

South Bronx: a whole community fighting social exclusion

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Dearest BX, thank you for always showing us what community power can do! xoxo DF.

This was one of many messages written to the Bronx, as reported in a 2016 article in *The Motthaven Herald*, a local Bronx newspaper. The article, titled 'Bronxites Gather to share stories, promote unity' reports on the event South Bronx Love Letter, which took place in the Bronx Music Heritage Center on a Saturday night.¹ As vividly described in the article, 'the evening consisted of a musical performance, sing-alongs and story circles, where the 50-plus attendees shared their reflections, memories and impressions of growing up in the boot of the city's northernmost borough'. The rapper and poet Not4Prophet, supported by congas, bongos and claves players of the Bronx Rican Bombers, performed songs and told anecdotes of his life in this borough. This gave way to 'story circles' where young and elder participants shared stories of growing up, raising family and community change. Recent developers' efforts to rebrand Mott Haven as 'The Piano District' led to conversations about the present. Indeed, the subtitle of the article, 'Residents issue a defiant statement to developers', referred to discussions of the positive and negative effects of development that ensued: on the one hand new housing that residents can't afford, on the other, beautification and the potential for more locally owned small businesses.

This vignette reflects the present dynamics of the South Bronx. In this report we analyse recession effects and community responses in Mott Haven and Melrose, a 5.7 km² area home to 91 500 inhabitants. This area, characterized by a mix of residential and industrial properties, including large NYCHA² public housing developments, is the central section of the South Bronx, lying immediately across the Harlem River from East Harlem in New York City. Mott Haven, with its residential, redbrick Queen-Anne style multi-family buildings, is described as 'a waterfront enclave... in the process of reinvention'.³ Likewise, Melrose is 'a collection of small blocks with big character... sandwiched between the busiest thoroughfares of the South Bronx', and starting to become the epicentre of transportation and retail activity in the South Bronx.⁴ Despite having significant specific characteristics, these two neighbourhoods should be understood in the context of the South Bronx as a whole.

The South Bronx has become known and stigmatized, both nationally and internationally, as a symbol of urban destruction and decay. However, it did not even exist as a geographical entity until the 1970s, when its neighbourhoods were devastated economically, socially and physically by urban crisis. The names and identities of local neighbourhoods were obscured by their inclusion under the new label used to define the growing area subsumed by violence, abandonment, and blight. Since then, though, the South Bronx has been transformed from a national symbol of urban dystopia into a collection of ordinary working class neighbourhoods. Through this process, a solid sense of belonging has developed and strengthened in the area.

As Guimond (2013) argues, the process of revitalization in the South Bronx has evolved from the first community-driven efforts made in the midst of the urban crisis, to the formation of a City-convened revitalization complex in the 1980s and the financing dedicated to regeneration in the 1990s and 2000s. Although a moderate vision of revitalization has gained increasing ground, and the private sector has had a significant role working with policymakers, this coexists with radical and left-liberal ideas about revitalization based on community organizing.

As we will see, Mott Haven and Melrose have been characterized by several Community Development Corporations (CDCs) aiming to provide affordable housing on the basis of maintaining and strengthening the community (Sahd 2004). Some of them have been genuinely participatory and have empowered the community, such as the Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association. Others, such as Nos Quedamos, were especially innovative, promoting mixed-use housing and sustainable communities as far back as the 1990s. Through their enormous efforts, working together with public institutions but at times also contesting them, the neighbourhood managed to retain some of its population. The community was rebuilt and the sense of belonging to the South Bronx was spread to new residents arriving in the 1990s and in the early 21st century. This process generated a ‘we have stayed’ community in this area, including a large portion of residents within the public housing system. This community coexists, without conflict, with several recent-immigrant communities and newcomers from other parts of NYC and New York State. Like Bushwick, Mott Haven and Melrose have a large Spanish speaking population. Puerto Ricans have formed the core of the area since 1950s. However, many types of cultures and ethnicities make this area distinctive, and it is more ethnically diverse than Bushwick. Prominent ethnicities include: Puerto Rican, Mexican, Dominican, African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and African.

City-run public housing complexes and tenement buildings are the most characteristic features of Mott Haven and Melrose. It is likely that this is one of the main reasons why gentrification has not spread to this area as much as it has been notable in other NYC neighbourhoods⁵, such as Bushwick. Public housing is deeply stigmatized, and hasn’t been built in decades. On the other hand, more than twenty state-subsidized affordable housing projects have been built in this area since the early 1990s, when a city plan was developed to turn Melrose into a suburban district⁶. The area has been revitalized and is safer than forty years ago. However, social problems such as unemployment, poverty and education failure remain. Likewise, environmental and health problems are highly prominent and have prompted the mobilization of the local community during recent decades. Heavily impacted by Robert Moses-era thinking,⁷ the South Bronx is now ringed by highways. Its population is subjected to a high level of pollution, and asthma cases, especially in children, are higher here than in any other area of NYC. Despite there being a large amount of nearby waterfront – notably the Harlem River – the community has little access either to it or to green space. The desire for greater access to the water and to green space constitutes one of the residents’ main claims:

We're a community surrounded by water but we have no access to the water. And so we know part of the problems that we have with air quality is not enough green space not enough creation of alternatives or avenues to alter the negative effects that plague our community. So, more open space, more green space, more waterfront access, more recreational opportunities because not only do we have the highest rates of asthma, but also obesity and diabetes (South Bronx Unite, Co-founder).

1. A Great Recession hits a socially excluded community

From the late 1940s through to the late 1960s the South Bronx experienced a slow decline. By the early 1970s a huge urban crisis had hit this and other urban areas in the US, with gradual



transformation having mutated into rapid degeneration (Sahd 2004). During this crisis, week by week blocks were being destroyed by fire, abandonment and decay (Carrión 2008). The South Bronx (along with Brooklyn's Brownsville, Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant neighbourhoods, and Manhattan's Harlem and Lower East Side) was indeed, literally burning. Between 1970 and 1980, seven different census tracts in the Bronx lost more than 97 per cent of their buildings to fire and abandonment, while forty-four tracts (out of 289 in the borough) lost more than 50 per cent. In this period the Bronx was an area with extremely severe problems associated with poverty, drugs, social exclusion and many types of violence and insecurity.

The main response to this crisis was depopulation. By 1980 the Bronx had lost 300 000 inhabitants, down from a peak of 1.5 million people in 1950 (Carrión 2008). By the 1990s, 70 per cent of the population had left the Melrose Commons area. The borough was a place to avoid, most of its residents had left their neighbourhood and since then the Bronx has been, and continues to be, stigmatized.

As a result of the complex revitalization process mentioned above, the South Bronx is no longer a devastated area. However, it is yet to completely recover from that period's devastation. The area has been so economically depressed that very few businesses could be found beyond corner stores. Residents, therefore, have had to travel out of the area when purchasing specialized goods, adding transportation and time costs into the larger cycle of poverty.

Nowadays, the South Bronx is a working class community, where social, economic, and also environmental problems have never been completely overcome. The South Bronx was and remains vulnerable. Thus, each new economic crisis hits an already poor, disenfranchised and socially excluded community.

In this context, the 2008 economic recession was the latest shock to a neighbourhood that had already been through multiple crises over recent generations. Several interviewees expressed this sense in a very clear statement: *'you cannot go much lower than low!'* Or, as shown in the following quotation, the 2008 economic crisis impacted on an already poor and vulnerable community.

This community is highly, highly impacted by the economic violence of unemployment and poverty. These are things that pre-date the so-called economic crisis of 2008... The 2008 crisis – if it did anything, it maybe had exacerbated things (Friends of Brook Park, Program Director).

Before redistricting in 2013, Mott Haven and Melrose were in the poorest congressional district in the US. This was not a result of the Great Recession, as even prior to it, this area was already the poorest in the country. Today, following redistricting, the Mott Haven and Melrose area is in the 15th congressional district. It is no longer the absolute poorest, but it is still at the bottom in terms of income distribution in the US.

Of course, this does not mean that the 2008 Great Recession had no impact in the South Bronx. The recession has hit an already vulnerable community and has put financial pressure on the emerging working class and lower-middle class in the Bronx, flattening or contracting their salaries without a commensurate adjustment in rents.



They can't afford public housing because they make too much and they make too little to really afford the supposed affordable housing, meaning then they have to leave the area, where they have lived for some time. (South Bronx Unite, Co-founder)

Small businesses were also dramatically affected by the recession and most of them were forced to close. Rents are high for these stores to remain open and they cannot keep up with the chain stores that are popping up in the area.

You see the more Mom-and-Pop stores that are struggling that could make ends meet ten years ago and were somewhat struggling then... now it's impossible. Either the rent kills them or restocking these stores kills them (Tenant Association of NYCHA's Andrew Jackson Houses, President).

Public cuts were also significant, and affected not only public services delivered by the government but also nonprofits. In the wake of the Great Recession, the nonprofits of the South Bronx underwent processes of merger, financial struggle and, in some cases, closure. Several community centres and day-care centres closed between 2008 and 2011 due to retrenchment in government funding. Similarly, the director of Mothers on the Move reported that food pantry activity increased in 2008-09, as the effects of the recession hit working class people. At the same time, SNAP⁸ funding (food stamps) was also cut, leaving the poor ever more reliant on food banks.

Private investment also stopped after the crash and the strategy of 'economic development' – the plan to turn the South Bronx into an economic village – was clearly affected. Nowadays, it seems that private investment is returning and, as a consequence, gentrification is emerging as a threat.

The principal historic problems that have hit the South Bronx during the last four decades have been: depopulation, failing education, economic violence (unemployment and poverty), and environmental damage. Of these large-scale problems, only depopulation has been reversed, while the others remain salient causes of social stress in the South Bronx, despite both huge community efforts to address them and millions of public dollars invested in the area over time.

One cannot say that the South Bronx remains the same as forty years ago. The area has dramatically improved and, though it is still a poor and deprived area, is undoubtedly safer and wealthier than in the 1970s. Significant public and private investment have happened; however, probably not enough to lift the South Bronx out of poverty and social exclusion, and not enough to overcome its character as a segregated urban area. Educational failure clearly demonstrates this harsh reality: only 2 per cent of the students who graduate from public high-school are college ready, and graduation rates themselves are extremely low. This means that almost no one from the concentrated poverty areas in the Bronx goes to college.

For those who finish public schools, nothing has been positive for them about their education experience, so why would they go on to college? (Per Scholas, Director).

In this vein, a number of the nonprofit leaders we interviewed reported that the Bronx has suffered from public underfunding for education. Despite public and private programs carried out in these neighbourhoods, and despite some significant improvements in this area, it seems fairly clear that such efforts have not been enough to be effective and efficient. Consequently, a sense of insufficient investment or even disinvestment fills the collective imaginary in this area.

We have lots of concentrated poverty here, so we keep just getting 'pilot programs' that don't work. Public investment in Mott Haven has been 'here-and-there' but the 'investment' has been more corporate. Will they build schools? Not many (Mothers on the Move, Director).

6

Many of the investments made during the last three decades have been focused on public and social housing. The new housing that has been built has tended to 'move in' middle and working-class people from around the city. However, much of the housing that has been built over the past several decades is still not affordable to neighbourhood residents. These are not high-income apartments, but rather lower-income supposedly-affordable apartments. Nevertheless, they remain financially out of reach for the low-income and minimum-wage working class of the South Bronx (Guimond 2013). Thus, tenants from other boroughs and other states are moving in, but poverty and affordable housing are still tough and unsolved problems in the area.

We also discovered a sentiment among neighbours that the South Bronx has become 'a dumping ground': waste incinerators have been set-up there; a waste-transport company tried to move to Hunts Point but was stopped by community struggles against it; interviewees reported historic fights over waste treatment facilities in the area; drug treatment centres in the area draw clients from across New York City; homeless shelters have been developed in this area disproportional to the resident population; immigrant '*desplazados*' from other countries and military veterans come here. All in all, it is a magnet for poverty as a result of relatively low prices and the prevalence of shelters and food pantries. As one of the members of South Bronx Unite stated, '*it creates a circle that we can't get out of.*'

Among the more grassroots-oriented organizations, there is a sentiment that investment in the area has been made to enrich outside developers and nonprofits rather than, first and foremost, to benefit the lives of the residents.

We've had a lot of social service organizations. We've had corporations that have come together or formed or serve this community, I think, for their own profit and gain. We have too many, way too many drug treatment facilities. We have an overburden of that, citywide. People come here from other boroughs to get drug treatment, get methadone treatment - too much of that... way too many shelters. We call it poverty pimping, those organizations that are taking advantage of others. Of course there's a need for drug treatment, but it shouldn't all happen in one community (South Bronx Unite, Co-founder).

At the same time, most of our interviewees, from across the organizational spectrum, recognized some signs of gentrification. Even if gentrification is not currently the neighbourhood's most salient problem, almost all civil society organizations are at least

thinking or talking about it. Some social organizations such as Friends of Brook Park or CASA (Community Action for Safe Apartments) are aware of recent trends in the area. In 2013 the first Bronx Gentrification Conference was held in Melrose and it has been repeated annually. Thus, several social organizations are being mobilized against gentrification trends in South Bronx and they explicitly say they don't want to be the new Bushwick in NYC.

In the South Bronx we did not find extreme signs of gentrification like those we clearly observed in Bushwick. However, it seems that before the recession redevelopment had started to happen in the area with new private investment, which stopped after the crash. Now there are some signs that gentrification is starting to pick back up again, such as a new hotel for tourists on 149th street, new housing developments, a golf course backed by Donald Trump opening along the waterfront, the ABC Carpet Store moving an outlet to the area, and some famous people moving to South Bronx and 'advertising that' as part of their coolness.

Some stakeholders do not perceive gentrification as something necessarily bad. The Borough president is fostering a discourse around economic development in the Bronx aiming to attract investment and jobs: transforming the central area of the South Bronx into a real borough centre with new economic activities, attracting real estate developers through public financial incentives, expanding the Metro-North Railroad service in the area, allowing large industrial transformations such as the relocation of a Fresh Direct⁹ warehouse or fostering multiple rezoning projects.¹⁰

From rezonings to infrastructure projects and financial incentives, stakeholders have knit together programs that helped to generate more than \$1.1 billion in residential, institutional and commercial development in 2014, a 26 per cent jump from the previous year, according to a report from Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.'s office. Although this approach and many of these projects (especially the relocation of Fresh Direct) have generated significant contestation in the area, many stakeholders (including some traditional nonprofits participating on the Community Board¹¹) welcome this approach. Such individuals and organizations think it is good to revitalize the neighbourhood. Everybody acknowledges that displacement is the negative side of gentrification but they argue that displacement could be avoided in the South Bronx if gentrification is 'smartly planned'. The following quotation summarizes this positive view of gentrification:

People should have access to good parks, nice restaurants and garbage cans.... To what extent gentrification is bad? People should be able to live and work in this area. I don't think gentrification is a bad word, but we have to be smart of keeping people's job here (SoBro, Director of Special Projects, Strategic Initiatives and Governmental Relations).

2. A diverse community working as a whole

There are a number of 'worlds' in the South Bronx. We could identify several immigrant worlds (Spanish-speaking, African languages, and Asian), and there is also an older 'we have stayed' world, including a large population within the public housing system. These worlds, though, are not in a high degree of conflict with each other, so we could probably define it as a community with a significant bridging social capital among these different cultural and historical worlds.

The culture is the most characteristic feature... There are Latinos from around the world, just so many different Latin cultures, then also African-American culture, especially those who had migrated from the South and raised children here; then also Africans; then also Afro-Caribbean; now also Asians. There is diversity, and a beautiful diversity of music in the streets. The community gardens in the neighbourhood here in the South Bronx area not only grow vegetables but also play music, even music in the gardens; neighbours come in with 'island instruments' like bull horns, maracas, and bongos. Then, they welcome kids in to hear the music (Per Scholas, Director).

8

None of our interviewees reported a high level of social tension between demographic groups, while many of them stated that individual and organizational networks are very strong. Some stressed that people in the neighbourhoods know each other, while others highlighted how different organizations are able to work together. The Executive Director of Hostos Center for Bronx Nonprofits claimed that *'the community leaders are multigenerational, people know each other in the community and they are used to doing things together'* even if they come from different generations or from different social organizations and grassroots movements.

The South Bronx has a historical tradition of self-organizing and networking among different organizations. Sometimes these relations are informal or time-bounded, but the community has been characterized by the emergence of nonprofit coalitions with several goals. Some coalitions set-up partnerships among different stakeholders, including governmental actors; others are just permanent or temporary nonprofit or community-based coalitions.

Looking back to the 1970s helps explain this self-organizing tradition. In the midst of the urban crisis, the first community-driven revitalization efforts emerged from the bottom-up, shaping a radical and left-liberal vision based on a deep distrust of for-profit landlords and the dynamics of the real estate markets. This kind of revitalization exhibited a high degree of self-organization, creating alternative ownership structures and housing practices that gave some measure of autonomy to the community. As Guimond (2013) notes, this manifested as tenant cooperatives, sweat equity groups renovating and moving into vacant buildings, nonprofit housing organizations taking ownership of buildings abandoned by landlords, local organizations becoming community developers, and also as struggles over community planning. Thus, socially innovative responses in the South Bronx have developed since late 1970s, fostering a 'we stay' community that has fought for solutions to extremely tough collective problems, even when neither the state nor the market were able to halt the Bronx's decay. As a result, community ties were markedly strengthened.

We work with the people who have stayed, they are not going nowhere. Poor people, poor people of colour, are not left with a trust-fund; rather, they are left with an apartment. When my mother passed away, she left my older sister a 'section 8', so we could keep the apartment. When our community talks about housing, this is what keeps us, this is the connection we have with our neighbourhood. There's more sense of community because of the role housing plays in people's lives (Mothers on the Move, Director).

Several Community Development Corporations (CDCs) were created in the South Bronx, with roots going as far back as the early housing/tenant movements that burst onto the scene in the early 1960s. These movements struggled for resident control of what was planned and developed in the area, achieving significant victories. Residents who collectively formed South Bronx groups such as the People’s Development Corporation, South East Bronx Community Organization, the Mid Bronx Desperados, and the Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association began to redevelop the area with little outside interference or assistance (Sahd 2004).

Community-based organizations have been essential for attracting state funding programs to devastated neighbourhoods. However, nowadays most of these organizations – such as CDCs, tenant cooperatives, sweat equity organizations and so on – are dependent on state funding; the CDC world seems to have changed in the South Bronx. As reported by Sahd (2004: 91) the CDC model has developed that it makes resident participation virtually impossible. Most of the community development corporations in the South Bronx are now organized and function in a way similar to for-profit entities. From this point of view, CDCs have evolved from a model based on collective efforts led by coalitions of residents working together to improve the living conditions of the neighbourhood, to a new professionalized model where residents are conceived as clients and are excluded from the organization’s decision-making process. Although this is a general trend in South Bronx CDCs, each of these organizations has its own nuances. In some cases, such as Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association, we were still able to observe the original democratic model. In some other cases, such as Nos Quedamos, which will be analysed in-depth below, we identified professionalization but also significant efforts made toward community organizing.

The collaboration tradition among different sectors has also gone through several stages of evolution. It has been shaped through contested rationales and has been extremely context and path-dependent. Regarding the revitalization process in the South Bronx, Guimond (2013: 2) argues: *‘Radical forms of revitalization have been supported by the local state because there have been few alternatives in neighbourhoods abandoned by landlords and banks. Policymakers often preferred working with for-profits actors when and where possible, and the moderate vision of revitalization has gained ground over the last thirty years’.*

During the 1980s and 1990s, housing or revitalization coalitions were especially significant. More recently other significant issues have also been tackled through coalitions, such as education and youth-issues (Forward South Bronx Coalition or South Bronx Rising Together) and sustainability (among others the South Bronx Coalition for Clean Air, Sustainable South Bronx and South Bronx Asthma Partnership).

The Executive Director of Hostos’ Center for Bronx Nonprofits sees the nonprofit ecology as enjoying good, cooperative relationships both with each other and with government. Nevertheless, we must also recognize that there are several ‘universes’ of nonprofits in the South Bronx, working as almost separate systems. On one hand we identified conventional, bureaucratic, and well-funded organizations. Most of these organizations are service providers and, additionally, some, such as SoBro, are pro-gentrification. On the other hand, we found more grassroots, community-based organizations that focus on advocacy and organizing, as well as various kinds of service-delivery. The networking tradition, though, could be found in both of these nonprofit universes. Thus, the bureaucratic world of large nonprofits

works together in some coalitions such as the Bronx Nonprofit Coalition, while the grassroots universe is nowadays networked around South Bronx Unite.

Historically, nonprofits have worked with the government in the South Bronx through several forms of collaboration: partnerships, state-sponsored revitalization, funding programs, etc. However, while some forms of collaboration have produced state-dependence and co-optation, others have followed a rationale of contestation and self-organization.

At the same time, each of the nonprofit universes described above shows a particular kind of relationship with public institutions. The inhabitants of the traditional and bureaucratic universe of large nonprofits providing services are more satisfied with their relations with public administration and most of them participate in a friendly way on the Community Board. The grassroots side, by contrast, is more frustrated with public administration and there is a prevalent feeling that the Community Board is working like a 'machine', without much turnover replacement. This second universe is currently engaged around South Bronx Unite, a coalition contesting the Fresh Direct project, which will be analysed in depth below. If there is a sense of 'conflict' within the social structure of these neighbourhoods, it is perhaps best described in terms of these two universes of organizations and their alignment around Fresh Direct. Even here, however, we did not observe conflict playing out between the nonprofit universes in an overt and sharp way, but rather conflict between a number of grassroots nonprofits, the public administration and Fresh Direct itself.

This conflict is also useful to show how these two different universes perceive public sector involvement in the area. The public sector is backing the entry of Fresh Direct into the waterfront area. The organizations close to the public sector tend to support Fresh Direct. These entities - particularly the larger, bureaucratic ones such as Presbyterian Senior Services, Per Scholas, SoBro, etc. – are favourable towards the public sector and tend to work with every office-holder:

The Borough President is paying enough attention here, he's making a lot of effort to get support. He's especially interested in the South Bronx, making it safe and friendly, and encouraging community... Why not have a Fresh Direct in the Bronx? The Borough President wants diversity but also fairness, the same opportunity for everyone, not just the high end. He's invested in everything -- youth, education, seniors, health and wellness, community health (Per Scholas, Director).

On the other hand, organizations that are disappointed with the public sector are fighting Fresh Direct. These social organizations tend to criticize public institutions for not doing or investing enough:

The Borough President is interested in Trump and his own future, and in development. He's funding Fresh Direct and then getting kick-backs; he is not fighting for living wages, Fresh Direct is exempt from living wages... De Blasio uses the subsidies related to Fresh Direct for his candidacy (South Bronx Farmers Market, Director).

I don't think the Bronx Borough president has been paying enough appropriate attention to this community as it pertains to some of the grassroots concerns... He has not been as supportive as

I think he should have and should be in creating solutions to our long-standing problems of air quality. What is he doing around it? And what is he doing around the fact that we have failing schools? We don't really have true job training, for job creation, for living wage jobs (South Bronx Unite, Co-founder).

Despite these two opposing positions towards the public sector, the two groups of organizations share a position that calls for higher public investment in the area. Even though most of the nonprofits strongly criticize the role of the public administration and the ineffectiveness of public dollars in solving collective problems in the South Bronx, they all argue that a major engagement at different levels of government is needed. All of them maintain that the state, the city council and the borough should play a prominent role in producing effective and comprehensive solutions to the tough problems the South Bronx is experiencing. Thus, although the South Bronx is home to a highly self-organized community, its members are not making a claim for autonomy but rather for public administration support and commitment.

In short, the South Bronx could be defined as a struggling community where social organizations are characterized by a high degree of self-organizing and networking, able to work together for common goals— even in a conflictive way – with the public administration. This form of civic capacity defines, and probably partly explains, the South Bronx's gradual walk towards recovery; a recovery which is far from complete but which (as long as New York City as a whole continues to recover) promises to shape development in a way more favourable to residents than in other parts of the city.

3. A community response from below

How has the community in the South Bronx responded to the effects of the Great Recession? Are they being socially innovative in order to face new challenges arising from this contemporary scenario? Let us examine and characterize some of the responses we found.

Firstly, the South Bronx is a community that has not overcome either social exclusion or stigmatization, but its members are prepared and coordinated to face the effects of the recession. Even though the community has not been able to eradicate its tough problems, it is socially organized to respond to them. There are a number of social services and nonprofits in the area; churches, parochial schools and community centres provide a safety net. Hence, nonprofits delivering services, solidarity networks and public institutions provide local responses at a neighbourhood level.

Secondly, despite the fact that cuts and recession effects have also hit nonprofits and grassroots organizations, the South Bronx community appears to be ready to face any challenge or threat. There is a common feeling in the community that their recent history has been made through people, firms and governments coming to the South Bronx from outside the area and making changes without community involvement. Over the last 40 years, though, they have built a robust community and they want to be heard; they claim they won't accept any change that does not take them into account.

We have done a lot of initiatives in the past, so we are prepared to fight new changes such as new shelters in the area or gentrification (Nos Quedamos, Administrative Assistant).

Thirdly, many of the responses we identified – which emerged from below – are socially innovative. Either as a result of insufficient public investment or because of community capacities developed over recent decades, the South Bronx is a place where social innovation flourishes. After 2008, new organizations emerged providing project-specific services in a creative way; a number of green farms appeared in reaction to the 'food desert' issue, green job organizations started working in the area, and many advocacy groups strengthened their activities by training people to speak up.

Socially innovative responses in the Mott Haven and Melrose area exhibit higher degrees of 'insider-initiative' or 'indigenoussness' when compared to Bushwick, where a larger proportion of social innovations have been established in the community through newcomers (particularly the wave of gentrifying millennials). We have selected two such initiatives, aiming to analyse in-depth the kind of innovations they produce and how leadership happens. Both initiatives emerged from the 'indigenous' South Bronx community and must be understood as a result of a historical and geographical trajectory of struggle. The first initiative – Nos Quedamos – was founded in response to the 1970s urban crisis and continues to provide socially innovative responses in Melrose. Although the second initiative – South Bronx Unite – builds on past South Bronx grassroots and community efforts at mobilization, it was inspired by the Occupy Wall Street movement and crystalized as a new coalition in 2012.

3.1. Nos Quedamos

In the 1970s Melrose Commons (a 35-block area in the heart of the South Bronx) had a population of 21 000 inhabitants. By the 1990s the area's population had dropped to 6000, with services gradually removed. Urban planning methods at the time were essentially focused on attempting to turn depressed areas into suburban developments. A redevelopment plan was projected for the area, which would have completely displaced its residents. The plan was to drive out the remaining residents and then carry out a 'suburban expansion' in the South Bronx.

In the early 1990s, residents of Melrose Commons fought against this plan through community organizing and socially innovative responses. A grassroots community group, Nos Quedamos [We Stay], generated a new redevelopment plan that included area residents instead of displacing them. With the establishment of the Melrose Commons Urban Renewal area, Nos Quedamos set a new precedent for urban community planning and design, forcing cities to include their residents in planning processes instead of neglecting them. They argued that Melrose was not a community that needed to be erased, but rather, they could build on the community's strengths. They successfully fought against the 'deficient population' model of development as well as articulating an early vision for community sustainability, which has been a 'guiding star' that continues to be followed today. Nos Quedamos was also among the first organizations to promote 'mixed use housing'; in other words, shops on the ground level, and housing above. While urban landscapes are often marked by such arrangements (businesses opening onto the street, with residences above), the innovative element here was

Nos Quedamos's vision for bringing businesses back into the Bronx, even while authorities at the city level planned on total redevelopment rather than neighbourhood renewal.

Pushing this idea of mixed use housing, which the city was pretty opposed to, even though in the intervening 20 years has become absolutely the norm... I would be surprised if you could do a new development without something like that... That's social innovation if you think about it (Nos Quedamos, Executive Director).

Nos Quedamos is a Community Development Corporation (CDC) comprised of residents, homeowners and business-owners from the South Bronx. They are committed to promoting, supporting, and advancing healthy and sustainable growth, both for local communities and the larger society. Their members are mostly Spanish-speaking.

Nos Quedamos uses a typical community development approach. It is a community-based organization aiming to develop a specific community, using a comprehensive approach and based on creating housing, business and social programs for that community. Its main activity has been promoting housing projects through a specific mixed-use vision and listening to what the community has to say about its needs. For example, Nos Quedamos changed the way they build kitchens based on an understanding of community lifestyles. From 1998 to 2009, sixteen housing projects were constructed based on Nos Quedamos's vision, and two more projects are currently under construction. All of these projects have been carried out through public funding (at Federal, State and/or City level), which clearly shows that Nos Quedamos's success can only be explained through a continuous collaboration between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in the area.

During the last twenty-five years, the organization's core activities have been advocacy and campaigning for affordable housing, providing support and services to residents in the area, fostering sustainable community development and also furthering work force development. As we have said, their founding goal was to stabilize the population of the neighbourhood and create a critical mass to support business, thereby bringing business back to the Bronx. They clearly succeeded. The Melrose Commons population stabilized by late 1990s and the first new supermarket in thirty years opened its doors in the neighbourhood.

Nos Quedamos has remained in the neighbourhood, engaging in community organizing for a long time, but its goals have evolved. Currently, Nos Quedamos is focused on providing housing for the 'working-middle class' (those who make too much for public housing but cannot afford market rates). They provide the following services on-site for the community and the residents of its buildings: financial literacy (tenant and community member financial education), property management, youth promotion and job development. At the same time, sustainability has increasingly become one of their main targets and they are fairly innovative in this field.

In the early days Nos Quedamos was highly innovative, combining contestation with alternative pragmatic solutions, advocating a new way of community urban planning and enjoying success with their proposal for mixed-use housing. They have continued to propose novel solutions to community problems up to and including the current post-recession scenario, clearly demonstrating that to be innovative you don't have to be new. A good example is their trend toward greener jobs, linking saving energy with poverty reduction. Nos

Quedamos has a specific Green Buildings program, promoting green and LEED¹² certified developments, encompassing materials, systems and high efficiency Energy Star appliances and fixtures that help reduce energy and water usage in its projects.

Urban agriculture and roof gardens, including green spaces with native plants, as well as capturing and reusing rain and greywater are some of the measures they apply in their buildings to create a positive impact, both for the environment and the community. They also have an environmental program aimed at redeveloping brownfield sites, whose former activities involved the use of potentially hazardous materials. Nos Quedamos has participated in the creation of standards and regulations concerning brownfields redevelopment at local, citywide, state-wide, and federal levels. It is important to highlight that they have done this through their constant work with local leaders.

Although the South Bronx is not as gentrified as Bushwick, gentrification is nonetheless a hot issue in the area. Some see it as a threat and others as an opportunity. Nos Quedamos wants to preserve the community and keep it from becoming another Brooklyn or over-priced Manhattan. Thus, they are planning to respond to gentrification:

We have had a chance to really look at what happened in Brooklyn and it's in our minds to be a little more thoughtful. And to figure out how can we pursue this mixed use, mixed income development without jumping to the 900 square foot condo. We don't want people to be priced out because all the housing is targeted to lower income tiers but on the other hand we also don't want them to be priced out because Manhattan rates are astronomical (Nos Quedamos, Executive Director).

Nos Quedamos has developed an innovative philosophy of home ownership as a way to preempt gentrification, which they predict will eventually come to the South Bronx:

Really seeing to it that the housing stock is accessible to the local community is super important. But not just rental. An important key plan to the community members was that we needed affordable home ownership. And another way to anchor a community against gentrification and these other ailments is home ownership. And having multi-family home ownership that actually was able to give rental income to the homeowners was something else that was a social innovation itself (Nos Quedamos, Director of Housing and Development).

The argument continued:

Especially, when you think about it, what are the household types in this community? A lot of them are large with extended family members. So knowing that you're able to have a household where you could have another kind of dedicated unit just for relatives that you could rent it out to or to another community member. You think about how that also generates community sustainability (Nos Quedamos, Director of Housing and Development).

Over the past several years Nos Quedamos has been following a new mission, although within the same overall vision. They are now focusing on the newer economic class, community members who are making too much for low income affordable housing but not enough for

market rate housing. At the same time, a lot of people fall through the cracks because affordable housing is too expensive and their incomes are too low for it. The idea is to prevent these people from falling between the cracks. This could be a clue for how the South Bronx may emerge as a different kind of NYC neighbourhood, a neighbourhood that is not polarized between the long-term residents and the gentrifiers. In advance of gentrification, Nos Quedamos is building infrastructure precisely to avoid low income residents' displacement and to keep them in place.

On the other hand, we also observed Nos Quedamos in the midst of a strategic shift in its organizational goals. While continuing its mission with respect to housing and development, the organization is also now increasingly articulating concerns about education, adult training, and starting to translate these into programmatic form. The organization is pivoting toward 'training youth leaders', in other words, as they say, to recover the lost generation. We detected this shift in thinking when listening to how Nos Quedamos leaders framed the purpose of their next era of engagement in the neighbourhood: to address poverty by connecting economic approaches to the topic of education attainment.

Youth from age 17 to 21 or 22 are disconnected from school; they're not completing school, they're not going to college, and they're not going into the workforce (...) That means that our future is in crisis (...) Although you have families in Melrose that have managed to benefit from this development (for instance the newer 'mixed developments' that have brought population back into the Bronx through a lottery process, managed by HPD, and that has stimulated entrepreneurship in the South Bronx), you still have a larger population that is still in poverty... (Nos Quedamos, Executive Director).

This individual concluded,

So now, what are the other issues that are at play to be able to address really changing the conversation around not just income and economic attainment, but there's everything else from education attainment and there's all these other social justice issues that are at play here (Nos Quedamos, Executive Director).

While the organization supports itself through funds from their housing developments, Nos Quedamos also gets funding from public institutions to carry out its programs and services. Undoubtedly its success in the 1990s has to do with its capacity to struggle and challenge the initial urban plan. But it is also linked to its ability to work together with public institutions and other stakeholders to get the Melrose Commons Urban Renewal area implemented. Currently they have good relations with just about all public sector actors: working relations with the Bronx's Council member, with the State Assemblyman and with the Bronx Borough President. They also have good relations with their Congressman and with the Community Board. They also have a close relationship with other nonprofits, such as Bronx Defenders, Sustainable South Bronx or Mothers on the Move, and informal but positive relations in general with the whole universe of South Bronx nonprofits.

Nos Quedamos remains actively engaged with advocacy efforts. This way they connect Bronx based organizations to leverage capacity and influence matters of public policy. These

advocacy campaigns and initiatives include, but are not limited to: South Bronx River Watershed Alliance, NYC Environmental Justice Alliance, Our City Our Homes and Bronx Climate Justice Initiative. Despite this tradition of collaboration with other Bronx nonprofits, Nos Quedamos tends to carry out its own projects in a fairly autonomous way, without coalitions or other forms of networking.

Nos Quedamos emerges from an organizing ethos, with voter registration drives, hired organizers, and so on. However, nowadays it doesn't fit in what Guimond (2013) calls a 'radical and democratic model' of organizing. It has a traditional nonprofit organizational structure (including a board, COO, CEO, program manager, etc.), but it functions much like a small team. The organization consists of seven professionals and twenty-five volunteers, who help with events and campaigns, several also providing daily office support. They have a programs Department (for organizing events) and a Community and Social Services Department (providing services such as help in applying for affordable housing).

Considering the social change model, we found that Nos Quedamos is building collective capacity for change by way of doing leadership work to produce unleashing, reframing, and bridging practices. Nos Quedamos endeavours to embody a team-based and collective form of leadership, valuing the collective network of residents, churches and other organizations as sources of leadership. It wants to be an enterprise that distributes leadership equally across staff and volunteers. However, Nos Quedamos exhibits many features of a conventionally structured organization, albeit suffused with collective practices.

While Nos Quedamos has evolved into the organizational form of an established nonprofit service provider, its members have not lost their community organizing practices. The Nos Quedamos leadership recognizes such practices (gathering signatures, running campaigns, going to town hall meetings, etc.) as key to their past successes.

We invite community leaders to speak to elected representatives. Giving them that voice, we are empowering them (Nos Quedamos, Executive Director).

Their organizing practices have been evident in recent events, for example when a neighbourhood resident came to Nos Quedamos to organize a campaign against a proposal for a new homeless shelter in the area. At the same time, Nos Quedamos takes opportunities to coach residents in community organizing practices. As one active participant reported:

People come here for affordable housing and they realize they don't qualify, and that's an opportunity to get them engaged, using their experience as a person affected by one of the problems we try to tackle (Nos Quedamos, Administrative Assistant).

Using a conventional community-organizing rationale, Nos Quedamos tries to unleash the human energy of community members. They offer information to the whole community and usually organize workshops, especially for their volunteers. They try to foster and give voice to new community leaders from below. In some cases, moreover, they have also brought community residents into the organization staff. The following quote shows the example of a resident who was engaged as a volunteer in Nos Quedamos and has recently been hired as administrative assistant:

I feel that I've learned how to do community outreach and community organizing, how to get people engaged... I've learned the skill set needed to work with community and help them understand this is our stake... Put them at the forefront and say these are our issues (Nos Quedamos, Administrative Assistant).

Like with the other social initiatives in this project, we found 'reframing discourse' to be an evident leadership practice. Nos Quedamos successfully fought against the 'deficient population' model of development and successfully asserted that the remaining residents were not a community that needed to be erased. Instead, they argued that development could build on the strengths of the community. They intentionally went about the task of changing the stereotype of community development in the Bronx from the 'deficient community' model to the belief that the remaining residents were valuable stakeholders in whatever development plans took shape. This reframing practice continues:

We want to change the stereotype that... 'oh, in the Bronx they don't do much...' That's not true, we have a lot and people who live here they wanna do something about what's going on... We don't like to be in poverty and we wanna change that (Nos Quedamos, Administrative Assistant).

The organization's work is focused within the community, and thus bridging difference practices take place within the community and especially within the 'we stay' community. Members work for and from the community, aiming to organize it in order to realize its common goals. Bridging difference is also evident in the descriptions above about the excellent relations with public officials and with the whole universe of South Bronx nonprofits.

We also found a dramatic example of Nos Quedamos creatively bridging differences as part of its housing work: bringing property managers into the planning process for new developments. Because property managers have a stake in the environments in which housing developments are embedded, they became valuable participants in the planning of new affordable housing even after an initial hesitancy to become involved. In this creative way, Nos Quedamos spans different professional domains and stages in community development.

3.2. South Bronx Unite (and Friends of Brook Park)

South Bronx Unite (SBU) is a coalition of South Bronx residents, organizations and other allies working together to improve and protect the social, environmental and economic future of the South Bronx. It was formed in 2012 in response to the proposed relocation of the grocery delivery organization Fresh Direct from Long Island City in Queens to the Harlem River Yard. This was a 96-acre waterfront parcel of public land leased by the New York State Department of Transportation to Harlem River Yard Ventures in 1991 for 99 years.

The Fresh Direct controversy was its galvanizing issue, but the coalition has focused on numerous other activities overtime. These include revitalizing the waterfront, developing a bike share program with Bike the Bronx, and organizing climate coalition activities for the Climate March. They have also lead efforts to turn an old health clinic into a community-owned space that will house local community nonprofits.

SBU has a long-term vision that aims to involve the community in planning and development of the waterfront. The goal is to develop access to a blue-green area and foster a green development that would provide living wage jobs for neighbourhood residents. In a similar way to Nos Quedamos, SBU is in the planning stages of extending its work into the area of human development.

We initially formed this coalition around the stopping of the relocation of Fresh Direct because of the potential environmental harm to an area that's already dealing with incredibly poor air quality, really heavily trafficked area with vehicular traffic... Almost 17,000 diesel trucks per day coming from Hunts Point through Mott Haven, Port Morris through either the highways into the city or upstate... We're now trying to propose projects that would increase quality of life (...) We're trying to create space for that [human development] by asking and looking for space that we can do, like, after school programs around creative writing or creative thinking. We have the library right here -the Mott Haven Library- but a lot of the times it doesn't have the programming that it needs. Most often that place is just used as a computer lab (South Bronx Unite, Co-founder).

SBU could be understood as a simple coalition contesting a public-private development proposal in the South Bronx. However, we think they are socially innovative because they go beyond contestation: they self-produced an alternative proposal for the area and they are carrying out several community activities according to their socio-environmental view. Thus, despite the fact that the coalition was created and mobilized against having Fresh Direct in the South Bronx, they went beyond that protest, by developing an alternative urban plan to make the waterfront 'green'. This community initiative appears to have been successful in that it was able to get plans incorporated into the NY State plan, presumably putting pressure on city planners to take these ideas seriously.

We've seen waterfront development in every borough -Long Island City, Queens, Gantry State Park, Battery Park City, Brooklyn Bridge Park-. All over the city there's development going on around waterfront development to increase quality of life, but it's not happening in this community. The southside Bronx is not getting that waterfront access. And so the community had to be 'the change it's looking for' by proposing and getting this plan nominated and then voted for overwhelmingly to become a priority project (South Bronx Unite, Co-founder).

They are also socially innovative because they are attempting to meet unmet social needs in the area from below. As will become apparent, they are transforming neighbourhood social relations through a new form of networked organization and they try to empower South Bronx residents through their activities.

The organization builds upon past community mobilization efforts. Despite the coalition being founded in 2012, it already existed 'in spirit' prior to that date. For instance, the same people fought the Major Deegan Expressway in 2009, started to lead the contestation to the waterfront plan and also worked around the Stericycle modification actions. Thus, SBU was created as a coalition when major players in previous efforts decided to come together to

coordinate their efforts in a somewhat more formalized manner. As we will see, the influence of the Occupy Wall Street movement was significant at this milestone.

On paper, SBU is more than fifty organizations coming together to advocate for remedies to environmental and social injustices in Mott Haven, Port Morris and Melrose. In practice, the coalition works around several community-based organizations and a team of activists. Thus, the coalition has a core nucleus of actors, supplemented by others who are involved to varying degrees. Money spent by the coalition comes from individuals' and organizations' own personal dollars.

Friends of Brook Park (FBP) is one of SBU's key organizational partners and also acts as the coalition's financial sponsor. Located on a 'million dollar block'¹³, since 1999 FBP has functioned as an open-air community centre in the form of gardens and event-space, empowering projects that, according to its members, respond to the 'economic violence' of the unemployment and poverty that afflict the area. FBP is characterized by strong links to environmental and indigenous movements and they are known for sponsoring a great deal of education in their garden space, particularly working with youth and after-school programs. Over the course of its fifteen-year history, FBP has evolved into an eclectic and creative community space.

Friends of Brook Park is partially a community garden and a park. We have chicken coops, sustainable agriculture, raised beds. We have community gardens going on. We do classes there. There's sweat lodges happening there (Friends of Brook Park, Program Director).

As we might expect, the objectives of FBP very much overlap with SBU. They respond to the lack of environmental analysis for projects in the Mott Haven area, the lack of community input in those projects and their lack of transparency. They are aligned with the larger environmental justice movement and respond to the problem of access to green spaces, but overall they also have a clear community approach.

I have a tomato garden. What am I growing and harvesting? Obviously, tomatoes. If I have a flower garden, what am I growing? Flowers. If I say I have a community garden, what am I growing? Community. In addition to the horticultural, agricultural activity that's going on here, very much the cultivation of community social capital. And that's probably as significant as the strict ecological work that goes on here in terms of the trees, the vegetables, the fruits, and the flowers and that sort of thing. It's as important (Friends of Brook Park, Program Director).

FBP has a pragmatic approach. They provide environmental justice eco-tours. By taking the youth to the waterfront via kayaking and biking tours around the neighbourhood, they help young people to envision what the Bronx could look like. They lend out their park to other community organizations, such as Green Worker Cooperatives, and they also gained funding from the NYCHA¹⁴ for a greenhouse project. Some of these initiatives were launched in the post-recession setting and they could be labelled as socially innovative. For instance, FBP runs a youth farm as an alternative to incarceration since 2009. The farm was created as a result of a community survey that engaged youth in the diagnosis and they even recruited Columbia University to help analyse the data through a Geographical Information System. At that point,

FBP began serving as a program site with Community Connections for Youth. As a subcontractor for this organization organization, FBP gets city and state funding. Beyond their pragmatic approach delivering services for the community, FBP also conducts advocacy campaigns, for instance participating actively in SBU's struggle to stop the Fresh Direct relocation.

FBP has connections with many social organizations in the area, such as Community Connections for Youth, Mothers on the Move and Banana Kelly, among others. FBP's program director is also President of NYC Community Gardens Coalitions. Several of our interviewees in fact claimed that a lot of 'organizational threads' weaving through the system of South Bronx community organizations run through Friends of Brook Park.

Neither SBU nor FBP have highly positive relations with the Community Board or the Police Precinct. However, they do work directly with the Department of Probation and Courts and with NYCHA. They also have good relations with the City Council, especially with the Speaker, who is developing Participatory Budgeting in Mott Haven as the Council member for this District.

We participated in that [participatory budgeting] and we joined together with residents out of NYCHA and were able to leverage that community driven process, able to leverage \$300,000 for a solar energy powered food production greenhouse on NYCHA land – the Milbrook Houses just down this way (Friends of Brook Park, Program Director).

Neither FBP nor SBU employ paid staff. However, while FBP is recognized as a formal nonprofit organization (501c3¹⁵), SBU is not – it is rather an informal coalition. SBU has decided not to be legalized as a 501c3 because they do not want the constraints that would come with it. They have a very small budget coming from speaking honorariums, a few small grants to participate in activities such as the Climate March, and participants and organizations donating their own time and money.

Everyone contributes with their time, and energy, and their dollars. Personal funds have created posters and signs and websites. We believe in this community, we believe in our people and so we pay for it with everything we have. Including our children. My son was protesting at four weeks down by the proposed Fresh Direct site (South Bronx Unite, Activist).

SBU was created after the emergence of the Occupy Wall Street movement in NYC, which inspired its model of organization. SBU has a horizontal model whereby residents and community-based organizations are networked around different projects and those who are most engaged are those who have the most time. They also rely heavily on social media and fluid modes of communication. For example, one day Mayor Bill De Blasio came to a local restaurant in the neighbourhood and SBU quickly gathered a group of people to engage with him (with placards, pressing for a conversation), having mobilized on-line. Another day there was a public hearing where Fresh Direct mobilized their people, and South Bronx Unite immediately mobilized out their people too in a theatre at Hostos; each side had about 100 people.

SBU is currently leading a process for the community to acquire a building – the Lincoln Recovery Center (formerly an alcohol and drug treatment centre) – to house community organizations, drawing inspiration not only from Occupy Wall Street but also from the Black Panthers.

This building has been sitting vacant and this hospital first tried to sell the building for a profit but found that they would not be able to get a profit from the sale of that building. So now they're in the process of turning the building back over to the city and we have a progressive city council person who happens to be the speaker of the city council. We are calling on her to lend her support in the community acquiring the building... The community today likewise wants to work together to brainstorm that and other needs that the community has (South Bronx Unite, Co-founder).

21

As this quote suggests, SBU draws heavily from the community for its work. South Bronx Unite lacks a professionalized and hierarchical structure, advocates flexible, open and horizontal forms of organizing, and is based on grassroots movements and community networking. Hence they demonstrate to some degree what we can term a 'collective' form of leadership. At the same time, though, there is a small group of charismatic individuals in SBU that shape its discourse and push for things to be done. Some people think this is less democratic than it could be.

For example, once-a-month SBU has a formal meeting that is open to everyone. However, the date is not posted on its website. Their organizers maintain that SBU is highly collaborative and works as a consensus-driven organization, aiming to draw heavily on community inputs. Its openness and transparency is assumed, again inspired by Occupy Wall Street.

The way we started off is the way we exist still. We've taken on and adopted some of the Occupy Wall Street type structural example of there not being one head or there being a core that make on the ground decisions about press releases, events, how we mobilized - that's the nucleus. And then we have a larger coalition that the core disseminates the information to (South Bronx Unite, Organizer).

We all listen to what each has to say and again we have a consensus approach to solving problems and also coming to conclusions... We have a consensus based approach to coming up with solutions. We meet periodically. We communicate a lot via e-mail or via text. So we're talking to each other pretty frequently throughout the week depending on need and issues that are arising (South Bronx Unite, Co-founder).

On the other hand, though, several of their members claim that SBU has no strong organizational structure and it is more a network of individuals than a network of organizations. In fact, there is a small group of four people leading and coordinating its action. They also argue that SBU actually sits in the middle of the leadership spectrum; it is not a 'command and control' organization, but neither is it a big tent in which to form strategy. These members perceive that decisions seem to be made internal to a small group of

individuals and they argue, therefore, that it could not be considered an organization characterized by fully collective leadership.

With respect to FBP, we also observed some charismatic individuals in that organization. Nevertheless, everybody we interviewed stressed that FBP has a very horizontal leadership style, with a great deal of involvement from volunteers. It exhibits a character that several interviewees described as ‘anarchist’.

We also observed different leadership practices both in SBU and in FBP. Firstly, even though they have not produced a new discourse (the same discourse was used in previous struggles in the area, such as the fight against the waste transfer station in Hunts Point), they clearly frame the South Bronx in general and the waterfront in particular according to an alternative, community development model. Likewise, the ‘anarchist’ model of organizing itself, more networked and fluid than a traditional nonprofit represents a ‘reframing’ of sorts, in practice. It is making the statement that traditional nonprofit status is not the only or perhaps even the best way to achieve collective work. In this sense, it offers a counter-hegemonic perspective, which may be interpreted by some as ‘too loose’ or leaderless, but seems to work. Indeed, when the need comes, SBU is able to mobilize sufficient people around the problem and thus make things happen.

Secondly, they bridge differences through a networked form of organizing which horizontally engages residents, organizations and other allies working together to improve and protect the social, environmental and economic future of the South Bronx. The ‘weaving’ of organizations through this informal one represents a very original way of bridging differences to address specific problems at the right moment. Mobilization would not be possible without sustained, invisible work done from the core. Calling upon many organizations when these are needed, rather than burdening them with daily tasks of organizing that would distract them from their mission represents, like in Occupy Wall Street, a contemporary implementation of collective leadership. Rather than leaderless, the network could be said to be leaderful.

Finally, SBU understands that its success depends on their ability to mobilize and engage people, supporting their claims. To do this, they must listen and work directly with the community in a very decentralized model, but one where learning by doing happens constantly:

Everyone [leads], it's open access and a pure contribution-based effort. You talk about community and trust, there aren't any private accounts. Everyone has access and everyone jumps in (South Bronx Unite, Activist).

SBU uses a number of strategies (information, activities, service delivery, etc.) in order to unleash this human energy.

4. Conclusions

The South Bronx is a socially excluded urban area that has significantly improved over the last four decades. 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. As a result, the South Bronx is, today, a more resilient community prepared to work to ameliorate the effects of recession and ready to face any challenge or threat. Some innovative organizations in the South Bronx community are shifting their activities from service provision to the organizing of human development. It is very likely that they will manage processes of gentrification in a different way to other areas of NYC (such as the Lower East Side, Williamsburg or Bushwick). The residents may be able to realise a ‘mixed income’ area of NYC, taking advantage of an important feature of the South Bronx neighbourhood: while it has often been a ‘dumping ground,’ it is also an area that enjoys a concentration of services.

Social innovation is not something new in the South Bronx. Community members in the area have been innovative since it was economically devastated in 1970s. Unmet social needs, ineffective public investment and a lack of market interest had created a context where the only way urban problems would be tackled was through community responses that emerged from below. Nonetheless, socially innovative initiatives have been possible because the public sector has played a significant role in funding them and collaborating with the community. The model favoured by policymakers has, however, prioritized moderate revitalization in partnership with private companies. Thus, the recognition of the willingness of the South Bronx’s grassroots to struggle is crucial in order to understand why, in some places and at certain times, their transformative approach has been enforced.

The community in the South Bronx is still producing effective, socially innovative responses in the contemporary, post-recession environment. 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 is also expanding its activities beyond the neighbourhood, though it remains too soon to evaluate its impact, which could, potentially, be highly significant. SBU 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.). Both initiatives analysed here take advantage of the South Bronx community’s ability to bring together different actors to work for a common purpose. Hence, relationships, both among different social organizations and also between nonprofits and the public sector, have clearly contributed to the resilience of this social system. In other words, a consolidated and

collaborative civic capacity evident in the South Bronx has enabled socially innovative processes to produce potentially effective and scalable outcomes.

At the same time, we have observed how Nos Quedamos and South Bronx Unite show significant differences in leadership styles and practices. Nos Quedamos is a traditional community development organization that has been professionalized and is now highly state-dependent. However, it reinforces community organizing and aims to empower community leaders through its activities. South Bronx Unite, on the other hand, is a new, transformative coalition inspired by Occupy Wall Street: self-organizing, self-funding, characterized by horizontal and flexible organizational arrangements and the prominent use of social media. Those involved with SBU maintain that leadership comes from its network (residents, organizations and allies). However, notable in SBU is a small group of charismatic individuals pushing to get things done. Being a grassroots movement, they have been empowered and recognized.

In an urban context where social innovation is not only needed but also enabled, we found two different forms of collective leadership producing different kinds of socially innovative processes. In Nos Quedamos, a traditional community-organizing leadership produces state-dependent social innovations based on community development. In South Bronx Unite, a networked, grassroots leadership produces transformative social innovations based on practices of contestation.

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Notes

1 <http://www.mothavenherald.com/2016/03/22/bronxites-gather-to-share-stories-promote-unity/>

2 New York City Housing Authority

3 <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/realestate/mott-haven-the-bronx-in-transition.html>

4 <http://www.amny.com/real-estate/city-living/bronx/city-living-melrose-1.10314986>

5 Nevertheless, other neighbourhoods in NYC with a high public housing rate, such as the Lower East Side, have already been gentrified. Thus, the tenure security of public housing prevents displacement and creates a measure of diversity, but given enough pressure from capital, public housing does not prevent gentrification.

6 It's important to distinguish between public housing and state-subsidized affordable housing. New public housing hasn't been built in decades and is deeply stigmatized popularly and in policy circles. Affordable housing is privately built and run with state subsidy, and the policy regime is entirely different.

7 Moses was an urban planner with a huge influence in the New York metropolitan area in the mid-20th century, and was known for favouring private over public transit.

8 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (U.S. Department of Agriculture).

9 Fresh Direct is an online grocery shopping and food delivery company.

10 The city rezoned 29 areas in the Bronx between 2003 and 2013 according to the Department of City Planning's website.

11 Bronx Community Board 1 serves the Mott Haven, Melrose and Port Morris Communities:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/bxcb1/html/home/home.shtml>

12 The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System

13 A 'million dollar block' is a block of housing on which the public sector spends at least one million dollars per year on the incarceration of residents.

14 New York City Housing Authority.

15 A 501(c) organization is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization in the United States. The most common type of tax-exempt nonprofit organization falls under category 501(c)(3), whereby a nonprofit organization is exempt from federal income tax if its activities have the following purposes: charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering amateur sports competition, or preventing cruelty to children or animals.