

SOCIAL INNOVATION AGAINST THE CRISIS

How Leadership Practices & Civic Capacity improve Neighbourhood Development

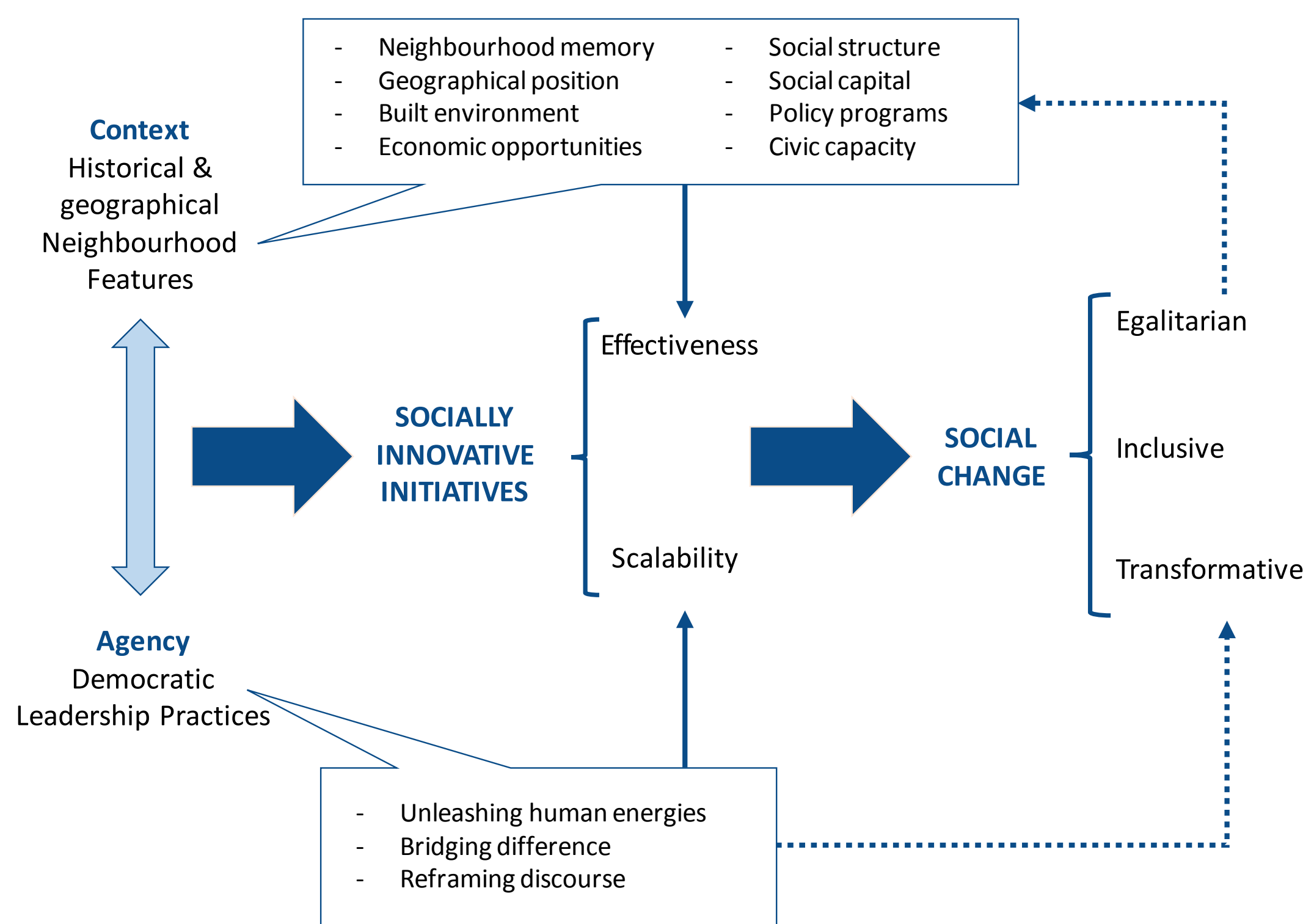
The SOCRISIS Research Project

WHAT: The SOCRISIS project analyses the ways in which local communities, at neighbourhood level, are addressing the effects of economic recession in two global cities: Barcelona and New York. We focus on those socially innovative responses emerging from below, and we use our analysis to draw conclusions aiming to both understand and foster social change.

WHY: Evidence in many places around the world suggest that citizens are, increasingly, self-organizing to produce innovative solutions as they face the collective problems that governments are failing to solve in a context of scarcity and austerity policies. Social innovation is usually conceptualized as a way of improving territorial development in disenfranchised neighbourhoods. However, little attention has been paid to the dynamics by which responses emerge, how social impact or scalability could be achieved and, finally, how social change could be effectively accomplished.

HOW: Bringing together disruptive theories of social innovation and constructionist theories of collective leadership this research delves on the context-agency debate. On one hand we analyse how neighbourhood features constrain/enable social innovation effectiveness and scalability. On the other hand, we unveil those collective leadership practices that democratize socially innovative initiatives and make social change happen.

WHEN: SOCRISIS is a two-year research project started in September 2014. The field work was carried out between September 2014 and December 2015.



Concepts

Social Innovation: Alternative solutions (ideas, products, services and models) developed to collectively satisfy human needs that have not or unsatisfactorily been satisfied. These novel solutions do not come neither from the state nor the market, but from citizens and civil society; and not only satisfy alienated social needs but also produce citizens' empowerment and shift social and power relationships (Moulaert et al., 2013). Social Innovation is a complex process of introducing new products, processes or programs that profoundly change the basic routines, resource and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system in which the innovation occurs (Westley & Antadze, 2010). To become a social change driver social innovation should be effective and scalable.

Civic Capacity: The ability to articulate stakeholders in a neighbourhood concerning with collective problems. The extent to which different sectors of the community (governmental and non-governmental) act in concert around a matter of community-wide import (Stone, 2001). We understand civic capacity as a community resource, as a neighbourhood feature.

Leadership Practices: Collective and meaning-making interventions and patterns of behaviour that make things different from what they were before, fostering that social change happens. Leadership is a unique type of meaning-making process. This is so because the shared agreements that produce leadership are articulated and generated within a community of practice, that is, a group working to achieve results. They connect wills and help transform wills into practice. We have analysed three types of leadership practices in our case studies (Ospina et al., 2012):

Unleashing human energies: leadership practices that empower the have-nots, practices that stem from the assumption that knowledge is power.

Bridging difference: leadership practices that create the conditions to bring diverse actors or social groups together and facilitate their joint work while maintaining, appreciating and drawing on their differences.

Reframing discourse: leadership practices that disrupt established frames, while proposing others more congruent with their vision for the future.

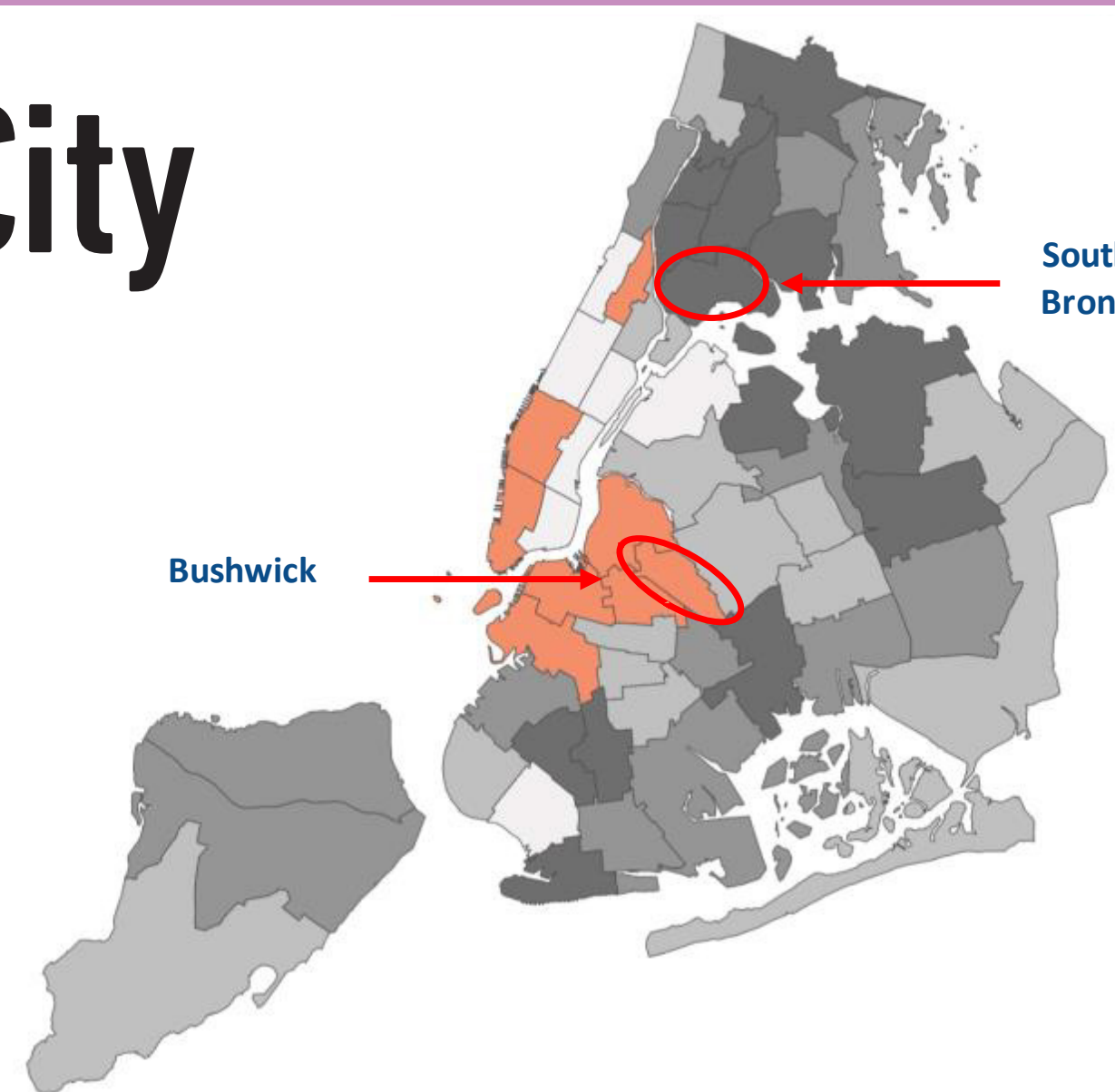
Case studies

New York City

Population: 8,405,437
Surface (Km²): 783.1
Popul. Density: 10.734

Percent Change in Sub-borough Area Median Household Income, 2000 to 2011-2013

- Decreased 15.0 or More
- Decreased 10.0 - 14.9
- Decreased 5.0 - 9.9
- Little Change (+/- 5.0)
- Increased More Than 5.0



BUSHWICK

Population: 112,634 | Surface (Km²): 5.2 | Popul. Density (inhab/Km²): 21,660

Bushwick is a neighbourhood suffering a huge gentrification processes. It has a dominant and longstanding low-income Hispanic community, which is being displaced by newcomers. As a result, the neighbourhood is divided in two social groups. In this context, under the conditions of economic crisis post-2008, we see various struggles for social innovation; efforts to stabilize employment for the low-income, action to stem the tide of housing displacement (aggravated by stagnant and falling incomes), and struggles to integrate the neighbourhood's major constituencies – to keep the neighbourhood whole, as one Bushwick rather than two.

Bushwick has not proven easy to deal with gentrification effects. A former political machine – engaging the New York State Assembly for the area and a big traditional non-profit – has constrained any other social initiative. However, Bushwick is starting to evolve. It is precisely Bushwick's community that, through building networks and experimenting with new ways of doing, is leading this emerging process of social change

SOUTH BRONX

Population: 91,487 | Surface (Km²): 5.7 | Popul. Density (inhab/Km²): 16,050

The South Bronx is a socially excluded urban area that has significantly improved over the last 40 years. It has been revitalized and been transformed from a national symbol of urban dystopia into a collection of ordinary working class neighbourhoods. However, stigmatization remains a handicap, environmental problems have not been adequately addressed, housing is still not affordable for many, unemployment is high, the poverty rate remains extreme and access to good education is a serious contemporary problem. In the South Bronx, the Great Recession hit an area that was already vulnerable, shrouded in a sense of a lack of investment. There is a feeling among residents that public authorities have failed their community and they believe that public institutions should do more for the area.

At the same time, though, in recent decades a strong sense of belonging – fostered by the 'we stay' movement – has helped build up a community with solid ties and a powerful organizing capacity. This community has struggled, has influenced public policies and has been able to work together with public authorities in order to improve the South Bronx. There is a history in the South Bronx of organizations and interests banding together.

NOU BARRIS NORD

Population: 14,062 | Surface (Km²): 2.8 | Popul. Density (inhab/Km²): 5,022

Nou Barris Nord is a segregated urban area that has not overcome its vulnerability. It has been hit extremely hard by the effects of the Great Recession. To really understand what has happened in the area we should not focus on how the crisis has affected it (unemployment, foreclosures and so on) but on how these neighbourhoods were transformed prior to the crisis. The real estate bubble multiplied its urban segregation as a result of a huge demographic replacement, and the poorest population in Barcelona became concentrated in this urban area. The social fabric of Nou Barris Nord was fragmented and its social capital declined, while civic capacity evolved into a general mistrust and hostility between, on the one hand, neighbourhood associations and, on the other, the City Council.

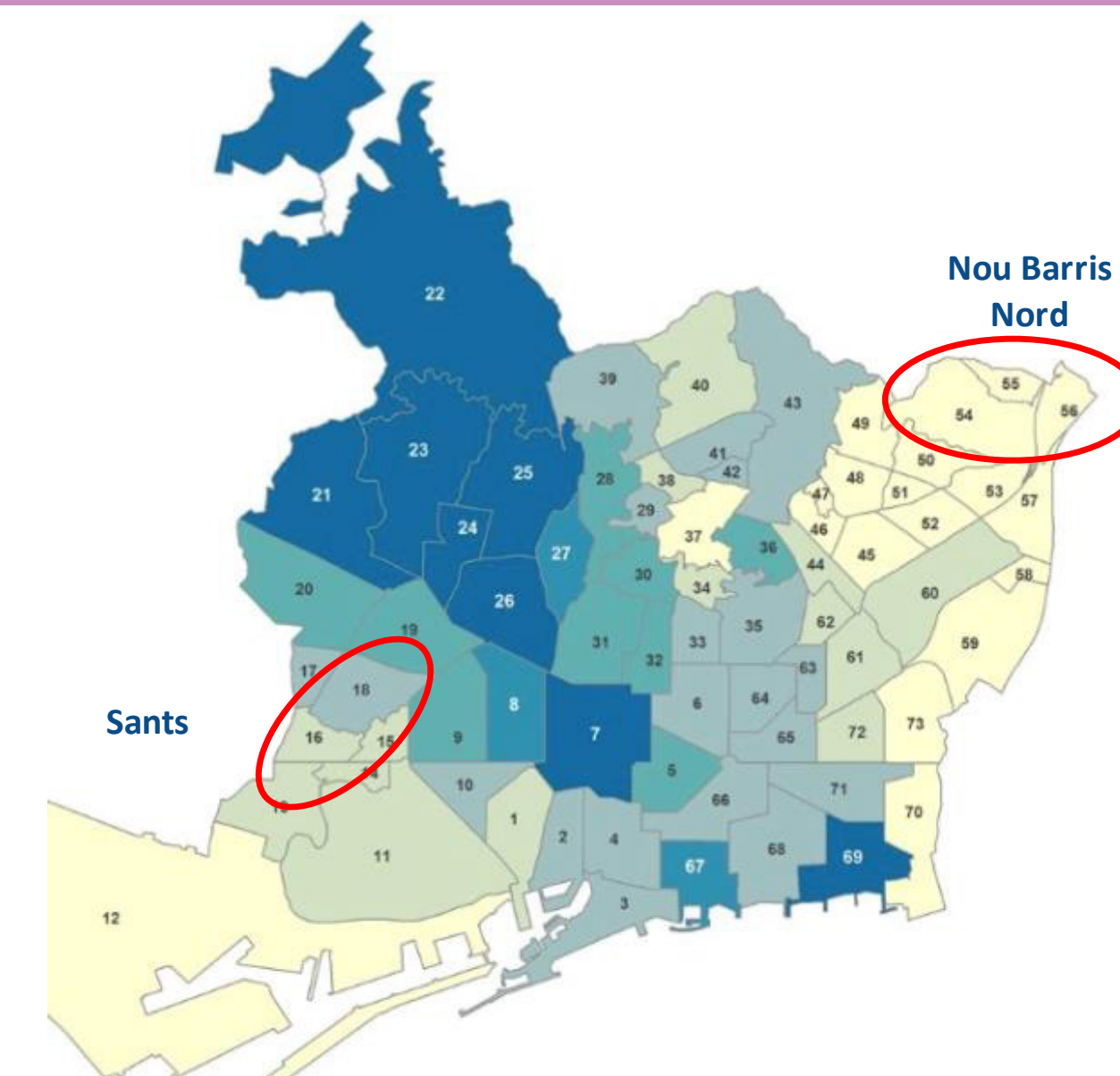
In this context the emergence of socially innovative responses to problems is not easy. When initiatives flourish, the lack of coordination and collaboration with public authorities hinders their potential social impact. However, we also found in Nou Barris Nord a story of struggle based on the neighbourhood's tradition of collective action. Neighbours, neighbourhood associations and other community-based organizations have clearly responded to recession effects through solidarity and resistance.

Barcelona

Population: 1,604,555
Surface (Km²): 91.4
Popul. Density: 17,555

Per capita Available Family Income 2014 (Barcelona's average = 100)

- Very high (more than 159)
- High (from 126 to 159)
- Medium-high (from 100 to 126)
- Medium-low (from 79 to 100)
- Low (from 63 to 79)
- Very low (less than 63)



SANTS

Population: 59,550 | Surface (Km²): 1.7 | Popul. Density (inhab/Km²): 35,029

Sants is a traditional working-class neighbourhood. With its character of a small town within a city, Sants has retained a strong sense of belonging among its residents and its social organizations. The area has accumulated the experience of numerous historical struggles and an extremely high level of political activism has developed.

Social innovation in Sants is not something new. It is not a response to the post-recession situation in the area, but rather the result of a tradition of collective action from below which is historically rooted, diverse and politicized. Thus, in Sants we can see a tradition of cooperativism, self-management and self-organizing. This is a tradition of alternative action, flourishing in the local civil society and both distinct from the state and outside of the market. After the Great Recession new initiatives emerged which have merged old and new grassroots movements and have taken advantage of all the knowledge accumulated through old initiatives in the area. Moreover, the neighbourhood is home to an economically precarious but culturally important class of people; young, well-educated, politicized people with ideas that go beyond the mainstream. This class of people is playing a significant role in developing some of the social responses.

Socially innovative initiatives at neighbourhood level

SMALL BUSINESS UNITED (Bushwick)



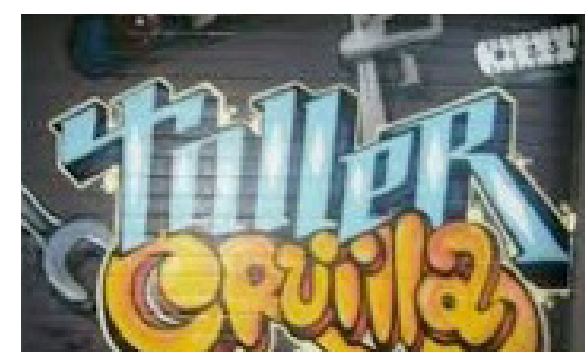
Small Business United is a Latino initiative of a longstanding social change organization in the area (Make the Road NY) which aims to address small business harassment and displacement. Small Business United shows how social innovation can emerge even when the context is not favourable to it. Through leadership practices characterized by power-based community organizing, Small Business United is fostering new community leaders and is empowering immigrants in the area.

ECOSTATION (Bushwick)



Ecystation is a new food justice organization launched by newcomers that grows organic food with youths and manages a Farmers' Market in the neighbourhood. The initiative shows how, using collaborative leadership practices based on bridging differences, the two Bushwicks could be linked.

CENTRE CRUÏLLA (Nou Barris Nord)



Centre Cruïlla is a non-profit service provider working on youth labour inclusion. A traditional professionalized leadership has produced a multi-stakeholder governance oriented model of social innovation based on community development. The model has been replicated in other urban areas.

NOS QUEDAMOS (South Bronx)



Nos Quedamos is a traditional Community Development Corporation that launched an innovative urban development in the 1990s and has adapted its programs to the post-recession scenario. Nos Quedamos has historically been effective at fostering an innovative mixed-use housing model, which has spread across the neighbourhood and even beyond it. Now the organization is producing new programs focused on youth training and sustainable development.

SOUTH BRONX UNITE (South Bronx)



South Bronx Unite is a new coalition, influenced by the Occupy Wall Street movement, fighting to protect and improve the social, environmental and economic future of the South Bronx, especially since Fresh Direct planned to relocate its warehouse into the area. South Bronx

Unite holds a transformative view regarding how the South Bronx should be developed and has produced an alternative planning proposal. Its members are also providing community services according to this view, not only through their own activities but also through some of their associated organizations, such as Friends of Brook Park (who provide a community garden, youth programs, eco-tours, etc.).

50X20 (Nou Barris Nord)



50x20 is an emerging effort of 50 people collecting €20 per person each month and distributing these resources to community-based organizations to cope with social emergencies. In the operation of 50x20 a horizontal, small group leadership has produced a self-organized community-building model of social innovation. It is a form of social resistance in the face of the failure of public authorities to address significant social problems. 50x20 has been effective in contesting how public administrations are dealing with crisis effects in Nou Barris Nord while achieving little social impact.

CAN BATLLÓ (Sants)



Can Batlló is a former textile manufacturing complex where several initiatives are being launched from below: a cultural self-organized space, a housing cooperative, a self-managed school, and an agency for the promotion of a cooperative and solidarity-based economy. Even though the initiative takes advantage of some kind of collaboration with public administrations, it can only be understood from its emancipatory wish, which comes from a longer neighbourhood tradition. Can Batlló's success has been possible because behind the initiative there is a huge and heterogeneous citizen movement claiming for an autonomous way of doing. The bottom-up yet linked form of governance developed in Can Batlló emerges as a crucial challenge for Can Batlló's future effectiveness and scalability.

PAH-BARCELONA (Sants)



The Platform for Mortgage Affected People demonstrates a very specific, successful and mixed form of social innovation struggling against evictions. The PAH's leadership practices are especially important for understanding how and why the platform succeeded in having a huge social impact. They combine both contentious and conventional actions. Thus, at the same time as resisting systemic problems (such as stopping evictions), they try to get influence to the system proposing alternative public policies and legal reforms, and they also produce dissident responses to the failure of authorities to address the problem, such as negotiating with financial institutions to prevent evictions or occupying empty buildings owned by banks to make them available to evicted families.

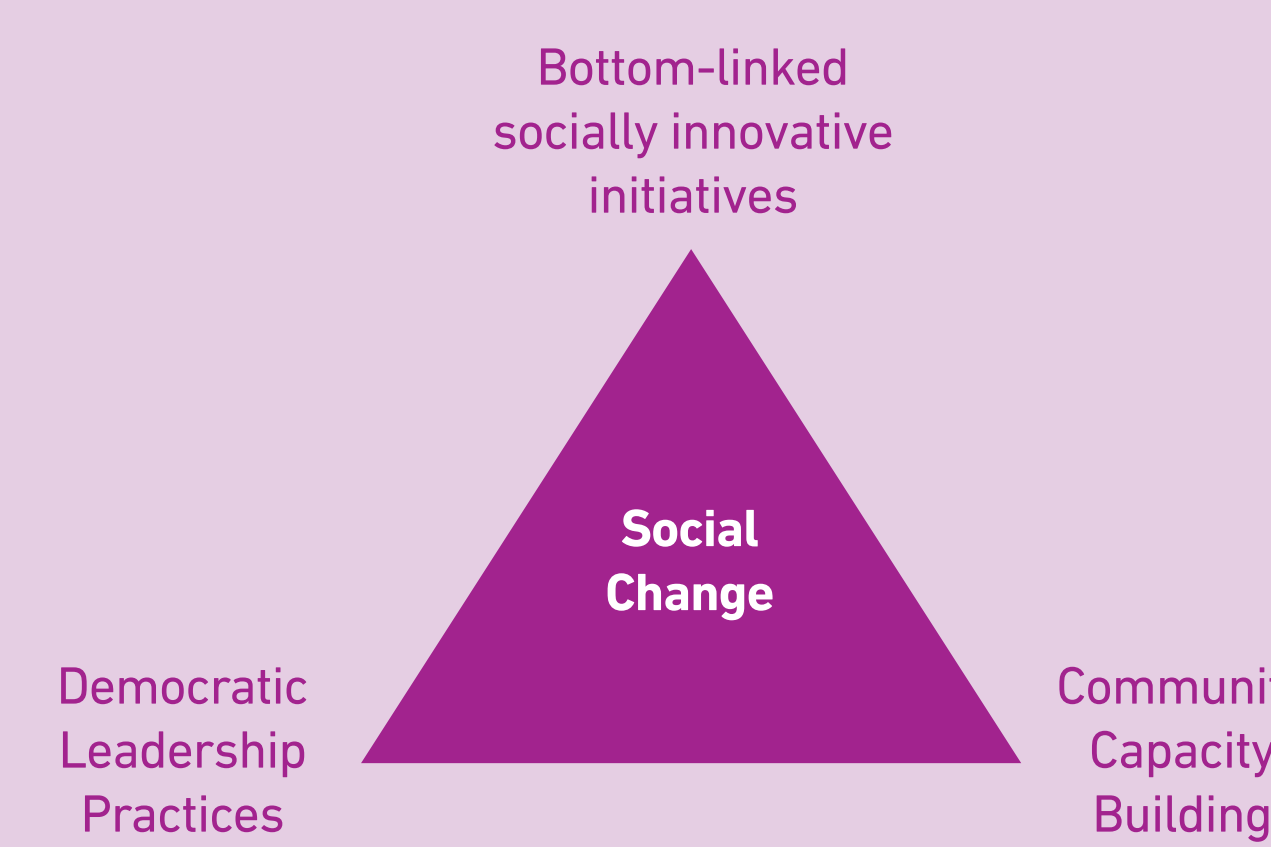
contentious and conventional actions. Thus, at the same time as resisting systemic problems (such as stopping evictions), they try to get influence to the system proposing alternative public policies and legal reforms, and they also produce dissident responses to the failure of authorities to address the problem, such as negotiating with financial institutions to prevent evictions or occupying empty buildings owned by banks to make them available to evicted families.

	BUSHWICK	SOUTH BRONX	NOU BARRIS NORD	SANTS
Ecotation	Small Business United	South Bronx Unite	Nos Quedamos	Can Batlló, PAH Barcelona, Centre Cruïlla, 50x20
LEADERSHIP PRACTICES				
Unleashing human energies	Youth training Empowering affected people; Community leaders	Self-management Community leaders	Self-management Community leaders	Empowering affected people Self-management
Bridging difference	Bridging two Bushwicks	Bridging within the community	Networking organizations and individuals	Inter-class bridging Networking organizations
Reframing discourse	Community food and sustainability; Political	Immigrants as victims; Pragmatic	Alternative urban development; Political	Changing the stereotype; Pragmatic
Problem solving	Low impact; Only at micro level	Medium impact; Structural and institutional changes still needed	Medium impact; Structural and institutional changes still needed	High impact; At neighbourhood level
Empowerment	Empowering young people as community leaders	Empowering immigrants	Empowering activists	Empowering affected people
Changes in social & power relations	Yes: New actor building new relations	Yes: Some successful struggles	Yes: New coalition networking actors	Yes: Successful struggles; New constatory actor
SCALABILITY				
Scaling out	Limited: Small initiative	Yes: More small business are being engaged	Yes: More people and organizations being engaged	Yes: The initiative has grown and more people are being engaged
Scaling up	Partially: Huge interest beyond Bushwick	No: Local initiative	Yes: Spreading its protest beyond the South Bronx	Partially: Huge interest beyond Sants

REFERENCES

Moulaert, F. et al., 2010. Can Neighbourhoods Save the City?. New York: Routledge.
Moulaert, F. et al., 2013. The International Handbook on Social Innovation, Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
Ospina, S. et al., 2012. Social Change Leadership as Relational Leadership. In M. Uhl-Bien & S. M. Ospina, eds. Advancing Relational Leadership Research. A Dialogue Among Perspectives. Charlotte, NC: Information Age, pp. 255-302.
Stone, C.N., 2001. Civic Capacity and Urban Education. Urban Affairs Review, 36(5), pp.595-619.

CONCLUSIONS



To be effective and scalable, social innovation should be carried out in a context with the necessary features to make that innovation successful. Civic capacity is one such characteristic, but not the only one. Consequently, To make social innovation a feasible alternative that might foster systemic social change, community capacity building should be engaged.

At the same time, unleashing human energy, bridging difference and reframing discourse have, in the course of this study, emerged as three types of democratic leadership practices that can help make social innovation effective and scalable even in those neighbourhoods with lesser capacity.

Purely institutional approaches seem insufficient for facing the collective problems prominent in the post-recession context of austerity. Yet localized and purely grassroots initiatives do not seem to have either enough potency to trigger systemic social change. A bottom-linked perspective appears to hold promise. This approach recognises 'the centrality of initiatives taken by those immediately concerned, but stresses the necessity of institutions that would enable, gear or sustain such initiatives through sound, regulated and lasting practices and clearer citizen rights guaranteed by a democratic state-functioning' (Moulaert et al. 2010: 9).

Marc Parés, IGOP-UAB
marc.pares@uab.cat

Sonia Ospina, NYU-Wagner
Joan Subirats, IGOP-UAB
Cliff Frasier, NYU-Wagner
Santi Ezaguirre, IGOP-UAB

The SOCRISIS project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Programme under grant agreement No 625070-FP7-PEOPLE-2013-IOF.

