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**URBAN REGENERATION AND THE  
TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF *DISSENSUS*  
THE CASE OF 'EL CABANYAL' IN VALENCIA**

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# URBAN REGENERATION AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF **DISSENSUS**

## The case of 'el cabanyal' in valencia

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores and discusses the potential of *agonistic dissensus* as an emancipatory agent of design in a global age where cities have become highly contested sites, constantly refashioned by neoliberal hegemonic forces. *Dissensus* has the potential to refashion the city as a truly agonistic space, one that can re-politicise what neoliberal governance arrangements have profoundly de-politicised, what this paper calls 'agonistic urbanisms'. Furthermore, this paper explores how 'agonistic urbanisms' materialize engaging with Secor's analysis of Agamben's and Lacan's topology of space. Agamben's topological analysis has the potentiality to unlock new modes of politics (Mouffe, 2005) by revealing mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion, while Lacan's topology urges us to consider the desires and affects behind the subject and its lived space.

The second part of the paper will focus on the case of 'El Cabanyal' in Valencia and the aftermath of almost two decades of resistance against a tubula-rassa urban renewal. With the new government brought by the local elections of 2015, 'El Cabanyal' has now a unique opportunity to take ownership of the decision process of their urban future. The aim of the paper is to unpack the transformative potential of *agonistic dissensus* in creating a new urban plan for 'El Cabanyal', one that is open and inclusive, geared towards the creation and inclusion of new political subjects, those otherwise left outside the current mainstream production of space and knowledge within the city. Analysing the case of 'El Cabanyal' through these topological lens, this paper shows how this approach is key to reveals issues of power and exclusion, while explaining explain how collective and individual affects arise and move different neighbours of 'El Cabanyal' into political actions that spatialise as an alternative urban future that can transform the neighbourhood.

**KEYWORDS:** Dissensus, Urban Regeneration, Agonistic urbanisms, Exclusion, El Cabanyal

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the past years urban conflicts have been sprouting throughout the entire planet, in a global age where cities are constantly being refashioned by neoliberal forces – with the frictions, struggles and resistances those entail. Political subjects such as urban social movements, community associations, citizens cooperatives and so on, have put forward an array of dissentient acts, that have shown a possible way forward for the production of alternative urban futures. These struggles and resistances materialise in counter-hegemonic spatio-temporal sites where *dissensus* has the potential of being source of creativity and innovative practices (Agamben, 2014; Baeten, 2007; Fezer, 2010; Mouffe, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2008a; Žižek, 2002a) that can challenge the current hegemonic planning of our cities geared to the commodification of our built environments.

According to the urban sociologist Fernando Díaz Orueta, Valencia is one of the cities in Spain that has produced the most important social response from its civil society in recent years. Over the last two decades, the battle between the previous municipal government in Valencia and the community of neighbours of ‘El Cabanyal’ has been one of the most notorious and long urban struggles in the country. What started with the opposition of some groups of local neighbours El Cabanyal against a tabula-rassa regeneration plan has ended up being one of the most successful examples of local resistance in Spain. However, El Cabanyal, now one of the most affordable districts of Valencia with around 300 houses belonging to the administration and prime location near the sea, now suffers threat of gentrification under the current left wing progressive government, who are unblocking the regeneration of the area by subsidizing the much needed renovation of housing stock by individuals.

This has raised confronting but equally legitimate views on the urban future of El Cabanyal, that show creative and alternative ways of conceptualising, imagining, planning and designing the city – and, ultimately, as a way of re-politicising what the current neoliberal governance arrangements have contributed to de-politicise profoundly. The aim of the paper is to investigate the role of *dissensus* in creating a new urban future for ‘El Cabanyal’ in an agonistic manner, one that is open and inclusive, geared towards the creation and inclusion of all political subjects, those who otherwise are left outside the current mainstream production of space and knowledge within the city. My fieldwork has been taking place against the background of a crucial moment in El Cabanyal’s future, framed within the familiar story of the predicted gentrification of a previously deprived historical neighbourhood in a super location near de seaside. Furthermore, the paper wants to discuss how this agonistic approach to *dissensus* reveals issues of power and exclusion, and can explain how collective and individual affects of the different collectives of ‘El Cabanyal’ can develop into political strategies that can determine the urban future of the neighbourhood.

The first part of this paper will explain what *dissensus* can bring to urbanism, its political context and what is an agonistic approach to *dissensus*. I will then explain what ‘Agonistic Urbanisms’ represent, and the conditions under which these spatialise and how they do so. On the second part looking particularly Secor’s account of Agamben’s and Lacan’s topology, I will explain what topology can bring to the table in order to better understand the emergent spatialisation of these ‘Agonistic Urbanisms’. Lastly I will explore how this particular topological approach can offer a fresh and provocative understanding of the case of El Cabanyal as an ‘Agonistic Urbanism’.

## 2. TOWARDS AN URBANISM OF *DISSENSUS*

Inspired by the conflicting relationship between different neighbours and community groups of ‘El Cabanyal’, and the different tactics and strategies of resistance they have staged through different conflictual contexts up to the present, this paper engages with Rancière’s concept of *dissensus* as a disruption of the hegemonic order, which occurs in the boundaries of different discourses (Jones 2014). For him, *dissensus* is a disruption of the established order of things by those who demand a place in it, a “part for those who have no part” (Rancière, 2001: 6). As Dikeç observes, the central premise of *dissensus* for Rancière is the disagreement and opposition to the “established order of governance with its distributions of functions, people, and places” (Dikeç, 2007: Chapter 2: 3). But Rancière’s *dissensus*, far from being understood as irrational or violent, is understood as a “micro-political practice” that empowers people to negotiate and reach their goals, desires and aspirations (Miessen, 2010: 93). This triggers the participation of who Rancière terms the ‘*ochlos*’<sup>1</sup>, in the form of critical engagement of social and spatial concerns.

The concept of *dissensus* is the key in the broader debate on the ‘Post-political’. Theorist like Rancière, Žižek, Crouch, Mouffe or geographers such as Erik Swyngedouw, define our current political state as the ‘Post-political’ condition. These authors define post-democracy as the political condition that actually excludes and expels the “*properly political*”. The end of politics” (Rancière 2001, p.32) is the abnegation of *dissensus*, the main feature that defines consensus. In the ‘Post-political’ order, freedom and choice are only permitted if they are within the consensual frames of the hegemonic order. Hence, Those outside that police order, the *ochlos* —squatters, homeless, immigrants and protesters— do not form part of the *demos*.

For Rancière, the *ochlos* represent that otherness excluded outside cultural, economic and political mainstreams norms, and they are the ones that can unsettle the apparatus of the established hegemonic *order*<sup>2</sup>. They are seen as outside the democratic play and “democracy only exists in a society to the degree that the *demos* exists as the power to divide the *ochlos*” (ibid., p.32). For them, as Agamben (2005) argues, the law is suspended; they are literally put outside the law and treated as extremists and, as Swyngedouw points out “the only way to deal with them is by sheer violence, by suspending their ‘humanitarian’ and ‘democratic’ rights. The ‘Post-political’ relies on either including all in a consensual pluralist order [*demos*] and on excluding radically those who posit themselves outside the consensus [*ochlos*]” (Swyngedouw 2009, p.610; 2014, p.127).

Drawing from these discussions, and following Rancière’s call for a rupture of the given *political* order, my aim in this paper is to contribute to the theorization of (urban) *dissensus* through the lenses Mouffe’s work, in particular with her concept of *agonism*. For her the *political* is linked to the dimension of *agonism*, inherently present in human societies, within a large variety of social relations. As Rancière, she distinguishes between the *political* and *politics*, which for her “aims at establishing an order and organising human coexistence under conditions that are marked by the political and thus always conflictual” (Mouffe 2014, p.150). She groups with those theorists that see the *political* “as a site of conflict and antagonism” (Mouffe 2005; 2007; 2014) and claims that “only when the ineradicable

<sup>1</sup> These research will adopt Rancière’s concept of the *ochlos*, which constitutes that otherness outside cultural, economic and political mainstreams.

<sup>2</sup> Here related to the ‘Police order’ and Foucauldian notion of *governmentality*.

character of division and antagonism is recognised [...]it is possible to think in a properly political manner” (Mouffe 2014, p.150). As Isaac Marrero points out “the political horizon is therefore not one of agreement, but of open cohabitation – i.e. learning to live in the presence of (even unruly) others”(Marrero-Guillamón 2016, p.128).

This paper understands this engagement is characterised by an *agonistic*<sup>3</sup> mode of politics that implies recognising the fact that some conflicts can simply not achieve a rational solution and the “absence of a final ground and the undecidability that pervades every order” (Mouffe 2014, p.151). It is this same *agonistic* expression of *dissensus* that empowers citizens to have the possibility of freedom, of choosing between real alternatives. Partaking this agonistic approach to the political implies recognizing the fact that some conflicts can simply not achieve a rational solution. However, Mouffe acknowledges that democracy cannot survive without certain forms of consensus based on the *ethico-political* values equality and justice that legitimise it, and the need of institutions in which these can be inscribed. Nevertheless she insists it must also enable the agonistic expression of conflict, which requires that citizens have the possibility of freedom, of choosing between real alternatives.

However, the same ‘Post-political’ consensus that renders no alternatives to the commodification of urban life, through this universalist consensus that annuls any form of disagreement to the given order of things, has an inherent contradictory nature, that allows for new imaginaries to unfold outside the hegemonic order. As Swyngedouw points out, “the disappearance of the political in a ‘Post-political’ arrangement leaves all manner of traces that allow for the resurfacing of the properly political” (Swyngedouw 2009, p.605). This sets the conditions for the production of “new material and discursive spatialities within and through the existing spatialities of the police” (Swyngedouw 2011).

Indeed space “becomes political in that it...becomes an integral element of the interruption of the ‘natural’ order of domination through the constitution of a place of encounter by those that have no part in that order” (Dikeç 2005, p.172). In line with Mouffe I will argue this can be achieved enabling the political space where *dissensus* can be manifested (Swyngedouw 2010; Fezer 2010) by different actors. This “common symbolic space” (Mouffe 2005, p.20) must facilitate platform where diverse and often conflicting agendas can manifest their confrontation, and “to create such a space would be a design task in the widest possible sense of the term”(Fezer 2010, p.2). These spaces are key to formulate new alternatives visions to the hegemonic order by those who are left outside it that can challenge the dominant discourses that shape our cities. The *ochlos*, by demanding the active inclusion of the excluded into the political arena, become political subjects. And it is in this transformation that unveils the mechanisms through which new politico-spatial practices materialise into what I call in this paper ‘Urbanisms of Alterity’.

<sup>3</sup> Agonism according to Mouffe is a confrontation of legitimate adversaries both entitled to defend their positions.(Mouffe 2014, p.150)

### 3. PRODUCTION OF “COMMON SYMBOLIC SPACES”: ‘AGONISTIC URBANISMS’

Critical literature in urban studies is looking at both the explosion of urban political movements, critical practice and ‘Agonistic Urbanisms’ across our cities<sup>4</sup>. ‘Agonistic Urbanisms’ are defined here as the series of material and symbolic spaces created as a result of subversive socio-spatial tactics within the inherent permeability of the ‘Post-political’ city. These tactics are performed by the *ochlos* themselves, like the neighbours of ‘El Cabanyal’, that use space as a platform of encounter and critical engagement between diverse actors (Schneider 2013 in (Boano & Talocci 2014) and produce contested alternative spatial uses that challenge the consensual *givenness* of the place and new urban imaginaries that represent an alternative to planned city. This spatial approach links together different social categories together and unveils their “motivation for activism comprehensively in terms of a mismatch between conceptual space and material space fused in everyday lived space” (Purcell 2001, p.190). That everyday lived space represents the contestation to a prescribed use of space, transforming it into the *symbolic space* Mouffe claims for, thus opening the door for an alternative uses and meanings of those lived spaces, embedded with everyday practices.

People like the neighbours of ‘El Cabanyal’ do not fight for an utopian image of the city they envision, but for the essential rights that they feel have been neglected, re-appropriating public and private spaces, thus transforming the city in so doing. These emergent spatialities thus represent different ways in which citizens tend to imagine the spaces that will house the life they fight for. At the same time, those spatialities “reflect the ways in which collective action attempts to create its own space” (Stavrides 2009). Citizens claim against oppression and injustice, they claim for their rights, reaffirming their marginal condition as someone who has been neglected a basic right, and as Agamben argues, resistance to oppression is a right and a duty of the citizen (Agamben 2005). Nevertheless, resistance as an ultimate goal of the *ochlos* just reinforces the inalteration of the system (Žižek 1999) foreclosing the political space as “[t]he problem with such tactics is [...] that they leave the symbolic order intact and at best ‘tickle’ the police” (Swyngedouw 2011, p.18). They are absorbed through managerial participatory apparatuses of consensual urban governance or “they are radically marginalized and [...] relegated to a domain outside the consensual post-democratic arrangement” (Swyngedouw 2009, p.615).

‘Agonistic Urbanisms’ here do not represent not spaces for manifesting an opinion or claiming a demand, but spaces within the city that go beyond the logics of the consensual and the given political order. These material and symbolic spaces, enact *dissensus* and are constituted by multiple and distinctive socio-spatial practices “aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony” (Mouffe 2007, p.5). In this vein I argue that these ‘Urbanisms of alterity’ represent what Shatkin calls “actually existing urbanisms, that are rooted in alternative social dynamics and are manifest in a variety of appropriations of space and social behaviours that contravene master planning” (Shatkin 2011, p.8).

<sup>4</sup> Since 2001 in Argentina, followed in 2005 in France, and especially since 2011, our cities have been catering insurgent citizens organizing collectively in urban political movements in places as diverse as Spain, The United States, Turkey, Tunisia, Egypt, Greece, the United Kingdom, Chile, Brazil, and so on. They operate under a common slogan of “Democracy now!/ Democracia Real Ya!”, to cry and demand for a new hegemonic political system, their legitimate place in the police order and a new way of organizing common political life collectively, of taking management of their own affairs (Purcell 2013; Swyngedouw 2014; Stavrakakis 2014; Decreus et al. 2014)

'Agonistic Urbanisms' materialise within the thresholds<sup>5</sup> of the 'Post-political' mechanisms of order and control, of inclusion or exclusion. Rather than creating spaces for specific identities, they provides a platform where new spatial imaginaries can be envisioned and identities can be reconfigured<sup>6</sup>. Embedded in the agonistic approach, these created material and symbolic spaces, enact *dissensus* revealing what the 'Post-political' consensus wants to hide. These existing urbanisms<sup>7</sup> are the spatial manifestation of the counter-hegemonic political practices of the *ochlos*, that operate within the cracks of the system. In doing so, they are '*destituent*' powers that challenge the mainstream development of neoliberal and post-neoliberal systems and inaugurate new urban alternatives that show peoples needs, desires and aspirations regarding their place.

#### **4. 'AGONISTIC URBANISMS' AS TOPOLOGICAL SPACES: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

In order to understand the spatialisation of 'Agonistic Urbanisms', I will explore in this paper what a particular topological analysis can bring us to unveil the processes and relationships whereby the *ochlos* materialise their aspirations and needs into 'Agonistic Urbanisms', and the dynamics of power and exclusion that underlie across the *ochlos* and their lived and perceived space. The current debate in urban studies, urbanism and urban design stresses the topological nature of space while exploring the conflicting relations between power, governance and politics under globalisation in urban space<sup>8</sup> (Allen 2009; Allen & Cochrane 2010; Amin 2002, 2004 2007). Issues of urban segregation have also been examined using topology as a lens to look at connectivity and flows (physical, symbolical, political, social (Kringas, 2012 in (Secor 2012, p.432).

Furthermore "topological city" has been coined to describe a city in which class confrontation is diffused through urban fragmentation and segregation (Kesteloot, 2005 in Secor 2012, p.432). Recent work by Harker looking at city of Ramallah, adopts the term '*ordinary topologies*' to attend the intensive or qualitative spatio-temporal relations in urban and political space, crucial to creating possibilities and potentials (Simone 2004) to subvert the dictates of oppressive topological powers (Harker et al. 2012). In order to understand the spatialisation of 'Agonistic Urbanisms' regarding issues of power and exclusion, and the affects that forge individual and collective qualitative relationships between the neighbours of 'El Cabanyal' and the city of Valencia, to spark off into political actions, I will explore what a particular topological analysis can bring us to apprehend this potential. This work wants to knit closely with Anna Secor's interpretation of topology based on Lacan's and Agamben's work, as it helps us to "understand the subjectivity holding those desires, dreams, and passions" (Mouffe 2014, p.157) around urban spaces, and the ways these can pose a challenge to the existing structures of power, control and order in the city. Urban conflicts like 'El Cabanyal' are looked in this research

<sup>5</sup> The permeability of the '*Post-political*' city, produces what Stavrides calls "city of thresholds" (Stavrides 2006, p.177) which is "a spatial network that provides opportunities of encounter, exchange and mutual recognition... [that] provides the ground for a possible solidarity between different people allowed to regain control over their lives" (Stavrides 2009, p.8).

<sup>6</sup> This platform represents the "common symbolic space" Mouffe calls for that enables the agonistic dialogue between legitimate adversaries.

<sup>7</sup> 'Agonistic Urbanisms' represent what Shatkin calls "actually existing urbanisms, that are rooted in alternative social dynamics and are manifest in a variety of appropriations of space and social behaviours that contravene master planning" (Shatkin 2011, p.8)

<sup>8</sup> It is not in the interest of this chapter doing an "archaeology" of Topology in Urban Studies, but I will explain briefly what topology this paper engages with.

through the lenses of Anna Secor’s analysis of Lacanian and Agambenian topology, understanding it can provide with a rich and fresh framework to understand the intricate spatialisations of ‘Agonistic Urbanisms’ within our cities, and specifically with ‘El Cabanyal’ and the City of Valencia. This approach wants to address questions on how the city and its dwellers co-constitute each other subjectively, how urban struggles shape the city and how the city curbs those same struggles.

#### 4.1 Topological exclusion

‘Agonistic Urbanisms’ *materialized by the ‘ochlos’* — like those in El Cabayal— represent Agamben’s exception, which materialises in ordinary spaces. Topological spaces of exception are created because in the ‘Post-political’ government order people can be “othered”, as *ochlos*, and cast aside in an “architecture of enmity”<sup>9</sup> (Derek 2004 in Secor 2008). In fact, as we witness everyday, architecture and Urban Design have been used as *dispositifs* to plan, design and order our cities, employing several *apparatuses*<sup>10</sup> that filter, connect, disconnect or juxtapose, to exclude or include the *ochlos*<sup>11</sup> (Boano & Talocci 2014), and exclusion and inclusion are immanent to our political systems (Agamben 1995). These topological relations of inclusion/exclusion disseminated across our urban space, are no more than Foucauldian techniques of power used to govern “between an outside and an inside, with the latter inevitably acquiring a character of otherness, albeit in a state of potential connection with what surrounds it” working as “a reminder of how spatial typologies and social tensions contribute to shape” (Boano & Martén 2013, p.3) ‘Urbanisms of alterity’.

The exception is the indistinction between hegemonic power and the *ochlos*, an immanently tensional relationship between the inside and the outside (Agamben 1999). This tension is the “very faculty of non-consensus which both can and can-not instigate the appearance of other worlds and other grammars of being” (Reed 2010, p.88). The key question is to understand how as these ‘Agonistic Urbanisms’ navigate through these mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, producing symbolic and discursive spaces that counterpart those established by police order. This work understands that this tension<sup>12</sup> can open up for new modes of politics, the ones Mouffe claims for, and new ways of creative thinking that can challenge the existing hegemonic order (Mouffe 2005; 2014). Thus, Agamben’s topology of exception can help us understand how their “potential of emergence, the potential of topological transformation...[can] undermine the apparent fixity of current geometries of power”(Secor et al. 2008). ‘Agonistic Urbanisms’ materialise urban imaginaries that stage and define equality and expose the topologies of exclusion and inclusion of the *ochlos* and the *demos* while “refus[ing] to produce subjects that can be captured”(Secor et al. 2008, p.502)

<sup>9</sup> People like squatters, homeless, immigrants or protesters are rendered as ‘them’.

<sup>10</sup> Agamben’s apparatus as a *dispositif* of power and control. As he highlights, “it would probably not be wrong to define the extreme phase of capitalist development as a massive accumulation and proliferation of apparatuses” (Agamben 2009a, 14).

<sup>11</sup> These topological relations of inclusion/exclusion disseminated across our urban space, are no more than Foucauldian techniques of power, used to govern “between an outside and an inside, with the latter inevitably acquiring a character of otherness, albeit in a state of potential connection with what surrounds it” working as “a reminder of how spatial typologies and social tensions contribute to shape an urbanism of exception” (Boano & Martén 2013, p.9)

<sup>12</sup> The exception is the indistinction between hegemonic power and the *ochlos*, an immanently tensional relationship between the actual materialization and the potentiality of not materializing (Agamben 1999:179).

## 4.2 Topological desires

However, as much as Agamben is useful to understand these intensive relations of power and exclusion in shaping people's spatialisation of counter hegemonic practices, what is missing are the motivations the neighbours of El Cabanyal have behind these quotidian subversive practices in relation to their lived and perceived spaces. These affects are crucial to understand how people are "mobilized in the political domain in the formation of the we/they forms of identification" and addresses questions of "how are collective forms of identification created and what is the part played by affects in this process" (Mouffe 2014, p.155). As Mouffe claims "[a] counter-hegemonic politics necessitates the creation of a different regime of desires and affects so as to bring about a collective will sustained by common affects able to challenge the existing order" (Mouffe 2014, p.157). And here is where Secor argues Lacanian topology can help us uncover the "topological relationship between the subject and the object, between interiority and exteriority" (Secor 2012, p.436). The city is a multilayered space of different topographies folding into each other that can also be understood as the field within which power and desire are constituted (Pile 1996 in Secor 2012). 'Agonistic Urbanisms' represent the "space where the discursive and the affective are articulated in specific practices" that unveil how "affects which [c]ould spur desire and lead to specific action" (Jones 2014, p.156). In other words we need to understand the crucial role that desires and passion have in triggering political actions and constituting subjectivities<sup>13</sup>.

Architecture and Urban Design have been used as mechanisms to shape peoples lives by planning, designing and ordering our cities (Graham, 2011 in (Boano & Talocci 2014), ignoring the affects and desires of urban dwellers. However, they "provide the perfect ground upon which the fantasies and experiences of social and political power operate in various forms of intersecting contention, contestations, collaboration, and coercion" (Fluri 2013, p.449). Where these emotions arise through the porosity of the symbolic order to the realm of the real, 'Agonistic Urbanisms' can offer a source of "creative challenges to structural forms of authority" and hierarchies and geometries of power (Massey, 2005 in Fluri 2013).

## 5. EL CABANYAL, DISSENTING VIEWS

'El Cabanyal' is the name of the historical district in the coast of Valencia, part of what is known as 'Poblats Marítims' home to around 20.000 inhabitants. This unique and picturesque neighbourhood has its origins in the XV century as a fisherman's village. The vernacular architecture of the time and the livelihoods of the inhabitants shaped the urban tissue in the form of a dense grid, parallel to the coastline — a distinctive urban pattern in the city. It has very unique and particular Art-Nouveau style architecture of terraced houses that, together with gridded urban fabric, together with this eclectic architecture, forged the protection of the historical district in 1993 declaring it Asset of Cultural Interest (BIC). Despite this, during the last two decades, the neighbourhood has seen an unprecedented decline due to the pressures of the previous municipal government to implement a tabula-rassa regeneration plan on the area that would have

<sup>13</sup> What is key in this research is to understand -if ever possible- how "spaces of the city shape people's lives and, in particular, how those spaces are bound up with the large and small politics that are part of making our way through life...the co-constitution of subjects and the city or perhaps subjects and the politics of living in the city" (Staheli 2013, p.445).

cleared the central area, giving way to the development of high-rise buildings. With this intricate social tissue and a prime location, it has had a history of *dissensus* and activism during the last two decades battling the regeneration plan from multiple of different and often conflicting interests and agendas.

Starting in the late nineties the government of Partido Popular promoted a speculative urban development through land deregulation (Gaja i Díaz 2002) and attracted private investment through a policy of mega events such as Americas Cup and F1 championship and mega projects like ‘Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias’<sup>14</sup>. Cabanyal 2010 is the name of one of these mayor regeneration plans to connect and absorb the deprived and isolated coastal areas into the city. Cabanyal 2010 was the name of one of these mayor regeneration plans to connect and absorb the supposedly deprived and isolated coastal areas into the city. The plan<sup>15</sup> named PEPRI comprised plan comprised the extension to of Blasco Ibañez Avenue through El Cabanyal until it reached the sea. This implied the clearance of the central area of the gridded fabric with the demolition of around 1600 houses. This operation would divide the neighbourhood in two disconnected halves—from a spatial, social and symbolic view, destroying the existing the social and economic proximity networks and thus the livelihoods of the inhabitants, great number of which had been living in the neighbourhood since they were born<sup>16</sup> (Gaja i Díaz 2002; Campos 2008; López Nicolás & Bodí Ramiro 2009; Martínez 2010).

Plan Cabanyal-Canyamelar was meant to connect and absorb the supposedly deprived and isolated coastal areas into the city. The plan faced not only the fierce opposition of many local people who were fighting for the neighbourhood that catered their lives and aspirations. To restrain the resistance the plan encountered, since the early 2000s, the municipal government fostered a process of socio-spatial deprivation in the area to further justify the need of the new urban plan. They presented this plan as the only viable alternative to give Valencia a ‘dignified’ connection to the seafront as the only possible solution to regenerate and revitalise the neighbourhood. There was a long period of expropriations, purchase of houses and demolitions starting in the mid 2000s. This happened in the years of real state boom in Spain, which meant that most of the two thousand people affected were not able to afford new houses in the open market due to low compensations and were therefore displaced from the neighbourhood<sup>17</sup> to areas further away. Urban Planning and Architecture were used as topological mechanism of exclusion of local residents of El Cabanyal through, planning, designing and ordering the

<sup>14</sup> All these mega projects were delineated along the coastal line and many of them have been used to re-qualify the port area and increase the value of the coastal land. These “market enablement policies” have enhanced socio economic inequalities in the city and “have seriously disadvantaged the poor and sections of the middle class, benefitted owners rather than tenants and the periphery rather than the inner city”. (Burgess, Carmona and Kolstee, 2007,p.). The outcome of these kinds of policies is an excessive investment in these projects, events and new sites of speculation, to the detriment of the other existing areas like El Cabanyal.

<sup>15</sup> The plan, promoted by the local government in 1998 is known as PEPRI (Plan Especial de Protección y Reforma Interior) and implies the demolition of 1600 homes and 600 buildings, many of which are protected heritage by law. See: VERACRUZ MAS, L. Cabanyal 2020: Rehabilitación Sin Destrucción. Madrid: Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. Instituto Pascual Madoz del Territorio, Urbanismo y Medio Ambiente. 2009. Available at <http://e-archivo.uc3m.es/handle/10016/10042>

<sup>16</sup> Together with the traditional houses, two historical buildings reflecting the district’s historical identity as a fisherman’s village would disappear: the old ‘Lonja de Pescadores’ (now inhabited by local people that have reconverted it into dwelling) and the ‘Casa dels Bous’.

<sup>17</sup> The authorities, once more, with “market enablement policies” aimed to make economic surpluses and political profits.

seafront fringe of the city as a site of capital accumulation<sup>18</sup>. This top-down redevelopment of the maritime district, contrasted fiercely with the locals' image and their desires for it. They did not want big high-rise buildings for the wealthy and big avenues through their small scale and unique neighbourhood. They wanted to a regenerated neighbourhood that kept both its social and urban fabric, and had the same services and quality of life it always garnished. As they used to claim, they wanted their neighbourhood '*alive and intact*'. However, the authorities as usual ignored the desires of local people. The *spectacularisation* of the Port Area as an articulation of political and financial hegemonic powers, contrasted further more with the quotidian desires of the neighbours of having a neighbourhood they could enjoy as they always had.

To stop the opposition from the neighbours and advance their plan, the local government started excluding and outcasting the neighbourhood in a clear example of 'real estate mobbing' (López Nicolás & Bodí Ramiro 2009; Martínez 2010). The atmosphere of tension between the different actors involved in the conflict even rose to more radical articulations after the municipal government continued in 2009 with the demolition of some affected houses. In 2010, the neighbours won a legal battle when the previous socialist government had stopped the plan and declared the demolitions illegal, accusing it of heritage spoliation. However, these continued, and the municipal government kept buying out local residents who couldn't bear living in the area, so deprived and lacking of services that seemed a 'ground zone', a name that has been adopted since to designate it.

During this period, the socio economic problems of the 'El Cabanyal', were heightened by the abandonment of the district by the authorities and the lack of public investment in preservation, basic infrastructure and social services<sup>19</sup>. As a result, many owners left the neighbourhood, and prices went down, typical of the first stages of gentrification (Fainstein 2005; 2014; Slater 2009; Brenner et al. 2009; Purcell 2003; Díaz Orueta 2006). Meanwhile, as the central area —the most affected by the prolongation and demolitions—the so-called 'ground zero', entered a further spiral of abandonment and profound physical and social decay, many of the remaining buildings were left empty. This process of abandonment attracted groups of squatters who started occupying the area joining the neighbours in their resistance by giving life and meaning to those empty houses, while trying to avoid further demolitions. The solidarity between community groups of different ideologies that were marginalised by the authorities, fighting together against a common enemy gave the impression of a cohesive neighbourhood. The recognition of being in a marginal condition, though different among neighbours, fostered a collective sentiment, as it creates a sense of solidarity, which is grounded not on what they have in common, but on what they aspire in common (Frediani & Boano 2012). The situation reached a point where even neighbours who supported the plan got together with those who had been fighting for the neighbourhood to reclaim services that were neglected by authorities

In this way, residents claimed against oppression and injustice, reaffirming their marginal condition as someone who has been neglected a basic right, and as Agamben argues, resistance to oppression is a right and a duty of the citizen (Agamben, 2005). However,

<sup>18</sup> This was part of a wider urban strategies of the city government (Boano & Talocci 2014) to promote this new image of the city.

<sup>19</sup> In fact, the worsening of these problems is a major argument in favour of the regeneration plan.

as Swyngedouw (2011) and Žižek (2002) point out, that resistance as an ultimate goal just reinforces the inalteration of the system and forecloses the political space. The different groups of neighbours went from merely resisting the authorities, to challenging them by engaging in different and multiple activities that articulated resistance at different levels and actively imagining and creating their own visions of what kind of regeneration they wanted for their neighbourhood. In doing so, neighbours materialised a potentially disruptive and alternative urban future to the one planned by the authorities (Foucault 1991, p.102), thus forming “complex topological figure in which not only the exception and the rule but also the state of nature and law, outside and inside, pass through one another” (Agamben 1998, p.37). The coastal district and Valencia, with its city-wide urban strategies, were co-constituted by the topological tension between the imposed power of the authorities and the desires of the neighbours (Pile 1996 in Secor 2012). Once again, the city was both the container of those struggles and the object of the struggles itself (Lacan in Secor et al. 2008). El Cabanyal today is the spatial manifestation of those struggles and frictions that shaped, but this conflict was also shaped by the planning of the city (Brown 2010).

Later on, in the early 2010s, to put further pressure to the neighbours that were still resisting in that area, Romanian Romani families looking for affordable housing were allowed into the houses owned by the municipal government, which did not have basic habitable and hygienic conditions such as water or electricity and there was permissiveness with other groups such as Spanish Romani families to occupy houses in the area as well. The area Romanian families made a living from illegally recycling of scrap metal, turning the ground zone in a huge scarp yard, while other groups were supposedly dealing with drugs with the connivance of the police. This “surveyed marginality” in the district, stressed further its social degradation and contributed to the stigmatization of being from ‘El Cabanyal’ as being a marginal, degraded area, disconnected from the city. One of the very visible ways they had to deepen that stigmatisation while showing how they were ‘conquering’ the neighbourhood was painting with a specific striped pattern the houses and empty sites they were acquiring. This, as many neighbours have expressed is one of the worst psychological pressures they had live with, seeing each day those stripes spreading across their neighbourhood, as a death sentence.

However, after almost twenty years of resistance s and actions, nowadays this diversity of interests seemed to be in a precarious equilibrium, fighting to live in a neighbourhood that was lived and perceived in almost opposite ways between different groups. The neighbourhood presents a complex scenario produced by an amalgam of squatters, Romanian Roma groups, Spanish Roma groups, local residents who were not able to leave or resisted to abandon de area, neighbours who wanted the plan to be developed and neighbours who had made their life around the defence of it. This fragile balance broke when the local elections of May 2015 unexpectedly brought in a new municipal authority in the political antipodes of the previous administration. The regeneration plan was repealed immediately, and after the initial hopes for positive change, after a year, besides political will, not much has changed in the area, raising concerns and fears on the neighbours. More importantly it has been revealed how effective the previous government was in fracturing and atomizing and fracturing the social tissue of the neighbourhood. Once the common enemy has disappeared, the real tensions and conflicts of interest between different collectives of the have been revealed. The neighbourhood appears more fractured than ever around the debates on the future renewal of the neighbourhood, discussing what kind of regeneration is coming, and who it is for, who will be included, and who will be excluded. Fears of the dangers of

gentrification or further ghettoisation have been tabled together with demands for investment, or the lack of social services or secure housing solutions for the most vulnerable groups. In the meanwhile, El Cabanyal has become this cake everyone wants a piece of.

I will argue that contrary to what many neighbours feel, this new scenario can lead to a real politisation of the neighbours who had been until recently outcasted. This new scenario can open up for new and unpredictable ways of creative thinking that can be materialized in the future of El Cabanyal, by opening spaces *dissensus* where can be manifested in an agonistic fashion. In fact, we can see how the ground zero area, despite being despised by many neighbours as the symbol of twenty years of oppression, it is used by groups of Roma families intensely and sometimes in unpredictable ways. Families live the streets as many of the ‘original’ neighbours claim they used to do when they were kids. Other groups related to the radical left have occupied houses and transformed them into collective social centres organizing cultural and leisure activities open to all the neighbours, actually replacing the role that new administration, has not been capable to keep up with. However, it seems for many, these ‘new’ *ochlos* are not entitled to do so.

The agonistic symbolism that the diverse aspirations of different groups and their urban meanings represent, can have profound implications on how the renewal project of El Cabanyal could be inclusive and open to all the neighbours, including those who usually represent the invisible sectors of the city. During many years, El Cabanyal staged as a proper counter-hegemonic site where *dissensus* could challenge the existing hegemony; where the *ochlos* had the potentiality of staging their transformation into *demos*. The neighbourhood became the urban space in the city that symbolised local resistance to top-down neoliberal oppressive forms of urban development. However, El Cabanyal now is facing a different threat, that of being or gentrifying or turning into a ghetto, but at the same time has unique opportunity to resist market-led regeneration and fight for an urban future that is open and inclusive of everyone. The neighbours together with local authorities can have the chance now to use Urban Planning and Architecture as a topological mechanisms of inclusion of local residents of El Cabanyal and new comers to redevelopment the maritime district, in line with locals’ image and their desires.

## 6. CONCLUSION

After almost two decades of resistance and active engagement, it is difficult to ensure, even at present time, these located claims and resistances have not end up finally absorbed and co-opted by the managerial webs of ‘Post-political’ urban governance arrangements, thus facing new threats of gentrification in the area (Novy & Colomb 2013). However, on the positive side, this case has shown us that when citizens are emotionally engaged with their claims, and have a clear political agenda, they can potentially go beyond them, thus disrupting and unsettling the “Post-political” status quo. These desires and aspirations of people are unpredictable and hence cannot be mapped or planned by the authorities or the planners. El Cabanyal is a clear example of how these desires and passions for a better place can triggered into political actions, constituting new subjectivities (Mouffe 2014), while refusing “to produce subjects to be capture” and therefore excluded by the hegemonic powers of the city and their ‘Post-political’ governance arrangements in the form of Urban planning and regeneration.

We must understand the crucial role passions play in the space of the city and peoples subjectivity, how they perceive and live those spaces. One could even argue that the topological transformations in this case were true: Valencia and its strategic planning since the late 90s, bent and stretched into the neighbourhood of El Cabanyal, and simultaneously, El Cabanyal did the same with the city. These topologies, whether they are tracing people's desires and motivations, or unveiling obscure mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, are too abstract to be included in the topographic planning and design of our cities, and that, as Mouffe claims would be the most challenging design task of all.

However, as Secor points out, the fact that they are abstract does not mean they are not real, that they do not exist. Furthermore, these spatialities, as topological, they will be, or potentially not be, but will always exist in a form or another. Understanding these spatialities of 'Urbanisms of alterity' as topological altered, or topological transformed spaces, can help us illustrate the relations of power that "scale and reengineer cities as sites of capitalist flows, uneven and unequal hierarchies of access to spaces within cities, and banal and blatant forms of violence" (Fluri 2013, p.448) underlying urban conflicts. These topologies can help urban theorist understand and examine the way inclusion and exclusion relational structures operate, or how the desires and affects operate in the psyche of people, mechanisms that are rarely taken into account beyond certain academic fields. As urbanists, we must understand how these uses can contest the hegemonic Cartesian topography of our cities. It is crucial to include these intensive relations into the material and symbolic horizontal construction of our cities, in order to contest their quantitative and technocratic vertical ordering.

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