themselves at a distance from the administration even though they are working under its structures. This continuous interlacing between two faces that would normally be seen as mutually exclusive and here are presented as intertwined, might recall the intricate nature of the public and private forces within cities described in the theoretical section of this thesis. This is a recurring issue in La Rambla project, one to which the leader of the team makes continual reference as well as contributing to the mix:

> "All of this methodology is a critique of democracy in the way we experience it. My ideal is quite libertarian, I was working in Christiania, with self-management, etc. I mean, I agree with Lefebvre, my background shows through. However, I'm a great cooperator with the administration, and I have been inside it, I empathize with it and I understand it. The fact of having been in the three places –I have been a resident, I have been a councilor within the administration and I have been a mediator between the two–, makes me understand all of the processes. This is a part of what I have to contribute." (González, Appendix 2, p. 16).

Therefore, what is presented as an advantage or as an important skill of the leader and consequently of the team –and it probably is–, may also contribute to the confusing scene of the public realm, in which the distinction of the private and the public is no longer possible. Moreover, what the informant presents as a 'libertarian' ideal can hardly be seen as a collaboration with the administration, where limitations are solid.

To go more deeply into the particular idea of participation that Km-Zero supports and fit it into the schools of thought classification developed in the theoretical section of this thesis, it could be said that while the Km-Zero vision of participation is not as vehement as the one shared by some of the authors mentioned (Lefebvre, 1996; Garnier, 2010b; Delgado, 2018), it does relate to the more conciliatory approach of other authors or to initiatives like those of the Catalan architects' cooperative LaCol (2016) or the geographer Boira (2011). Regarding the first of these, Itziar mentions that some of the students and people she works with come from organizations such as LaCol (González, Appendix 2, p. 14), which therefore supports this interpretation of her team's vision of participation.

Such perspectives have an essential difference from the perspectives of the first group of authors above, a difference that concerns the preferred path for confronting the urban problems of capitalism. While the latter group has a deep conviction that it is possible to

construct something different in our society and, more particularly, in our cities while waiting for the 'final revolt' to come (Boira, 2011, p. 2) – in other words, they aim to change the economic and political system from within – the first group of authors find it impossible to think about transforming a society –towards socialism– while tolerating any inch of the space produced by capitalism, not even during a given transition period (Garnier, 2012). Translated to La Rambla project, this line of thought would mean that the mere fact of collaborating in such a participation project would be inadmissible, since it would fail to address the structural problems that capitalism provokes. In the words of the French sociologist Jean-Pierre Garnier:

> "[…] there are many people who share the illusion that a collective appropriation of the urban space is possible without provoking a confrontation between possessors and dispossessed, that is, without seriously jeopardizing the capitalist mode of production that makes such appropriation impossible."[19]

This would be the case of La Rambla project as conceived by Km-Zero, which seeks to *pacify* the avenue and rescue it from the tourism monoculture, among other goals, without having the chance to tackle what some authors (Delgado, Appendix 2) see as its main and structural problem: the cost of housing, not only on the avenue but also in the city in its entirety. In any case, as has been seen so far, this is nevertheless meant to be a *different* type of participative process.

The leader of the team mentions a previous urban project in which she worked on redesigning a square in Barcelona and uses the case to describe her way of working as informal, in the sense that she conducted the previous process in such a way that it evolved unpredictably, without a predefined plan, where *power* never knew what was going to be the next step (González, Appendix 2). Back in the present, La Rambla case required a formal presentation of the process, due to the fact that this is entirely a City Council project, and the team put forward a structured and planned process. However, as the informant states, they included an element that "changes everything: transparency." (Ibid., p. 13). Thus, the fact of making the whole process transparent and open to the public, as well as being accountable to citizens and their queries, is presented here as the ultimate fix for taking the process away from the power of the administration: in other words, to avoiding a situation of 'official' participation.

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[19] Translated from Spanish by the author of this thesis. The original quote: "hay mucha gente que comparte la ilusión de que es posible una apropiación colectiva del espacio urbano sin provocar un enfrentamiento entre poseedores y desposeídos, es decir, sin poner seriamente en jaque el modo de producción capitalista que hace imposible dicha apropiación." (Tello, 2017, p. 205).

So far we have considered the expert team's understanding and participation, along with their discourse about the concept. We shall now look at the actual way in which participation takes place during the project the team is leading: in other words, the *ritual* of participating that was performed during the whole process. One of the workshops conducted with citizens will be analyzed below.

5.2.1 The ritual of participating

The conditions outlined above are those constructed by Km-Zero to prepare the ground for participation, conditions that at the same time are limited in time and resources by the City Council.

Regarding the actual performance of the concept, this analysis was based on conversations with a sample of informants –*participants*–, on observation of one of the actions held in the avenue and one of the open workshops with citizens, and on the subsequent review of all the available documentation of the process.

During the first conversation with one of the citizens who actively participated throughout the process, the informant drew attention at the very beginning of the process to one of the common risks of such a project:

> "[…] if you lead it [the process] too much, you go back to the logic of 'lunch is already precooked, you only have to put it in the microwave', don't you? Then, it doesn't facilitate the possibility of dynamics appearing, or of spontaneous dynamics generated through debate imposing themselves, but just following the guidelines they keep reminding you of: 'now I convene you to this, now I present these files to you, now we are going to discuss this topic.'" (Jordi, Appendix 2, p. 38)

While the informant does not directly criticize the Rambla project but states what he identifies as the risks of this kind of project, it seems fair to assume that he is basing his description on some of the dynamics that are actually taking place within the meetings and activities held by Km-Zero. The fact of mentioning the way participants are convened or the existence of files or topics to discuss points to a part of the project that is actually taking place. From the context of his interview, it also appears that the informant has certain expectations[20] of the project and at the same time is identifying negative dynamics or discouraging aspects of it, such as the ones mentioned in the excerpt above. Those dynamics reflect a limited type of

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[20] The following excerpt serves as an example of those expectations: "I have hope, yes. I am giving a lot of time and for me it is a commitment to say… If I don't give it time, then I can't complain, I can't say I have tried it. It has to be tried, right?" (Jordi, Appendix 2, p. 43).

participation, which is progressively appearing as closer to the "empty ritual" described by Arnstein (Arsntein, 1969) than to the "real power" (ibid.) exercise.

One of the basic conditions that the informant sees as crucial to avoiding excessive control of the project is the possibility of developing a 'Rambla community', a concept that was also mentioned by the leader of the expert team. In this case, the informant describes such a community as the appearance of "internal dynamics of collective intelligence." (Jordi, Appendix 2, p. 38). This idea relates again to the translation process described above in relation to Callon's case (Callon, 1999), where common knowledge is produced at the end of the process. Therefore, the idea of creating some sort of new sense of community and a collective knowledge around La Rambla could be used as a gauge of the project's evolution and level of success, although it will also be important to determine by and for whom it is considered to be successful. The informant also warns about what these kinds of processes tend to do with participants, who end up being *underused*: "You want to give a lot and you end up saying to yourself 'oh, the format doesn't allow you to, nor does the time either, so…'." (Jordi, Appendix 2, p. 39).

As a matter of fact, one of the factors that can delimit the way that participants are taking advantage of inputs is the **time frame** of the encounters. The timescale that normally attends 'official' participation processes is one of the most common issues, and it was mentioned by several of the informants of this project, both in interviews and in informal conversations. Time shapes these types of process in two different ways: with regard to the particular period in which the process takes place –normally not more than a few months– with the corresponding meetings and sessions, and with regard to the velocity of the sessions themselves.

Time is not an innocent element in participation. One of the informants made the following comment about the time issue:

> "There is another complexity issue, of having too much information, for example, and very little time to discuss it. […] Because there is not enough time to debate everything in depth […] and it doesn't let those who want to participate share their idea of the macro and the essence of the concept, so they are doomed to saying 'yes to this, 'no to that'. And maybe this is intentional, on the part of team Km-Zero, to avoid finding themselves in the middle of deep debates that pop up and they cannot close down. And also because, as they have said from the beginning, they are here to validate something." (Jordi, Appendix 2, p. 38-39)

Albert, another informant who is not involved in the particular case of La Rambla but is engaged in other participation processes with the City Council because of his activist role in the defence of the Barcelona neighbourhood of Vallcarca, adds the issue of haste on the part of political parties during the final periods of their term of office –which is in fact the case of the present city government in Barcelona–, when parties need to conclude as many initiatives or projects as possible in order to leave a mark, regardless of how deep the demands of those projects may be (Albert, Appendix 2). Independently of pre-election haste, the informant mentions that on many occasions the problem is having only three or four sessions in a period of several months and running each of these sessions too quickly: "[…] there have been very few sessions and they were very fast, I mean, very *simulation-like*." (Ibid., p. 73). The reference to a simulation of participation exactly recalls Lefebvre's description of the term (Theoretical Contribution, p. 28).

5.2.2.1 The open workshop

Going back to La Rambla and the type of participation that has taken place, Km-Zero held an open workshop with citizens in April –further described in the Field Diary (Field Diary, Appendix 1, p. 8) – with the intention of explaining the practicalities of the process up to that point. This consisted of a delimited tour of the seaward section of the avenue, with four different spaces that people could visit. The description below is from the communication issued by Km-Zero (Decidim, 2018):

1. 'Know Space' - Participants are informed about the actors involved in the process, the tools and methods of the Km-Zero team to 'rescue' the avenue, their plans, the preliminary draft project, the criteria and the results of the process.
2. 'Recognize Space' - the actions carried out by the 'Citizens' Cooperative Groups' are shown.
3. 'Propose Space' - Maps of the resulting spatial concept of La Rambla are shown. Participants can respond to questions about what the new uses and community life of this urban space should be in short term.
4. 'Fabricate Space' - participants can make contributions and proposals to be developed in the long term, based on the answers of the 'Propose Space'.

The final goal of the workshop was to receive feedback from the public, who were also expected to contribute with concrete suggestions and ideas for the project. With the help of a few facilitators from the expert team, citizens could connect their ideas with the structure of

the project and its final shape: in other words, place their proposals in the corresponding plan that was to be presented to the City Council[21], as can be seen in Figure 10. Thus they would be able to articulate their own demands within the final project in order to understand it in its entirety.

Figure 10. Participants place their proposals with the help of the facilitators from the expert team.

Strict time limits were applied throughout the whole event, particularly in the first stages of the tour, in which participants were not supposed to *participate* much but merely receive information. The event was planned in such a way that certain *things* −and not others− had to take place in every stage of the process. After each stage, in which participants were given an considerable amount of information, both written on panels and orally, they were 'invited' to move on to the next one, as described in the field notes of this thesis: "Without much time to read all the information on the panels, participants are 'pushed' on to the next station." (Field Diary, Appendix 1, p. 9); or "Again, with no time for questions from the public or discussion, everybody moves to the next point, number three." (Ibid.).

However, participants had more time in the last two stages of the tour, where they were actually supposed to participate in an active way, that is, by giving their ideas and suggestions. In the third stage the public was invited to write down on Post-its their responses to given questions and stick them onto the panel. In the last stage, they could articulate their suggestions in more detail, as shown in the figure above.

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[21] The details of the final plans are explained in the 'Introduction' chapter of this thesis.

Therefore, participation was supposed to take place *only* in certain moments –two out of four stops on the tour– and in specific conditions –in written format. In the rest of the session, participants were supposed to listen and be informed. Even if the purpose of the session was precisely that of showcasing the methods, activities and meetings held up to that point (that is, that it was merely informative), the session was called 'activate La Rambla' and the communication of the event was defined as "flexible" (Decidim, 2018) and was intended to "receive the maximum possible amount of contributions." (Ibid.).

In relation to the number of contributions that was expected, the fact that all data on the number of participants in each session is meticulously detailed and analyzed in the open documentation of the project is a significant element in relation to the type of participation that takes place. According to Arnstein's ladder of participation and her description of the 'consultation' level:

> "People are primarily perceived as statistical abstractions, and participation is measured by how many come to meetings, take brochures home, or answer a questionnaire. What citizens achieve in all this activity is that they have 'participated in participation'. And what powerholders achieve is the evidence that they have gone through the required motions of involving 'those people'." (Arnstein, 1969, p. 219).

Arnstein's description approximates fairly closely to the reality of the observed workshop on La Rambla. While people did actually take participated and were able to ask and to express their ideas at certain moments, the whole experience seemed to be thoroughly framed and prepared so that participation would took place in a very particular way. In that line, the type of participation observed up to this point appears as quite constrained and recalling to the title of this section, more of a ritual than an empowering exercise.

This preparation of the workshop, along with the fact that one of the main purposes was to show the methods used during the process (which is also a sign of transparency as it was intended), might also lead to discussion about the prioritizing of the methods over everything else in the participation processes, and this will be considered in the 'Discussion' chapter of this thesis.

After the analysis of the network, the drawing in of the relevant actors and the actual performance of participation enacted on the avenue itself, the last section of this chapter deals with the function of the digital platform that hosts the process. As it was introduced in the first chapters of this thesis, the platform was not a central element in the process, as compared

with other similar processes. It was relegated to a specific stage of the project due to the conditions given by the City Council. The expert team was expecting the support of the administration in order to ensure an efficient usage of the tool. However, the actual circumstances were different.

Their use of the tool will be analyzed below in order to understand how the expert team sees the tool and what reasons they have for giving it such a specific role.

5.3 The role of Decidim.Barcelona

The tool developed by Barcelona City Council in the last few years, Decidim.Barcelona, is the platform that hosts the participative process of La Rambla, and also centralises all of the city's open participative processes. The project is in fact framed within that context, although during the first stages of the process the tool has not been used in all its capacity but only in an informative way.

The following excerpt from one of the interviews summarizes the particular use of the tool as described by the expert team once the project of La Rambla had already started. When the informant is asked about it, she states that "First, we have created our space there [within the platform] because the City Council has this tool, so we have uploaded all our materials there. But it will be active from the second phase onwards." (González, Appendix 2, p. 20).

It is significant that during the continuation of this interview the informant progressively redirects her answer and starts talking about the use of physical tools such as cartography – described in the previous section. The informant's description of physical tools in response to the question about the digital tool might be due to the fact that the use of Decidim cannot be explained without describing the previous work done by the team.

Itziar talks about the creation of a 'Rambla community' and the compiling of what are called the 'objective criteria' on the problematization of the avenue as elements separate from the use of the tool, and almost as necessary previous steps that will enable the subsequent step.

Decidim is thus understood as a differentiated entity that will eventually be used in the process. Such a reading recalls –and contradicts– the ANT approach of in this regard: "Entities do not pre-exist the design process as fixed and separate actors with predefined roles and qualities but rather emerge, shift and fuse together in open-ended assemblages of humans and non-humans." (Storni, 2015, p. 169). Therefore, in order to understand the role of the tool it becomes necessary to approach it as something embedded in the rest of the network of the project. That is why the discourse of the informant and her way of describing the relations

between the tool, the expert team and the process must be considered as a relevant element in its own right.

Following on from the team's understanding of the digital tool, the key point of their judgement is the fact that they consider the tool to be very well suited to the specific task of presenting the progress of the project to the rest of the city: "I think that once we have the objective criteria, the Decidim tool is perfect. Because now we will be able to upload the progress to Decidim so that the whole city gets to know it." (González, Appendix 2, p. 21). The team separates the generating of a sense of community and the definition of a shared problematizing of the avenue from the task of informing the rest of the city, taking into account that the former had to be done 'physically' and the latter could be done via the digital platform. While one can agree that the first group of actions, along with the task of explaining the methods and values of the expert team to the public, in fact called for a high level of compromise and physical interaction with entities and citizens, these do not seem to exclude the use of the Decidim digital tool.

However, the informant has a clear reason for doing so and actually uses that argument as a critique of the City Council: "If I had had a more powerful communication campaign, Decidim would have been here all the time. [...] a powerful campaign where I would have explained this to everybody." (Ibid., p. 22); or: "if I had the big campaign I was telling you, which I actually asked for, including social media, internet in general, etc." (Ibid., p. 23). This argument might prove that the team's use of the platform is subject to the circumstances of the project, which do not include stronger support from the administration. As a matter of fact, this is the clearest and more repeated critique that the informant directed at the City Council on several occasions during the interviews for this thesis, as will be shown in the following chapter.

In any case, the informant considers the fact of explaining the project appropriately to be a crucial element in relation to the use of Decidim. It is thus understood that the expert team did not want to use the tool without the proper space to explain and *educate* the public, to create a particular state of mind (Ibid.) within the users of the platform and Barcelona citizens in general.

In relation to the benefits of using Decidim during the process, one of the main elements highlighted by the leader of the team is the opportunity to reach a bigger sample of citizens with the added value of engaging "people who already have an account within the tool, people who already believe in this 'techno-participation', who are comfortable with it, and

are users of this deliberation and follow-up tool." (González, Appendix 2, p. 22). Thus, the capabilities of the tool are believed to allow more citizens to participate online in the process, as is already happening in similar open processes in which Barcelona citizens are supposed to be in a position to shape "the city's policy agenda" (Bria, 2018).

To expand the network of participants would thus be the first advantage of Decidim, according to the expert team. A second factor which the informant mentions is transparency (González, Appendix 2), in order to present the process almost in real time, including the documentation from the meetings and workshops, the list of all the actors involved in the network and their degree of involvement, the criteria agreed through the project, etc.

On the other hand, Itziar is convinced that the digital tool by itself would not be enough to conduct the type of process the team has proposed. When she was asked whether it could be done only with Decidim, she replied as follows: "No, no. We need the Citizen Cooperative Space, the face-to-face space, the credibility, legitimacy… You have to earn this legitimacy. I mean, I have obtained the open request from the City Council, okay, but I haven't won the trust of the people." (Ibid., p. 22). Due to her background and the way of working of the expert team, the issue of proximity is crucial, in the sense of conducting actions, workshops and meetings in a face-to-face way and on a regular basis, especially in the first phase of the project. Moreover, if the team put all the necessary previous information into the platform, they did so in a merely formal manner, having an 'obligation' to do so: "I open it up because we are legally forced to, but I start working here [pointing at the physical space], at street level of La Rambla, here, and I win the legitimacy of interlocutions." (Ibid., p. 23). That is yet another indication of what kind of work they consider has to be done 'in the field', and also of their critique of the City Council, which, according to them, promotes the use of the digital tool but does not support their particular project with a powerful communication campaign that would contextualize its use.

However, the informant's opinion on this matter is not entirely clear. While she declares that Decidim would have been useful from the beginning in the event that the team had the opportunity to explain their project to the city, she also insists that the main difference in using the platform is to expand the network of participants: "So, Decidim amounts to expanding it even more. That's the difference, to reach more people, that's it." (Ibid.).

In that same line, the procedure of the team was to conduct the first phase of the project and once the preliminary network was firmly established and they have reached an agreement on the problematization of La Rambla, the next step is to explain that work to the rest of the city

and to allow citizens to participate as well, in this case in a base project that is already being implemented by others.

The digital platform Decidim.Barcelona was presented by the current government of the city as the ultimate way of improving citizen participation in Barcelona in an open-source format that would allow citizens' data to be used in an ethical way, that is, giving the citizens control of their own data and also allowing them to contribute to the continuous construction of the platform, with the final goal of empowering citizens to participate in the making of policy decisions.

In the case of La Rambla project, however, the use of the tool has somehow been forgotten. From the reasons of the Km-Zero team expounded in this thesis, it can be concluded that in order to give coherence to such a tool and make the most of it, a greater effort should have been made to integrate it into the project from the very start. In light of the Actor-Network Theory analysis of design processes such as the one that concerns us here, the failure of the City Council in this case would have been to regard Decidim.Barcelona and the expert team as isolated and pre-existing entities instead of analysing them together and in terms of what they could have become and could have produced in association with one another (Storni, 2015, p. 169). That would translate into merging the two elements and working for a general understanding of the project and the concrete role of the digital platform among citizens. Instead, as will be seen at the end of the Discussion chapter, the City Council *forced* the expert team to use the platform without supporting them in doing so and without adequately educating citizens in how to use the tool in the proper context.

Up to this point the creation of the network around La Rambla avenue has been analyzed, together with the interessement devices created by the Km-Zero expert team and the City Council in order to attract the relevant actors into the network. The concrete elements utilised for that purpose –such as the opportunity for citizens to participate and decide, the figure of the expert team leader, and the innovative methodology– have been analyzed together in order to understand how the participative process has taken place.

In parallel, the phenomenon of participation has been analyzed in relation to the expert team's notion of participation and their positioning towards it. They seem to maintain an intermediate position, balanced between the voices most critical of participation on the one side and the *official* definition absorbed by the administration on the other. In order to analyze their position, the practical workshop held with citizens on La Rambla has been considered. It has shown that despite the expert team's useful position towards participation,

the actual performance of the concept has been constrained by the conditions given by the City Council and caused by the interessement devices used.

Lastly, the role of the digital tool Decidim.Barcelona has also been addressed by explaining how the expert team has used it, in what circumstances and with what motives. Their particular understanding of the device has also been described in order to reflect on the causes of that use.

The above points will be problematized in the next chapter, with the aim of understanding what effects they have had in the participation process of La Rambla, and what were the reasons that shaped the conditions of participation in the project.

6. Discussion

Once the La Rambla process has been analyzed and all the elements described above have been addressed, this chapter aims to reflect on the effects of each of these on citizen participation. The ultimate aim of this chapter and of this thesis in general is the potential contribution to the general debate on the concept of participation, in that the analysis of the Barcelona case and its subsequent reflection and problematization may contribute to a broader reflection on what citizen participation is and what its effects are, in terms of empowering citizens or merely *using* them.

The following sections will address once more the forms that participation takes in the La Rambla project in relation to the discourse of the Km-Zero expert team. This time, the way of attracting participants, analyzed in the previous chapter, will be discussed here as one of the factors that has conditioned participation. It will therefore address the particular conditions applying to the participative process, including the channels and possibilities of action, along with the effects of limiting participation in such a way.

Continuing with the problematization of what constitutes participation in the case of La Rambla, the methods of Km-Zero –analyzed in the previous chapter– will be addressed to understand what use they may have and what kind of process they can help to shape.

This chapter is intended as a response to the questions raised in the previous one, and for that purpose, the discourse of the expert team will be discussed and compared to their actions and to what they finally contribute. In similar fashion, the responsibility of Barcelona City Council and its way of conditioning the process of participation will also be considered: declarations will be contrasted with intentions and achievements , as a clarification of the analysis about the City Council's role, described in the 'Analysis' chapter.

6.1 What type of participation?

While the results of the participative process in terms of actual changes in the avenue will not be presented, given that the process will only be officially finalized in June and the work on the street will not begin until 2019, it is possible to reflect on the previous analysis of participation thus far, with a view to understanding what the ritual described in the Analysis section relates to.

As seen in the 'Theoretical Contribution' chapter of this thesis, a number of authors have developed mechanisms for measuring levels of participation, such as Arnstein's (1969) ladder

of participation. In the case of this project, the method used has been based on analysis of the different discourses surrounding the concept of participation from the expert team, the participants and the dissident voices of those who are not involved in it, on observation of the activities held in the context of La Rambla project, and on the articulation of the concept within the political frame of neoliberalism and its power relations. Given the wide disparity of opinions on participation gathered in the 'Theoretical framework' of this thesis, it seems more relevant for this project to discuss what participation is and what it looks like in the particular case of La Rambla rather than trying to determine what precise level of participation has been achieved, which would mean assuming that anything and everything can be defined as *participating*.

From the previous analysis of these elements, the following issues will be addressed: the effects of the particular way to approach and engage participants in the process, the particular conditions given for citizen participation to take place, the role of the expert team and the influence of their leader, and, finally, how their methods influenced the process.

6.1.1 Attracting or forcing?

The previous chapter of this thesis described how the Km-Zero expert team created a network around the axis of La Rambla avenue and attracted towards it those actors they considered relevant, which were analyzed in relation to the interessement devices concept described by Callon (1999) in Actor-Network Theory and the translation process. While the Km-Zero group has an innovative methodology and its members emphasize the importance of their background in and around social movements and their distance from the administration, it could be said that the institutional framework in which their project takes place creates in itself a specific way of attracting actors to the network that might limit their possibilities as participants.

As Storni states in his approach to ANT from a design perspective, the traditional model in ANT "has long been criticised and associated with managerialism, because it focuses on the establishment of hierarchies and privileges one central actor, drawing things together under its design" (Storni, 2015, p. 172). This is not exactly the case within La Rambla project, in that the expert team did not impose a specific obligatory passage point (Callon, 1999) through which all actors had to pass. That is, a condition that all participants were required to meet in order to attain their different goals within the context of the avenue. Instead, they tried to use and connect the existing networks such as associations or social movements –as

for example the aforementioned group SOS Rambla that claims the avenue for its inhabitants– and their respective already existing points of passage.

However, the framework of Barcelona City Council made it difficult for the expert team to create an open form of participation and instead gave pre-existing conditions for a very particular way and channels of doing so. That is the reason why the process can recall to the critique of ANT that Storni mentions, because the official way of participating that the administration frames implies that the interessement devices of the network *force* participants to be part of the network instead of conducting a deeper analysis on each actor's issues around the avenue, as the expert team would have done if they had more time to conduct the project. That is to say, in a contradictory approach, the City Council turns the Km-Zero expert team into the central actor who draws things together into its design (Storni, 2015, p. 172), even though the expert team tries to compensate that situation and connect with all existing networks.

In the Analysis section, the opportunity to *participate* and *decide* was mentioned as a way of attracting citizens with the appealing opportunity of participating in the decision-making of the city. This sort of advertising claim might be misleading in the sense that it encourages citizens to participate and at the same time it aims to be the *only* way in which citizens can participate, the way that the City Council proposes and seeks to impose over other possibilities such as self-management.

As one of the informants commented in the interview conducted for this thesis, the library and cultural association he represented was *included*[22] in the project even though they were not taking part in the process because of ideological discrepancies with the administration. As he explained, the City Council tends to express annoyance in cases of this kind, when some actor chooses not to be part of a given process:

> "I know that the City Council complains: 'Oh, if you don't participate…'. Sure, but in my ideal way of organizing society, maybe the City Council is not the way of doing so. […] We all know what is needed to really participate and decide: it's an open assembly in which decisions are taken collectively. This is impossible in the case of La Rambla." (Iñaki, Appendix 2, p. 59).

The informant's point relates to that limitation of only being able to participate on the administration's terms. In other words, in his opinion, what the City Council is affirming with

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[22] The name of this cultural association appears in the public information of La Rambla project as one of the entities forming one of the Citizen's Cooperative Groups.

this mechanism is that if citizens do not participate through the given channels they forfeit the right to complain or protest, in a kind of 'take it or leave it' logic in which no other possibilities are available to citizens.

Therefore, and again recalling to Callon's (1999) description of the translation process, what might be necessary for the interessement of some actors might not be necessary for others. That is the case of the abovementioned City Council advertisement calling on citizens to co-decide policies affecting the city in conjunction with them, which will be welcomed as a unique opportunity by those citizens who believe in the usefulness of such processes and will do nothing to convince dissidents such as the informant above, who feel it is more relevant to contribute in other ways.

With regard to the limited options for participation afforded by the administration, there is a line of thought that seems relevant in so far as it defines participation processes as something whose primary purpose is to eliminate possible protests and placate the potential articulation of social movements. The French sociologist Jean-Pierre Garnier is one of those that subscribe to this vision: "There are, obviously, multiple 'citizens' participation' devices and concertation mechanisms […] In fact, these are stratagems directed at neutralizing opposition and facilitating the population's acceptance of these projects"[23].

Although Garnier's view of participation does not entirely define the case that concerns us, from the preparation of this thesis I suggest that one of the objectives of this type of process – and particularly in the case of La Rambla– is that of legitimating decisions taken by the City Council. An example of this logic can be seen in the inclusion of certain actors in the network and the fact of presenting them as 'involved' in the project. This was the case with the anthropologist Manuel Delgado, who did not know that he was being named as a member of one of the Citizens' Cooperative Groups, and also with the bookseller representing the cultural association, the name of whose association was being used even though they were not taking part. Thus Garnier's statement would partly apply to this case, especially his point about persuading the public to accept such projects.

Again with reference to the legitimation of the project, the importance of the expert team leader and her impact on La Rambla project in relation to the creation of the network –in

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[23] Translated from Spanish by the author of this thesis. The original quote: "Existen, obviamente, múltiples dispositivos de 'participación ciudadana' y mecanismos de 'concertación' [...] De hecho, se trata de estratagemas dirigidas a neutralizar la oposición y hacer que la población acepte estos proyectos" (Tello, 2017, p. 208).

other words, her involuntary function as an interessement device to attract the relevant actors– has been addressed in the 'Analysis' section of this thesis. The significance of this element and its effect on the process in relation to the aims of the administration is considered below.

6.1.2 Itziar as a legitimizing element

As its title suggests, this section reflects on the influence of the leader of La Rambla project. The purpose here is not to argue that the expert team leader was chosen by the City Council in order to satisfy certain interests or goals of the administration – as a matter of fact, the leader of the team was not chosen by the administration but emerged as the result of an open invitation as a member of a larger candidacy group. The point of this section is rather to understand the implications for the project and the process of the expert team and its leader .

The adjudication of the project to redesign La Rambla avenue in Barcelona was the result of a public competition, open to architecture offices and other urban planning consultancies, held by Barcelona City Council for the purpose of finding a team that could set to work on implementing an existing urban plan that had been approved by the previous city government. The novel element, however, was that the current city government wanted to develop the urbanization plan to remodel the street through a holistic approach that would also include a particular set of policies. It followed from this that the most suitable candidate to lead the process would be a transdisciplinary team (González, Appendix 2).

As the leader of the expert team explained during the first interview conducted for this thesis, the novelty of the competition brief was that it was very specific, in a way that contrasted with most urban planning competitions (Ibid.), and which gave the Km-Zero group a greater chance of winning the competition thanks to its transdisciplinary composition and accumulated knowledge and expertise. The differential element, according to the leader of the team, was that La Rambla residents and their associations, who had been conducting a range of actions in their attempt to 'save' the avenue, came to her to ask for help in putting together a team capable of submitting a strong candidacy for the open competition (Ibid.).

As the expert team leader explained during our first interview conducted for this thesis, the novelty of the open request was that its conditions were very specific in a different way as they normally were within urban planning contests (Ibid.). That is why the group Km-Zero had more chances to win due to its transdisciplinarity –and their knowledge on the topic–. The differential element according to the leader of the team was the fact that La Rambla

neighbors and their associations, who had been conducting several actions and fight in order to 'save' the avenue, turned to her and asked for help to create a team that was able to submit a strong candidacy for the open request (Ibid.).

The particular background of the team leader, Itziar, which has been described above as being halfway between the administration and activism, was a controversial element in the evaluation of the team's candidacy for the project. As the informant explained, her 'polemical' past in city politics[24], which offered clues to her line of thinking about the kind of avenue she was championing (Ibid.), was a negative factor on the scoresheet of the expert team's candidacy; however, her professional background as an architect with experience in urban planning, in cooperation with citizens and in mediating between administration and residents compensated on the positive side.

Itziar and the Km-Zero expert team that she would lead won the public competition held by the City Council because they satisfied most of the requirements. The innovative and integral approach proposed by the city government –the cross-party Barcelona en Comú coalition'[25]– as a frame for the competition was a golden opportunity for someone with a profile like Itziar's, a social activist and architect with proven expertise in projects with social movements and the public administration. As noted in previous chapters of this dissertation, the fact that Itziar was the project's principal 'visible face' did much to contribute to the creation of the network, in that several potential participants approached the process because of her involvement, which they saw as some kind of guarantee that a *different* project could be carried out. The presence of this figure who contributed to the creation of the network also helped legitimate the process in the eyes of the local people and to the city of Barcelona as a whole.

In the same line, as the anthropologist Manuel Delgado (Appendix 2) stated in the context of an interview for this thesis, what the present government of Barcelona is looking for with this project and with their policies in general is precisely legitimacy. Delgado (2018) describes what is known *citizenism*[26] and the 'new *municipalism*' as recent political strategies that – voluntarily or not– contribute to an ethical and aesthetic renovation of capitalism, which is now "deployed with this kind of rhetoric, loaded with good intentions, and willing, in one way or another, to reform and make those capitalist mechanisms that raze the city and make it

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[24] See the 'Analysis' chapter of this thesis (p. 26) for a reference to Itziar's background.

[25] In English 'Barcelona in common'.

[26] For a reference to *citizenism* see the theoretical section of this dissertation (p. 10).

sadder a little more clement." (Delgado, Appendix 2, p. 34). According to this vision –and Delgado is one of the most dissident voices on the concept of participation in Spain– the figure of a leader like Itziar would contribute to the public acceptance of such a process precisely because of the kind of discourse she adopts, which is followed up by active collaboration with the current administration.

The expert team leader can thus be seen as a double-sided element, on the one hand leading the team towards the development of a cooperative project with a clear set of values and methods, and on the other hand achieving a particular effect on the whole participative process, in a legitimation that serves the City Council's purpose of finding consensus among citizens in order to approve its decisions.

In another vein, the above-mentioned set of values and methods of the leader and thus of the expert team can be read in a different light. The importance that Km-Zero give to their methodology not only shapes La Rambla project and the way in which participants take part in it, but also defines the type of approach they take to participation, which is slightly different from their discourse. This effect is addressed below.

6.1.3 Methods over content

The methodology used by the Km-Zero expert team has been presented in this dissertation as one of their strong points. This is asserted by the expert team in most of the available public documentation of La Rambla project (Decidim.Barcelona, 2018; 2018b), and was described in depth by the leader of the team in the context of the interviews of this thesis (González, Appendix 2).

During the analysis of this project, it has been shown that such methods were innovative in their way of including citizens in the process as well as in their approach to the field, with a series of open workshops and actions in the street, and also in relation to the importance given to the materials and spaces used in the process, such as cartographies of the avenue and other mechanisms that contributed to a deeper understanding of the context of La Rambla. The transparency that has characterized this methodology has also been seen as an important element, thanks to the possibility of following the process online and having access to all the available data of the meetings and workshops.

The methods were also useful at a practical level in the sense of allowing a large number of people to take part in the process at the same time in a short period of time.

The analysis of this methodology has been based on the observation of an open workshop held on La Rambla and of one of the actions conducted in the street, on the available information about the project and on interviews and conversations with informants who included the leader of the expert team and some of the participants in the process.

As has been described in previous chapters, this methodology allowed the creation of a specific structure that had the so-called Citizens' Cooperative Groups in its core. At the same time, these groups included the figure of 'expert citizens' as their differential element. The presence of citizens in the core operative element of this process was indeed a novelty in the decision-making apparatus of a city like Barcelona.

In addition, the importance that the expert team gave to the materials and spaces served to create a deep shared knowledge of the avenue and its main issues and a sense of 'Rambla community' among all its diverse participants.

To sum up, the methods used in the participative process of La Rambla have been proved to be different and innovative – inclusive, transparent and useful.

While this methodology clearly has positive effects on the process and a very holistic approach towards citizen participation, as described above, it must at least be considered whether such an approach contributes to one of the main issues associated with *participationism* described in the theoretical chapter of this thesis: putting the emphasis on the tool instead of the ultimate goal (LaCol, 2016). The Catalan architecture collective LaCol talks about certain optimism about participation processes on the part of Spanish city councils, which tends to define and orient some decisions; that is to say, a technique, accompanied by a lack of depth in evaluating the subject or community (Ibid., p. 37) that is to participate in these processes. In this view, such a superficial approach to participation tends to "give a technological response to a political question. It answers a 'who?' with a 'how'. However […] the key to political systems is who decides and not how a decision is technically organized."[27].

The fact that Km-Zero's project was very intensely focused on the methodology of the process is beyond doubt. In its favour, however, it should be noted that in contrast to other participative processes based on mass consultations in which digital channels predominate

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[27] Translated from Spanish by the author of this thesis. The original quote: "da una respuesta tecnológica a una pregunta política. Responde a un quién con un cómo. Sin embargo, […] la clave de los sistemas políticos se centra en quién decide, no en cómo se organiza técnicamente la decisión." (LaCol, 2016, p. 37).

and there is an evident lack of transparency[28] (Imprevistos, 2018), the use that Km-Zero has made of the Decicim.Barcelona digital tool has been marked by precaution, adapting it to their possibilities –described in the 'Analysis' chapter of this thesis– and placing greater importance on physical meetings and workshops. That does not mean that the team had no faith in the use of digital platforms to conduct the project, but rather that in the absence of the necessary logistical support from the City Council in promoting the platform and reaching its users, they attached more importance to other types of encounter.

Nonetheless, the aforementioned predominance of the methodology over other elements in the process did in fact weaken the search for the people who should be involved in the project. One of the issues analyzed in previous sections of this dissertation is the inclusion of the names of actors that were not involved in any active capacity. Moreover, as has been shown, some of these actors understood their inclusion in the official documentation as a fraudulent means of legitimating the project. The fact that the expert team based their initial search for actors on their own prior knowledge of La Rambla was useful in the sense that they were able quickly to develop the first stages of the project, as Itziar stated in our first interview (González, Appendix 2); but it also prevented them from conducting a profound reflection on who should decide the future of the avenue and should therefore be included. The time frame given by the City Council also had an influence on this, since the fact that the team could work quickly was one of the factors they presented in their candidacy and contributed to their winning the public competition to develop the project. In other words, the fact that methods and time were prioritized over other important aspects of the process was also due in part to the framework for participation established by Barcelona City Council.

6.1.4 Participating in participation

As a summary of this section, the discussion of the La Rambla project along with the reflection on some of the aforementioned 'rituals of participation' leads to the conclusion that participation took place in a context that was fairly limited in time, in channels and in content. While citizens and the diverse associations and other actors involved in the process had a chance to contribute to the project of remodelling La Rambla, and some of them were actually involved in the groups that co-created the urban plan along with the technicians, the amount of power given to citizens in terms of real capacity to decide how the avenue should be was not great.

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[28] The Spanish blog *Imprevistos* describes the experience of a group of architects in a series of participation processes that recently took place in Madrid in order to reorganize certain squares surrounding Madrid city.

All of the actors involved in this process have had a chance to participate in participation (Arnstein, 1969, p. 219) in the sense of following up the activities prepared for them, responding to the questions posed by the expert team and even voicing their own suggestions and complaints about the use of the avenue. Their concerns were listened to and they were able to contribute to the core project that Km-Zero is developing with some of those actors embedded in their core structures. Furthermore, the structures surrounding participation described in the 'Analysis' chapter were clearly different from other types of process held in Barcelona in the past[29], with a deeper approach to participants and a better explanation of the evolution of the process, combined with a high degree of transparency.

However, the conditions for participation and the channels intended for it were determined in advance by the administration; what is more, the final urban plan prepared by the expert team will filter some of the citizens' inputs, and, finally, the City Council will be in charge of deciding what is approved and how. In this respect, the citizens' role will not be decisive and they will not be given any space for feedback on the application of the plan.

As Sherry Arnstein states in relation to her ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969), "In most cases where power has to be shared it was *taken by the citizens*, not given by the city." (Ibid., p. 222). In that sense, Barcelona City Council created a very specific frame in which participation was to take place and decided its limits, both in time, rhythm and possibilities. Even though that frame was considerably better than other previous processes, citizens did not have the power to create it and thus power was not shared in the strictest sense of the word.

In this section the possibilities and effects of participation have been measured according to La Rambla case, and the drawing in of the main actors or participants has also been problematized in relation to the previous issue.

In another vein, the impact of the expert team leader and its unintended legitimation of the project to the city has been treated as one of the elements influencing the creation of the network and the process in general.

The consequences of the prioritizing of methods within the project of the Km-Zero expert team have also been addressed, the main issue here being the poor quality of the search for who should participate in the process.

To sum up, the reading that La Rambla project makes of the concept of participation has been discussed in order to critically contribute to the broader discussion of the subject. In the same

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[29] The experience of one of the informants of this thesis, Albert, within a series of participative processes in the neighbourhood of Vallcarca, is explained in the Analysis chapter of this thesis (p.)

line, the role of the Km-Zero expert team will be addressed below in order to describe their legitimation of the project and to compare their discourse with their final contribution, or, in other words, to contrast their intentions with their eventual actions and the consequences of these.

6.2 The role of Km-Zero

Up to this point, the expert team has been presented as an interdisciplinary group, comprising professionals from various disciplines such as architecture, geography, urbanism, sociology and philosophy, all with a strong background in activism and social movements. Together they presented an innovative candidacy to the open competition to redesign La Rambla.

In the previous chapter, the team's understanding of participation is described as intentionally 'distanced' from the official interpretation. They present the concept of participation as something that has been 'absorbed by power'[30] aand must be developed in a different way in their project in order for it to be unpredictable from the administration's standpoint and thus preserve its disruptive nature. It was for this reason that they preferred to talk about *cooperation*,because it was an innovative way of working along with citizens and would serve as a protection from capitalism, as the leader of the team expressed during one of the interviews for this thesis (Participation, Analysis chapter, p. 33). Furthermore, Km-Zero express through their spokesperson their position with regard to the administration, from which at some point in the process they claim they were unwittingly separated or rather *abandoned*. During one of our last conversations in the framework of this thesis, in the final stage of La Rambla project, the leader of the expert team expressed the group's dissatisfaction with the role of the City Council, who had apparently not supported their work or been willing to take responsibility for their innovative methods (González, Appendix 2).

As has also been explained earlier in this dissertation, the fact that Km-Zero maintain their particular perspective on the concept of participation and incorporate the 'solution' of cooperation into La Rambla project is interesting to say the least, given that the framing institution of the project is the City Council, which would obviously represent here the power from which the Km-Zero group wants to protect its methodology. The contradiction between Km-Zero's discourse and the reality of the case leads to the following conclusions.

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[30] See the participation section within the analysis chapter of this thesis (p. 33)

6.2.1 Good intentions vs possibilities

On one reading, it could be claimed that the Km-Zero expert team led by Itziar maintains a *radical* approach to the project in order to criticize the way in which democracy is implemented in Spain and in so doing challenge the administration by using a method that puts citizens in the centre, thus redistributing power and avoiding the hierarchy of the administration and external technicians. This interpretation of the role of Km-Zero would make them out to be somewhat ingenuous, since, as we have seen, their project is framed within Barcelona City Council, which determines the duration, legal conditions and resources of the project, as well as taking the final decision. That is why it can be nuanced with the following argument.

The spokesperson of the group, Itziar, is well aware of what is possible and what is not within the legal frame of the administration, especially in the light of her experience in working on both sides of it. Consequently, what she and Km-Zero aim to achieve through their work is to raise a series of issues about policy and decision-making in the city and how this should be developed, including the role of citizens and the particular methodologies they are proposing with La Rambla project as a practical case to be institutionalized and eventually exported to other cities. For instance, during one of the interviews conducted with Itziar for this thesis, she explained some examples of the innovative practices they wanted to apply within the use of public space in La Rambla. While she qualified those ideas as utopian in the eyes of the administration, what the team had in mind was to bring them into the political sphere in order to engender debate around them (González, Appendix 2). This intention, which applies here to the use of public space in particular, also applies to the general methods of Km-Zero, since they have similar aims in relation to the political sphere.

This interpretation of the expert team's role relates to one of the authors mentioned during the previous chapters of this thesis, who represents the mid-point between those who are most critical of participation and those who blindly believe in it. The Catalan geographer Vicent Boira, contributing to the open debate between Jean-Pierre Garnier (2010b) and Horacio Capel (2011) on citizen participation within urbanism, questions the compatibility of waiting for a deeper shift of the political structures while making small changes to what it is possible to reform (Boira, 2011, p. 2): "Should we struggle to unveil consciousnesses or to solve problems?"[31]. In the case of La Rambla project and Km-Zero, while being aware of the greater struggle against the logics of capitalism, the expert team would in this case be

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[31] Translated from Spanish by the author of this thesis. The original quote: "¿debemos luchar por desvelar conciencias o por solucionar problemas?" (Boira, 2011, p. 2).

working to change what can be changed through the administration and in that way moving towards a larger change of structures.

On another reading, and to conclude this description of Km-Zero's role, a second and complementary interpretation is possible.

While the public discourse and practices of the expert team clearly tend towards critique, innovation and opposition to the establishment, their performance of the project directly contributes to the aforementioned interlacing of public and private interests in the neoliberal city[32]. The leader of the expert team pointed to this merging of spheres on several occasions during our interviews. She talks about a "public-private community management" (González, Appendix 2, p. 24) and a "true *quid pro quo* with the private" (Ibid., p. 25) – true in the sense that this time it would be truly equal. This is the near future of the avenue that the team foresees, in a given situation in which both private and public interests would own property – the latter with the aggregate capacity of implementing policies– and the 'community' would be the entity in charge of watching over both so that neither one outweighs the other in the use of space (Ibid.). Thus, the novelty in the abovementioned interlacing of private and public interests that Km-Zero's perspective offers is the capacity to make them visible and to balance them.

In the same line, when the informant is asked about whether their project helps to distinguish between the two spheres in the public space, she recognises that there is clear consent in Barcelona regarding that duality, but at the same time the present city government has tried to slow it down, or at least to state that not all kinds of private management of the space are acceptable (Ibid.). The vision she defends as spokesperson of Km-Zero, which in broad outline consists in balancing the public-private duality and trying to empower the unempowered, directly recalls what Delgado describes as 'requesting' capitalism to be less savage and accepting the few crumbs it might throw to the citizens (Delgado, Appendix 2). It does not try to subvert the situation or to end it, but rather to compensate or make soften it.

Finally, if the previous section of this discussion chapter explained the figure of Itziar as serving unwittingly to legitimate the La Rambla process to the city, it can now be seen how a similar effect would be achieved by the work of Km-Zero as a whole.

While their apparent goal is to reform the avenue in a way that also contributes to reforming political practices in the city of Barcelona and to institutionalizing a series of methods, they

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[32] See 'participation' section within the analysis chapter of this thesis (p. 34) for a description of the issue in relation to La Rambla project.

may also end up being used by the administration to legitimize whatever decision is finally taken, or at least may indirectly contribute to that outcome. Despite all the radical methods and contents they incorporate in their project, it is the City Council that will implement –or not– those elements of the plan in the last analysis; furthermore, the way in which the final urban plan is implemented may largely depend on whatever consensus can be reached with the opposition parties on the City Council and with the powerful economic lobbies involved in the context of La Rambla.

In that light, the work of Km-Zero would contribute to the logic of what Delgado describes as "a new type of capitalism for the city: the capitalism of the 'good tone', gentle, able to convince us that it can moderate its greed and spare a thought for the weak, in order to become a new soft version of institutional power at the local level."[33], which he relates to the new type of political parties such as the current government of Barcelona. The approach of the expert team would therefore be automatically absorbed by the administration and used to adjust its discourse and sugar-coat the final decisions and policies (Kaethler et al., 2017, p. 177).

To sum up, the role of Km-Zero becomes more intricate as one looks more deeply into their vision of the future of La Rambla, the use of public space and the city in general in relation to the logics of power, the market and, in the last term, citizens.

The 'direct democracy' that the leader of the team talked about in the interviews for this thesis, which on occasion were filled with libertarian notions such as self-management or *revolutionary* uses of the public space (González, Appendix 2), has a less radical end, which is to equate and balance power between the different actors in order to smooth the relations between public and private. The fact that all of these powerful ideas and practices can be adapted to fit as neatly as possible within the administration is partly due to Itziar's background, which as has been explained is halfway between the administration and activism. In that sense, the sometimes rather undefined position of Km-Zero becomes at least understandable thanks to her presence. The role of the expert team thus becomes nuanced by the actual consequences of their work. On the one hand, the fact that most of their objectives are adapted so as to be applicable makes them seem like realists, but at the same time they seem to lose some of their strength or radical spirit for the same reason.

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[33] Translated from Spanish by the author of this thesis. Original quote: "[...] un nuevo tipo de capitalismo para las ciudades: el capitalismo del 'buen tono', amable, capaz de convencernos que puede moderar su codicia y ser considerado con los débiles, todo para convertirse en una 'nueva versión soft del poder institucional' en el ámbito local" (Delgado, 2018, p. 21).

According to their discourse, they are challenging the government of Barcelona and maintaining a distance from it. At the same time, according to those dissident voices on the issue of participation, they are the perfect medium for legitimating and implementing the policies and ideals of the administration. According to this latter vision, they would be what Robert Goodman describes as follows: "We architects and urban planners aren't the visible symbols of oppression, like the military and the police. We're more sophisticated, more educated, and more socially conscious. We're the soft cops." (Boira, 2011, p. 4). This description of urban planners defines the role of Km-Zero as that of executing the administration's policies in a way that is socially acceptable and that seems to inflict less harm on society.

Finally, between the above two opposed ways of analyzing the role of the La Rambla project expert team, this thesis advocates a third position with regard to this crossroads. The work of Km-Zero brings a new approach to the management of Barcelona that is seen as very relevant at the present time, from both a social and a political point of view. The fact that they raise a series of issues in order to them to be considered in a wider political debate is seen as a necessary step towards changing some of the dynamics of the city, such as the way in which citizen participation should work and the mechanisms it should include in order to give a voice to those who lack one, or the use of public space. The fact that some of these issues are presented by the team itself as utopian reaffirms the idea that the very fact of talking about them and bringing them into the debate directly contributes to transforming them and gradually making them more realistic or possible.

On the other hand, the obvious effect of legitimizing the policies and discourse of the City Council also needs to be considered, and it should serve to avoid complacency about the project, and as a reminder of the necessary critical stance that must be taken when working in an arena as complex as the neoliberal city. The radical discourse of the dissident voices critical of participation described in this thesis can certainly contribute to the development of a radical stance from which to work to change the most generally accepted view of citizen participation.

The role and impact of the expert team must be addressed alongside those of Barcelona City Council, since the former is the ultimate representative of the latter, even if its positioning in the process is presented as separate from the administration. The discourse of the administration and the motives and intentions underlying the La Rambla project and the idea

of participation in general will be discussed below. The Decidim.Barcelona digital tool and the reasons for its misuse during the process will also be considered as a consequence of the City Council's role.

6.3 The administration and Decidim.Barcelona

The role of Barcelona City Council has not been directly addressed in this thesis, but it has appeared in the form of various elements or circumstances such as the analysis of the institutional framework of La Rambla project. The main reason why a deeper analysis of its role has not been conducted is the difficulty of engaging any of its representatives for the purpose of this thesis. Despite the fact that Km-Zero and in particular its leader are the final representatives of the City Council in the La Rambla project, their own positioning in the case has made it difficult to analyse them directly as 'administration'. Therefore, the analysis of the specific role of the City Council particular has been based so far on both the analysis of La Rambla project and the descriptions given by the expert team.

While the previous chapter described the nature of that role during the process and its flaws, at this point it is possible to reflect on the reasons that led to the adoption of that role.

The main issue that Km-Zero came up against in the process with regard to the City Council is the lack of accompaniment or support. The leader of the team spoke in our interviews of a bigger communication campaign as something they would have benefited from. In that regard, during the observation carried out within the framework of this thesis, both of one of the actions conducted on La Rambla as part of the work of the Citizens' Cooperative Groups[34] and of the final workshop open to citizens, the number of participants joining in the activities was surprising in relation to the population of the city: around one hundred people was present (Field Diary, Appendix 1), which is not a high number considering that Barcelona has around 1.6 million inhabitants (Ine.es, 2018), and furthermore considering the popularity of La Rambla in the city. It is probably Barcelona's most famous avenue and is situated in the very centre of the city. According to Km-Zero and its spokesperson, one of their specific requests to the City Council was to have debates about the La Rambla project in district plenary sessions in order to open it up to the rest of the city and its neighbourhoods, which clearly were not aware of it (González, Appendix 2). But those district debates did not take place.

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[34] The core structure created by the expert team within the participative process of La Rambla project. Described earlier during this thesis.

This general lack of accompaniment is also apparent in the misuse of the participation platform Decidim.Barcelona, treated in the Analysis chapter of this thesis; indeed, that misuse is a consequence of the lack of accompaniment. To give an example, the expert team claimed that they were supposed to have a series of resources in their last workshop with citizens, such as tablet computers with which to promote the use of the Decidim.Barcelona digital tool among citizens. In that way, even though the platform had not been exploited during the process, it could be used in its final stage to contribute to the urban plans that were being drawn up by the Citizens' Cooperative Groups and the expert team. However, those resources were not present at the final workshop.

The trivial example of the tablet computers can serve here as a metaphor for the use of the platform Decidim.Barcelona. While the tool has been presented as a highly innovative, democratic and practical way for citizens to participate in the decision-making on policies for Barcelona (Bria, 2018), it has not been supported with the necessary preparation of its potential users or the promotion of its use among Barcelona citizens. In the particular case of La Rambla, the City Council pushed towards a very specific way of channeling participation, asking the team Km-Zero to conduct their work through the platform and benefitting from it, but at the same time it left the team 'on their own' in that matter – and also in the project itself, according to the team. It seems that the expert team had to do both things –developing the project and promoting the use of the tool– by itself.

According to the leader of the team's, the main reason for the lack of support is that the City Council is overburdened in its governing of the city: one year before the next elections, they are trying to close as many fronts as possible. Furthermore, the superheated political situation in Catalonia and in Spain as a whole[35] will have influenced this matter, in her opinion. Itziar concludes that remodelling La Rambla is not a social priority but more of a city-model priority (González, Appendix 2), which has to do with the search for legitimation on the part of the City Council, and the desire to complete a project that can be presented as a model, instead of a genuine will to actually *rescue* the avenue.

In the same line, the evolution of this thesis makes it possible to conclude that in addition to being a matter of time and simultaneous engagement on too many fronts, the City Council's approach to supporting this project betrays a certain disposition to use citizen participation and more particularly the work of Km-Zero as a mere legitimation of the project. The case of

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[35] This relates to the conflict between Spain and Catalunya, with the latter immersed in a process of demanding independence from the Spanish state and the repressive answer of the national government, which has sent to jail several political representatives and members of cultural associations.

La Rambla was an existing open front that had to be addressed by the City Council one way or another, as a previous urban plan had been approved by the former government, and the economic lobbies surrounding the avenue were pressing for this to be finally applied. Therefore, and as has been explained in previous sections, the lack of support for the project and the expert team reveals a lack of interest in achieving profound and complex changes requiring a major effort; it is instead a way of applying the pending plan in a way that may prove to be socially acceptable and will probably obtain the consensus from a very diverse set of nature actors, such as the economic guilds and the various citizens' associations.

With this discussion of the role of Barcelona City Council, the effects of the given framework for citizen participation to take place within the project to redesign La Rambla avenue have now been presented. The participation process has been discussed, together with some of its main elements. Those elements include the way in which actors were drawn into the network and the consequences of that attraction on the process; the influence of the methods on the process and the side effects caused by the expert team and its lead. Finally, the actual 'physical appearance' and significance of participation and its mechanisms have also been considered.

In the following lines, summary of the thesis and a series of reflections are presented, together with a view to contextualizing this work and defining what it hopes to contribute.

7. Conclusion

In the course of this thesis I have approached the concept of citizen participation through an analysis of the Barcelona case and the project to redesign its main avenue, La Rambla.

The thesis has taken the Km-Zero expert team as a guiding element from which to follow the process and analyze the case. The different phases of La Rambla project have thus been followed chronologically in order to describe the participative process that has taken place. Consideration has been given not only to the stages of the project but also to the methods used by the team and their understanding of participation and its problematics, which they tried to resolve by instead adopting a cooperative approach to the project.

This process has started with the analysis and description of the network created by the expert team and their means of attracting and establishing the continuity of the relevant actors within it. The analysis of this phase has raised a series of questions that have been addressed in the 'Discussion' section. These arguments concern the limitations of the interessement elements, which affected the conditions imposed on participation and thus the way in which it could take place. In that regard, participation actually *occurred*, but it was closer to its official definitions –described in the 'Theoretical framework' chapter– than to the ideal definitions of the most critical actors (Arnstein, 1969; Lefebvre, 1996). Although the work of Km-Zero contributed to creating good conditions for citizen participation, the legal framework of the administration resulted in that process being limited even before it started. As a result, the La Rambla project was considerably less empowering than it could have been. The legitimizing role of the expert team leader has been also addressed as one of the side-effects that have contributed to maintain an 'official' type of participation proposed by the City Council.

The analysis of participation has consisted in understanding the expert team's notion of it and threshing out their actual performance of participation with citizens. From the revision of both elements it has been shown that participation in the La Rambla case has been closer to the empty ritual described by Arnstein (1969) than to the transference of real power to citizens for them to actually decide and take part in shaping their city.

This has been complemented by a further problematization of the consequences and effects of that performance, addressed in the 'Discussion chapter'. The side-effects of their methods have been also treated, and it has been suggested that these they contributed to the failure to obtain a better sample of participants to take part in the process and become empowered by it.

Finally, the roles of Km-Zero and the administration have been compared and related to one another. The former has contributed to the legitimation of the City Council's discourse and possibly to approval of its final plan. While the expert team had a set of values and intentions that were indeed applied through the process, they also worked in the service of the administration in another, unforeseen way. However, it could be said that both sides benefited from each other. On the one hand, the City Council used the ethically responsible and socially acceptable discourse of the expert team to legitimize whatever decision it takes in the case of La Rambla. Addressing this project was a wa for the City Council to enforce a former urban plan that was waiting to be implemented, and in so doing satisfy the economic interests of La Rambla traders, who were demanding its application. At the same time, the City Council can achieve consensus by having the *stamp* of citizen participation and a cooperative approach.

On the other hand, the expert team has been able to test a series of methods in a showcase setting as significant as the famous avenue in the heart of Barcelona. It has also brought a sample of disruptive elements into the political debate, such as new ways of performing citizen participation or the range of uses of public space.

At this point, and after reviewing the thread of this thesis, some final reflections –not conclusions– might be a useful way to return to the broader debate described in the initial sections of this project.

The powerful nature of citizen participation as a double-edged sword can be extracted from the Barcelona case analyzed here. First of all, it can contribute to empowering citizens by giving them a voice in deciding the policies that shape a city. It can include mechanisms which guarantee that citizens' contributions are respected and keep processes transparent so that no actor –such as economic lobbies– has more influence than others. It can therefore be used to balance the power of decision-making so those unheard voices are heard and listened to and have the chance to decide. In that sense, it might help to amend democracy so that it gives knowledge and decision-making capacity to those normally denied these things. Citizens become included by these kinds of process, but more importantly, they can form themselves and learn in order to make their contributions more relevant, significant and effective in relation to the functioning of the city.

However, participation can also be used for the purpose of legitimizing political decisions and making them socially acceptable. The development of channels, tools or areas of participation in general can be a way to present policies and regulations as co-created with

citizens and thus achieve consensus without any critical opposition. In that line, it can can also contribute to eliminating social movements and activism by absorbing its leaders and slogans and centralizing all channels of citizen protest.

In another vein, the notion of participation within cities also questions the relevance of working to change merely the surface of economic and political problems without transforming the major structures that brace and shape them. For instance, is it relevant to redesign an avenue, make it decent and try to attract more residents without questioning the structural problem of the cost of housing? In that regard, the urbanist Jane Jacobs described experiences of citizen participation as disheartening due to its palliative function if they do not change power relations and general structures, and as heartening and encouraging thanks to the discovery of citizen enthusiasm and capacity to talk about cities' problems (Boira, 2011, p. 3).

In that sense, this dissertation has tried to advocate for a more critical approach to the concept of citizen participation. This work started from the general excitement surrounding that notion and the almost magical capabilities that tend to be attributed to it as an independent entity that can solve cities' problems. It represents an attempt to fill this phenomenon with the inputs of the most critical voices raised against the conventional understanding of participation.

The La Rambla case has been useful for that purpose, as an example of both currents. It exposes the limitations of the administration in terms of citizen participation and the constrained version of this that it promotes, and at the same time it brings to light the countless possibilities that it could offer, represented by the expert team of the project.

Furthermore, the question of the ideal role of technology within this kind of process is also highlighted by this case. The most hyped examples of citizen participation tend to go hand in hand with a use of technology that is presented as a solution in itself. The La Rambla case has shown the importance of accompanying the use of digital tools with a concerted effort to educate users, promoting the proper use of the tool and adapting it to the possibilities of the particular case. Otherwise, the use of such tools should not be at the centre of the process and nor should the whole load of the project be placed on it, as it will not guarantee by itself that participation empowers citizens.

The ideal notion of participation that this project pleads for includes a concrete understanding of technology as an entity that shapes processes and gets shaped by them, instead of as a separate and pre-existing entity extraneous of other actors (Storni, 2015).

In that sense, the techno-anthropological perspective has been useful to analyze the role of technology in the Barcelona case. Moreover, techno-anthropology has contributed with an inclusive glance towards the participative process in general, in order to approach it in its whole as a big and dynamic cluster of actors. It is precisely this look that has allowed to include other perspectives such as the political notion and the critical understanding of participation. The use of techno-anthropology as some sort of toolkit with which to simultaneously describe and analyze processes or phenomena allows us to decontextualize them and connect them to other perspectivations.

With this thesis, I have tried to contribute to an ideal critical stance from which to approach citizen participation. The effects of the expert team Km-Zero's approach to the project has been rigorously analyzed, unfolding some of their side effects on the process. In a similar line, the role of the administration in general and the intentions of Barcelona City Council in particular have been also criticized due to their limitations on participation and their hidden agenda. However, the positive points regarding a new way of addressing citizen participation have also been described. That would be the case of Km-Zero's methodology and goals, as well as the opportunity given by the city council by broadening the public request specifications in a way that it allowed a group like Km-Zero to win the project. Therefore, the Barcelona example leaves some interesting elements –above-mentioned– that call for new ways of developing citizen participation.

The combination of the good practices collected from La Rambla project and the criticism of the surrounding voices are mixed here for the purpose of articulating a third path. Both are necessary to work towards the aforementioned critical approach to the concept of participation. The problems of our cities are not exclusively caused by the underlying economic and political structures, some of them are also the result of a profound ignorance of how a city works (Boira, 2011, p. 3). In that sense, the knowledge of a group of professionals like the team Km-Zero and more particularly that of their team leader it is of great importance. But that alone will not be enough to change the way in which the decision-making takes place. It is also necessary to be aware of the structural changes needed in order to make that change crucial. That is why the articulation of such innovative practices with a critical discourse becomes crucial. That will allow that any small project changing only the 'surface' of cities' problems contributes to address greater and structural problems on the way.

Either way, the Barcelona project to redesign La Rambla analyzed in this thesis has shown a participation process that is still far from that exercise full of "real power" (Arnstein, 1969) and capable of affecting the outcome of the process that Arnstein talked about in the sixties. It is not an "empty ritual" (Ibid.) as it contains some improvements and positive points, but that seems yet not enough for a substantial change in the decision-making of cities.

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