'Working in the Vegetable Garden' with Hortigas. A Critical Socio-Educational Experience Challenging Neoliberal Precarisation

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Abstract

In this paper, we analyse how neoliberalisation processes favour the development of what we call precarised citizenship. Faced with the logic of structural adjustment, austerity and cuts in social services, interesting critical socio-educational experiences have arisen, such as the Hortigas Agroecological Cooperative (based in Andalusia, Spain).This is presented as an 'alternative' practice based on food sovereignty and responsible consumption, promoting principles such as horizontality, mutual support, collaboration, autonomy and dialogical learning. On a methodological level, we apply an intrinsic case study using semi-structured depth interviews, documentary analysis and ethnographic observation. We analyse a self-managed practice that embraces assembly, community and solidarity values. This is in sharp contrast to the individualism, insecurity and uncertainty that characterise precarisation processes. Despite its local character and limitations Hortigas places great value on its transformative potential for alternative subjectivities.

Introduction

In this paper the following three objectives are proposed. The first is an analysis of the neoliberalisation practices which lie behind the construction of the competitive and individualistic subjectivities of today's world. This section focuses on the processes of 'endogenous privatisation' as a form of state governmentality which perceives the competitiveness generated by the free market as a strategy for the government of the subject (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Foucault, 2008). The second objective connects this vision of neoliberalism with the creation of the precariat as an emerging social class. It is proposed that one of the keys to the inner dimension of neoliberal precarisation resides in what Näsström and Kalm (2015) identify as the loss of 'shared responsibility' in current democracies when it comes to the justification of structural inequalities within society. Precarised subjects internalise the belief that they are the 'individuals responsible' for their material and financial misfortunes in addition to the psychological vulnerability in which they find themselves. The third objective is a response to these precarisation processes. Here we analyse the Hortigas Agroecological Cooperative as a critical socio-educational experience that constructs and establishes alternative subjectivities which oppose neoliberal principles. The processes of personal and collective learning, characteristic of this practice of resistance, are discussed in terms of critical pedagogy and public pedagogy (Sandlin, 2010).

Preparing the way: The neoliberal assault in the era of the 'precariat'

In recent decades, much has been written about the phenomenon of economic globalisation and the rise of neoliberal policies. From the 1980's, this dominant ideology, in which market logic prevails over other human dimensions, has had a strong impact on much of the world. Fine, Greene and Sánchez (2016, p. 511) link this market logic—which has infiltrated the institutions of the State— to the

difficult situations experienced by those young people who live in precarious environments, holding that:

> Within the field of educational studies, a focus on precarity obligates us to consider how market logic and values have entangled themselves within State apparatus in ways that threaten democracy, equity and stability for young people and disproportionately those most marginalized by class and racial hierarchies. All evidence would suggest that students in precarious settings would suffer enormously.

But, beyond the normative and structural aspects of neoliberalism, it is interesting to see how individuals construct that subjectivity which makes them see the world through the lens of neoliberalism. In this way we can observe the connection between neoliberal identity and the increasing growth of the precariat. From this context we can take, as a starting point, Ball and Youdell's (2008) double categorisation of neoliberalisation practice. Their first categorisation relates to *exogenous privatisation* (visible aspects of the deregulation of public services according to the logic of the market) and their second categorisation relates to *endogenous privatisation* (new political technologies which are dominated by a neoliberal governmentality).

From the perspective of exogenous privatisation, neoliberalism is perceived as a series of processes which favour the privatisation of public services, assuming the logic of the free market within the internal functioning of state institutions. All of this comes under the umbrella of those economic policies dominated by the interests of capital (Harvey, 2010). This vision of neoliberalism fits with the concept of governance, referred to by Rhodes (2007) as the transition from a unitary state, governed almost unilaterally, to a configuration of *political networks*. The neoliberal narrative which shapes this form of governance relies

on austerity and fiscal consolidation (control and reduction of public spending). This is done by subcontracting and/or privatisation of public services (including education and health) to the maximum (Bevir and Rhodes, 2016) together with performance control and accountability. The state thus loses its traditional bureaucratic function and acquires a new identity; a role which, according to Bevir (2013), consists of steering organisations and mediating between those networks which have been established between public-private entities.

Endogenous privatisation, the second categorisation related to neoliberalism, is another topic which we highlight in this paper. Its approach comes from those inquiries which see it as a *practice* aimed at the *freedom* of subjects (Ball, 2012; Ball and Olmedo, 2013; Foucault, 2008); that is, a form of state governmentaltiy which perceives the competitiveness generated by the free market as a strategy of government of the subject. The following words, written by Ball (2016, p. 30), illustrate this vision of neoliberalism perfectly:

> Neoliberalism is reflected in practical relations of competition and exploitation in business, but also, increasingly, in very ordinary and immediate ways in our daily life institutions. Thus, it 'makes us:' speaks and acts through our language, purposes, decisions and social relations.

This concept of neoliberalism connects with Rhodes' (2017) notion of 'decentred governance', which focuses on beliefs, the citizens' practices and political actors rather than on external aspects. This vision of governance starts from an analysis of the behavioural patterns of the subjects; from how they see and interpret the circumstances of their daily lives to their traditions and social habits. With their praxis, individuals remodel civil society and recalibrate the role of the state by responding to their personal beliefs and dilemmas (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010). This links with the Ball's (2016) perception of neoliberal

rationality. In other words, neoliberalism 'makes us,' produces us and shapes our lives, even to the extent of constructing our subjectivity. Due to this we believe that neoliberalism is not only an ideology, a kind of politics or a series of normative-legislative frameworks. Its true influence lies in the fact that it constructs our identity from within ourselves. It makes us see through its lenses, from the *predatory competition* of capitalist business, assuming this logic and then applying it to all human dimensions.

From this perspective, neoliberal governmentality uses control mechanisms to guide and influence the behaviour of citizens. In addition, it applies disciplinary strategies to reform possible deviant behaviour. Saura and Muñoz (2016, p. 48) hold that "the new practices of control and freedom are based on making subjects solely responsible for their successes and mistakes in their decision-making and ways to proceed." Thus, *precariousness* is socially legitimated through processes of criminalisation and even the 'dehumanisation' of the working class. Jones (2011) argues that the neoliberal policies, imposed by Thatcher and Reagan in the 1980's, have led to the dismantling of the working class and favoured the gradual emergence of the precariat. For Jones (2011, p. 37), "demonizing the less well-off also makes it easier to justify an unprecedented and growing level of social inequality." The strength of neoliberal power lies in the fact that a significant number of individuals believe that they, and everyone else, are where they are in life because they deserve it. Precarious living conditions are perceived as a natural product of free competition. Subjects construct their personal identity under the logic of competition, and from here everyone finds their status in the world by means of their own personal 'merit.' According to this way of thinking, precariousness is the result of personal incompetence.

Precarised individuals do not attribute their misfortunes to the structural problems of the system, but rather to personal motivation and circumstances. According to Jones (2011) this neoliberal criminalisation and precarisation is attributed to "their individual characteristics, rather than a deeply unequal society rigged in favour of the privileged." He adds: "In its extreme form, this has even led to a new Social Darwinism" (pp. 10-11).

Thus, the identity of precariousness is something which is not imposed from the outside but built from within individuals. In Ball's (2016, p. 30) view, "it 'makes us': speaks and acts through our language, purposes, decisions and social relations." This is an efficient form of a remote control or distance governing (Novoa and Yariv-Mashal, 2003; Saura and Muñoz, 2016) in which the subject becomes stigmatised and controls him/herself. So, neoliberal precarisation is socially legitimised. This is its authentic 'virtuality' and, furthermore, it generates the belief that precarised individuals have created, and are responsible for, their own state of insecurity and uncertainty. These aspects have created an ideal breeding ground for the precariat as an emerging social class.

The 'precariat'- a social and educational challenge for the 21stCentury: Citizens with restricted rights

Therefore, in this paper our starting point is that neoliberal policies and reforms lie behind the material and psychological vulnerability of the precariat (Ecclestone and Brunila, 2015; Näsström and Kalm, 2015). The visible aspects of neoliberalisation *(exogenous privatisation)* (Ball and Youdell, 2008) relate to the deregulation of the labour market in addition to making it more flexible. This causes an increase in job insecurity, the relocation of businesses /companies and deindustrialisation in western countries such as Spain. Here, real opportunities are restricted, security is reduced and the welfare benefits of

millions of citizens are cut. In parallel, *endogenous privatisation* or the *processes of endoprivatisation* (Verger, Fontdevila and Zancajo, 2016) constructs neoliberal subjectivities and favours mechanisms of government of the self (Ball and Olmedo, 2013). This second process is what lies behind the creation of precarised identities.

Within this context, precarised individuals have to compete with each other in order to guarantee a certain security and place in society, since neoliberal governments impose on them exclusive personal responsibility for their lives and their safety (Jones, 2011). In this way, they break with the principle of the shared responsibility characteristic of democracies. This produces a powerful psychological burden for those precarised individuals who think they are, ultimately, responsible for their own destiny (Picower, 2013). So they blame themselves for their material and psychological vulnerability (Ecclestone & Brunila, 2015). Even a high standard education cannot guarantee that an individual will not fall victim to precariousness. The idea of meritocracy, focused on education, and perceived as a way to a supposed equality of opportunity is strongly questioned. This, according to Standing (2011), means that an education sold as an investment is fraudulent because it fails to guarantee social mobility.

While it is true that the term 'precariousness' was first expressed by Bourdieu (1999) at the end of the last century, the work of Standing (2011) has given it resonance, particularly when linking it to the emergence of a new social class. From here, most research on precariousness focuses on two areas: work and citizenship. From the work perspective, the precariat lacks the kind of job security which was previously guaranteed by the welfare state to the industrial citizenship (Bagguley, 2013), thus weakening the link between education and equal opportunities.

So, the precariat is a heterogeneous group of individuals who share job insecurity and uncertainty in employment. This affects them negatively when it comes to establishing a decent life project, and is the reason why many of them are losing faith in the education system as a mechanism for social mobility. Näsström and Kalm (2015, p. 562) are correct when they hold that: "With Bourdieu, we regard precarity as a generalized state of insecurity produced by neoliberal economic reforms." These reforms are turning education into one more element in an extremely competitive market which removes opportunities from the most vulnerable. In relation to the precariat, they add:

> It does not only include those we might traditionally associate with the 'underclass', such as industrial workers, urban poor and undocumented migrant labourers. It also encompasses large portions of those who possess high cultural and educational capital, such as cultural workers, academics and Japanese 'freeters' (...). It includes young and old, women and men, citizens and immigrants, low skilled and highly skilled.

Starting from this definition of precariat, we connect with the second area of our study, which focuses on citizenship. The precarised individual does not have full citizenship rights; rather they feel like a permanent resident or foreigner. In fact, the connection between the notion of citizenship and the term precariousness can be, at a first glance, somewhat paradoxical. As Cervinkova (2016) holds, the category citizenship has positive connotations; it is associated with social and political rights acquired within modern social democracies and the so-called welfare state. On the other hand, precariousness has negative connotations. It is basically linked to employment and the labour market (Standing, 2011). But, as Cervinkoka (2016, p. 47) argues, the most recent studies relating to precariousness "have been challenging the predominantly economic understanding of precarity, suggesting the need for more expansive definitions pointing to precarity being synonymous with uncertainty and

unpredictability. This is more generally, and in important ways, related to violence and terror."

From this inner dimension of precariousness, linked to the construction of neoliberal subjectivity, individuals immersed in uncertainty and unpredictability (Casas-Cortés, 2014) are shaping a new notion of citizenship. So, the notion of citizenship as bearer of rights defended by a social democratic nation-state is being modified. In this regard, the concept of industrial citizenship (Bagguley, 2013; Strangleman, 2015; Zhang and Lillie, 2015) is of interest. According to this idea, the State guarantees some fundamental rights of citizenship to workers by virtue of them being employed. It is the State itself which limits the power of the market so that it does not commodify rights —rights which people have in the form of social and welfare benefits, public health or public education, all of them linked to the development of the welfare state (Fudge, 2005). Industrial citizenship connects the social rights of citizenship with the industrial working class. But, with the growth of the precariat and the flexibilisation of the labour market, these rights are being cut. The precarised subject is being deprived of rights they have fought for, hence the mutation of the term citizenship, which has been strongly influenced by the practices of neoliberalism, leading to the emerging precarised form of citizenship.

All this is creating a problematic and worrying situation, not only from the point of view of social justice, but also for the stability of democracy. Material and psychological vulnerability, and the lack of real opportunities for the working classes (let us not forget the Standing's 'fraudulent' education), is provoking:

> Tensions within the precariat [which] are setting people against each other, preventing them from recognising that the social and economic structure is producing their common set of vulnerabilities. Many will be attracted by populist

politicians and neo-fascist messages, a development already clearly visible across Europe, the United States and elsewhere. (Standing, 2011, p. 25)

The change of model from an industrial citizenship to a precarised citizenship deepens this serious problem. It is capable of triggering important social upheavals in Western democracies as a result of the absence of real opportunities leading to the establishment a decent life. As a result of this, Das and Randeira (2015, p. 3) add that the experience of precariousness goes "beyond material scarcity," affecting happiness, emotional and psychological stability, as well as the "ability to develop long-term relationships" (Näsström and Kalm, 2015, p. 563). All this constitutes a perfect breeding ground for the proliferation of social conflicts which shake the foundations of democracy. In this sense, Näsström and Kalm (2015, p. 562) link neoliberal precarisation with the corruption of democracy, stressing that "this begins when a democratic society passes on to individuals the burden of those responsibilities that ought to be shared and divided between citizens."

The privatisation of responsibility is a strategy used to blame precarised people for their situation in life.This war on the resources as individual responsibility is calledthe commodification of the personalby Jensen and Prieur (2016).So, according to Sabater (2016), precarised individuals lack citizenship rights due to their low income within a context of greater uncertainty and competitiveness. People lose control of their time in this era of flexibility, and there is an increase in anomie and apathy. However, the analysis of the precariat cannot be limited to an increasingly flexible labour market. We are facing a much subtler and dynamic phenomenon which is affecting people's lifestyle, in that it hinders the transition to adult life, influences the purchase or rent of housing, restricts access to further education, while increasing poverty, favouring marginality,

and limiting real opportunities. In short, it has a negative effect on the possibility of establishing a decent life.

Socio-educational answers of 'resistance' to neoliberal precarisation: The example of the Hortigas Agroecological Cooperative

Numerous demonstrations and citizen protests against precariousness and so-called austerity policies have taken place in Europe recently, such as the movement known as the 'EuroMayDay', which was established by a group of young Italian students (Standing, 2011) or the Swedish activist network "The Precariat" (Näsström & Kalm, 2015). Casas-Cortés (2014) holds that these antiprecarity movements reflect how citizens are responding to the biggest decline in labour and social rights ever seen in Europe. For her part, Flesher Fominaya (2014) carried out an exhaustive analysis of the citizen protests which, since the outbreak of the 2006 financial crash, have been organised in many cities worldwide. All this activates what Flesher calls prefigurative practices. The notion of prefiguration has a long trajectory, given that it goes back to the works of Andre Gorz (1968) and Carl Boggs (1977), in the 1960s and 1970s. This notion was debated within the context of the social justice movements of that time because their potential way of understanding politics as a transforming force. However, here we use it from the current perspective of Flesher, for whom "prefigurative politics refers to the practice of instituting modes of organization, tactics and practices that reflect the vision of society to which the social movements aspire" (p. 10). The gradual transition from an 'industrial citizenship' to a new emerging reality of *ciudadanía precarizada*— precarised citizenship— has provoked a sizeable citizen movement of indignation —a Global Revolution— against neoliberal precarisation.

On the other hand, public pedagogy has a long history (Burdick and Sandlin, 2013; Gutiérrez-Schmich and Heffernan, 2016; Sandlin, 2010), and if we

analyse it from a historical perspective (Sandlin, O'Malley and Burdick, 2011), we find that there are important links between it andcitizen movements like the *Indignados* Movement in Spain. Both public pedagogy and these social movements aim to explain the nature of inequality and highlight the mechanisms of exploitation and oppression which have historically subjected the working classes. At the same time, their efforts are focused on the search for emancipation as a political project which aspires to a more just society (Crowther, Galloway and Martin, 2005). Due to this, and paraphrasing the thoughts of Flesher (2014), difficult contextual conditions have led these prefigurative social movements to implement a series of informational educational processes which help them rethink democracy and citizenship from an alternative perspective.

This said, we consider Hortigas as a critical socio-educational experience of resistance to neoliberal precarisation, moving between alternative forms of community development. Among the values and principles which guide this practice the following categories are emphasised: reciprocity, horizontality, empowering of community, mutual support, autonomy, assembly-based structures, self-management, cooperativism, redistribution, community interest, dialogic learning, respect for the environment and priority of people over capital.

The pedagogical analysis of this practice of resistance is based on recent studies on Public Pedagogy (Burdick and Sandlin, 2013; Gutiérrez-Schmich and Heffernan, 2016; Sandlin, O´Malley and Burdick, 2011). Public pedagogy helps us to expose the strong ideological controls exercised by neoliberal precarisation over citizens when it comes to shaping identities, conditioning desires and directing subjectivities. This battle for control of the inner dimension of the individual is what social groups like Hortigas are fighting

against. Neoliberalism plays with the people's desires and emotions and the hopes of the most vulnerable. It seeks to precarise their personal identity, nullifying collective action, criticism and reflective analysis on the mechanisms of structural inequality. Placing this under the microscope of a critical review is the essence of the kind of collective learning, directly experienced by the members of this self-managed cooperative.

According to Sandlin, O'Malley and Burdick (2011, pp. 338-339) public pedagogy is:

> Educational activity and learning in extra institutional spaces and discourses. This form of education, commonly known as public pedagogy, has been largely constructed as a concept focusing on various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning occurring beyond formal schooling and is distinct from hidden and explicit curricula operating within and through school sites.

Starting from this general definition, we share Hill's (2002, p. 182) argument that social groups like this are "sites of learning, meaning making and resistance." In this sense, we agree with Richard David Wolff when he holds that cooperative work helps combat neoliberal subjectivities. This prestigious American Marxist economist highlights the transformative potential of 'workers self-directed enterprises' (for a more in-depth analysis of this idea: https://truthout.org/articles/worker-coops-and-left-strategy/ and https://www.counterpunch.org/2019/05/10/socialism-and-workers-coops/).

These companies, managed collectively and democratically by workers, are based on horizontal decision-making, so that workers are those who decide what, how and where to produce (Wolff, 2012). Here, direct political democracy and economic democracy meet, as workers regain their ability to

exercise collective decisions and manage resources in an autonomous way. Being able to combine both levels of democracy (political and economic) can, according to Wolff (2019), help us to rethink the new socialism. Establishing democracy within companies –a cooperative in this case– implies, metaphorically, progressing 'from being governed' to 'people's government'. Creating democratic workers' cooperatives could foster the way towards this new socialism. We refer here to collaborative learning spaces which have the ability to create meanings capable of redefining the current relations of power and critical resistance to neoliberal logic. We believe that the Hortigas experience points in this direction.

Methodology

On a methodological level, we opted for the intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995) due to our interest in experiencing and understanding from inside this paradigmatic collective practice. We consider Hortigas as a specific case with its own identity. It operates as a complex and integrated collaborative system composed of more than 120 stories from women and men. These stories provide it with meaning and identity.

We have selected the Hortigas project for several reasons. First, because we consider it a unique experience in Andalusia, in which the practice of food sovereignty and responsible consumption converge, together with a deep socio-political conviction that opposes neoliberal logic. The actors involved promote a different way of satisfying basic needs, such as healthy and ecological food. This combines with a community lifestyle, perceived as 'alternative' by its members.

Second, our access to field work was facilitated, at all times, by the researcher's relationships with some of the cooperative members. This has meant that, from

a methodological perspective, it has been an easy case to approach. Additionally, all our enquiries were well received.

Third, since the 2014/2015 academic year, I have been organising annual work seminars and talks with members of Hortigas in Granada University's Faculty of Education Sciences. The main objective is that those students in Pedagogy and Social Education degrees who attend my classes meet critical socio-educational experiences which advocate alternative models of community development.

All these aspects justify this case study, as well as the need to present and systematise this unique socio-educational practice. In other words, it is about getting to know who they are and what they do in order to better understand the distinctive nature of Hortigas within the current context of neoliberal precarisation. The study of this case allows us to analyse a self-managed practice that is based on assembly, community and solidarity principles, as oppose to the individualism, insecurity and uncertainty that characterises precariousness.

As our strategy for gathering information and analysis, we have used a semi-structured in-depth interview technique. This was applied to four members of Hortigas (two women and two men aged 55, 65, 41 and 58 respectively). It also involved the documentary analysis of unpublished internal documents, such as the Diario de la Huerta (Diary of the Vegetable Garden) in addition to ethnographic observation for an empathic understanding of the phenomenon under study. There were two criteria for the selection of the interviewees: maintaining parity between women and men, and that the actors had considerable experience as active members of Hortigas. Three of the interviewees have been in the cooperative since its inception, and the fourth

(Ruipe) for ten years. Likewise, it is important to clarify that the excerpts taken from the interviews are presented together with the first name of the interviewees. The protagonists have been informed and agree with the researcher that it is important to name ('to give a face' to) the narratives in order to personalise them.

The combination of these three methodological strategies (interview, documentary analysis and ethnographic observation) have allowed us to see how these cooperativists tackle neoliberal subjectivity by participating in dialogical exchanges related to practical issues. These we connect with public pedagogy.

Characterisation and contextualisation of Hortigas

"We like diversity, weave networks and speaking in a feminine style, valuing care and reproductive rhythms over mass and unsustainable production." These words form the introduction to Hortigas Agroecological Cooperative's website (https://hortigas.es) and the internal documents, which outline some of its values and constitutional principles. These include respect for diversity, a feminist perspective, the importance given to care, an interest in establishing collaborative networks and a distancing from the capitalist modes of production and consumption.

Hortigas is defined as a production, distribution and consumption cooperative focused on food sovereignty and solidarity economy. At the time of writing this paper, 123 people are part of this cooperative, and most of them (around 60%) are women. From our interviews we have learnt that the number of participants varies according to the time of year. An important percentage are university students who do not have a permanent residence in the city of Granada. So,

members of Hortigas vary from year to year, although it does have a stable number of about 80 people who reside permanently in the city.

In addition (although there is no official record), during the interviews and ethnographic observations reference has been made to the fact that a large percentage of their members (around 80%) have university degrees or are still studying. All are between 20 and 65 years old, most aged between 35 and 55.

This experience was set up in Granada in 2004 as part of a community project based on the self-management of food through the cultivation of vegetable gardens, barter and mutual support with other projects dedicated to food production and solidarity economy initiatives. The cooperative farming land is located in the village of Dúrcal, about 19 miles from Granada, in the Spanish region known as 'El Valle de Lecrín' (Lecrín's Valley). It forms part of the autonomous community of Andalusia and is located in an extraordinary natural environment, between the well-known Alpujarra and the Mediterranean coast.

> We cultivate vegetable gardens and orchards in Dúrcal under an assignment (cession) regime, with an agricultural model in accordance with the principles of agroecology, maintaining traditional forms of labour, such as the use of animal traction and flood irrigation. This allows us to take advantage of the irrigation canals inherited from the Arabic culture (Hortigas, 2019).

As stated, they are not the owners of the land which they cultivate and in which they develop their activities. This is because the land has been provided free by the residents of Dúrcal. They do not pay rent, or for the lease of land. The owners of the land receive nothing in return. They simply assessed this initiative, led in 2004 by a group of young people to recover uncultivated lands (wasteland), which their owners voluntarily ceded to this collective socio-

educational project. All this is difficult to 'accept' from within a global capitalist context:

> Three people work daily in the gardens. They are responsible for coordinating the work of the people who come from the city to do their shift. They also plan the crops, organise the distribution of vegetables and participate as one more group in the decision-making processes of the cooperative. There is a strong socio-political component because the employment, sustainability and care of this group depends directly on everyone belonging to the cooperative. (Hortigas, 2019)

They describe themselves as a group with a marked 'socio-political component' working in an assembly-like way, experiencing new forms of relating to each other and their environment, with the central objective of eating in a healthy and ecological way. Hence, they aspire to "maintain a non-hierarchical, horizontal, participatory and flexible model where everyone makes decisions, collaborates and becomes involved in the sustainability of the cooperative" (Hortigas, 2019). The focus is on key issues: "Agroecology, local consumption, feminisms or assembly politics are some of the cross-cutting views that we have in the cooperative when it comes to organising ourselves, our work and interactions" (Hortigas, 2019).

Hortigas is organised in Self-Managed Groups of Consumption (SGC), which are, in turn, divided into consumption units (boxes or baskets). Likewise, the cooperative has work commissions in charge of specific tasks. One or two people represent each SGC. "In this way, we achieve a functioning model of shared and participatory responsibility" (Hortigas, 2019).

Currently, there are four work commissions: Outreach, for communication with the 'outside' and the public visibility of the cooperative, The Atypical Commission of Economy (ACE), which, from approaches related to critical and

social economy, care, and an anti-capitalist stance, carries out the accounting and management of Hortigas. EdukAcción (EdukAction) is the commission responsible for promoting assembly and participatory processes, both inside and outside the cooperative. This same commission, which combines 'education' and 'action', also seeks to promote its socio-political dimension through the transmission of knowledge by means of talks, debates, conferences and other activities that seek to "encourage reflections and social transformations" (Hortigas, 2019). The fourth commission is that of Extra Products, which generates synergies with local producers. This involves the exchange of products from their garden for other products like oil, cheese and bread.

Every Wednesday they distribute the baskets or boxes of vegetables at two locations in Granada: at La Recicreativa (http://www.recicreativa.com/), which is a self-managed space dedicated to associative and participatory work and at the Gómez Moreno Public School (https://colegiogomezmorenogranada. blogspot.com/), a pre-school and primary school open to community. At La Recicreativa, the distribution of vegetables is from 19:30 to 21:00and at the Gómez Moreno School it is from 18:30 to 19:30, when members of Hortigas have the opportunity to talk to each other and reflect on what has happened in the garden during that week. As a researcher, I have attended several of these vegetable deliveries on Wednesdays. They are, from my perspective, a clear example of public pedagogy being used as a strategy to build new forms of appropriation of public space.

Finally, at an organisational level, they have a monthly general assembly which involves all the members of Hortigas. Here, the decisions of the cooperative are taken in a collective way. As a means of communication, and to record the decisions and advances of the cooperative, they keep a Diary of the Vegetable Garden (DVG). In the words of its protagonists:

> After each distribution, we meet with our SGC to read and discuss the Diary of the Vegetable Garden, where the progress of agricultural work, state of the group, calls for Green Days, and proposals, together with other information, are presented. The DVG is the cooperative's main communication channel. Here the minutes and agendas of the assemblies are published, in addition to all kinds of news related to the collective. It is an open space where any member of the cooperative can publish their opinion, news or comments on internal and external issues. It does not have an editorial stance or any censorship filters. The General Assembly is held monthly, all the 'Hortigueiras' participate and the next assembly is convened in each. All these characteristics of the group seek to build a model based on co-responsibility in every process whether it be agricultural and social, political and economic. (Hortigas, 2019)

The following link presents a selection of short videos made by Hortigas members, which offer us an additional image of this critical collective experience of food and agroecological sovereignty: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8wiVLKlop3Mn4Gzp87GH7g

Hortigas: Food sovereignty, responsible consumption and critical socio-educational practice

Self-consumption groups and local producers, conscious of problems relating to their health, collective well-being and sustainable ways of conceiving community development have focused their activities on responsible and local consumption, in addition to agroecology. Although the 2008 crisis favoured the emergence of new initiatives, the truth is that Granada has decades of experience in this field, dating back to the early 1980s. In the last 25 years, a network of associations have appeared, all focused on agroecology and responsible consumption (Con-sumo Cuidado, Los Verdes, Ecomercado de Granada, etc.). Many of these initiatives have a clear political perspective guiding their actions and defining them as groups which not only seek to

consume, cultivate and produce organic food, but work towards a more democratic model of society. These aspects clearly connect with critical pedagogies and public pedagogy in that they question the current socioeconomic structure and advocate more direct and participatory models of democracy, in which priority is given to the interests of people and the natural environment.

The Cooperativa Agroecológica Hortigas is an excellent example of this. As has been mentioned, since 2004, a group of people have launched a comprehensive network —focused on the exchange and mutual support— but not limited to the production, consumption, purchase and sale of organic products. This self-managed horizontal project uses assemblies as a democratic tool for inner organisation. In addition to the organic production of food and its consumption, it has a solid assembly-led organisational structure in which dialogic learning processes are put into practice. Here people can raise awareness about problems derived from the impact of neoliberal capitalism, such as structural unemployment, poverty, precariousness, climate change, inequality, depletion of resources, nature destruction, and mass migration. The purpose of the assembly is to promote community participation, which enable everyone to comment and debate on the internal matters of the cooperative or those external issues which connect with their socio-political philosophy:

> We encourage community participation through two related channels. On the one hand, we have internal participation, which is a key element in Hortigas. Everyone knows that this is an organisation in which we must participate and collaborate. On the other hand, there is community participation, at the external level, which focuses on the relationship of the cooperative with its closest local environment and also with the wider global environment. (Interview: Javi)

> Democratic relationships involve processes of decision-making and participation which have to be totally horizontal. Hortigas is a self-managed organisation which makes decisions by global consensus with the participation of everyone, through mechanisms that are totally horizontal and participatory. (Interview: Cristina)

Courses and workshops are organised in order to reflect on current issues, such as the effects of the CETA or TTIP trade treaties, which are devastating for current democracies. Through all of these educational activities, Hortigas analyses and raises awareness of the complexity of economic globalisation and the impact of neoliberalisation on populations, the common interests of individuals and the natural world. Rethinking democracy, and problems arising from inequality and environmental risks, are the basic issues which are addressed by this group from both a critical perspective and dialogic learning.

> Some workshops take place internally, with people from within. However, we also have others with people from outside who are brought hereto train and learn about interesting and current topics. There are also other more cultural and formative activities, like video-forums, making ourselves visible in the wider community, encouraging more social encounters with other groups, and so on. (Interview: Ruipe)

Thus, Hortigas is a good example of critical practice which requires a "critical learning and a stance of reflexivity about self and society" (Sandlin, 2010, p. 297). Its members focus on developing a whole range of anti-consumption critical learning, while generating forms of resistance to consumption (Sandlin & McLaren, 2010). The following words by Sandlin (2010, p. 297) allow us to argue that these groups, which focus on food sovereignty and responsible consumption, promote critical education processes which are characteristic of public pedagogy:

Critical practices occur both inside and outside of formal educational institutions and engage with processes of both production and consumption, especially against products of consumer capitalism such as waste and environmental pollution. They further argue that critical resistance takes place not only by working against material products and processes of oppression tied to consumption, but also in the cultural and symbolic realms.

The Hortigas community is highly critical of the neoliberal capitalist model, and consider 'consumption' as an element of struggle, both in the real world and at the symbolic level:

A key aspect of the work of Hortigas focuses on deciding what we consume. Raising alternative ways of addressing this issue is very important, because you can purchase food in a large supermarket or decide to buy it from a local trader, through agroecological self-production, etc. The same can be said with regard to clothes, electricity and almost everything. In short, deterring consumers from these more capitalist companies, and bringing them closer to more cooperative and self-managed forms, is an alternative way of combating capitalism. (Interview: Ruipe)

In this way, the public pedagogy initiatives, which have been developed in recent years by Hortigas, have allowed its members to expand their imagination beyond the neoliberal capitalist pattern of food consumption and production. Participants in this venture have cultivated divergent forms of critical thinking which help them to believe in, think about, and activate alternative ways of being and living. This is a way to challenge processes of 'commodification of the personal' (Jensen and Prieur, 2016). We are talking here about the kind of experimental and experiential learning in which the Hortigas activists are involved, particularly in their social and natural environment. They do this with strong conviction and, additionally, they show us that there are other possible ways of living. The sociopolitical and environmental convictions, which form

the foundation of their beliefs, lead them to believe in, and work towards, a new model of society, one which is different from the neoliberal model. In the opposite direction to what Ball (2016) stated when talking about neoliberal subjectivity, we see here, once more, that individuals 'make' themselves, think and behave according to a totally different kind of internal construction.

> Critical awareness is at the core of Hortigas' philosophy. In general, people who participate in Hortigas usually come with critical awareness. The individual who decides to join usually has the desire and will to participate. (Interview: Paca)

At Hortigas there is a work group called EdukAction that works on two important levels:

> to think at a more philosophical level about what Hortigas has to be and also to make it more participatory (…) On the other hand, there is a part which is dedicated to training on topics at all levels. These include participation and decision-making mechanisms, issues of affection, care, and also on more practical themes relating to production, responsible consumption, ecological footprint and even issues such as inequality and poverty… (Interview: Cristina)

From within the context of public pedagogy, like the one described above, a wide variety of social practices evolve. They are all inextricably linked to learning (Gutiérrez-Schmich & Hefferman, 2016). This is because the participants in these social initiatives have shown that they are learning about the value of mutual aid as an important community practice. Precarised neoliberal subjectivity, which has constructed these participants by means of the impact of material and psychological vulnerability (Ecclestone & Brunila, 2015), is now giving way to a new kind of identity which reconstructs them emotionally and psychologically within the context of those human relationships which give pedagogical value to solidarity. Empathy becomes a

fundamental principle that structures the inner life of Hortigas. This is an example of public pedagogy.

> Everyone, at a political level, can freely think what they want, but I think you can find meeting points, hence the importance of having a little empathy and willingness to combine the individual with the social (…) realising that almost nothing of what I do as a person is neutral, that many of the things we do are political and have consequences. In short, it is important to understand others and the world in which we live and, from here, show empathy. (Interview: Paca)

Once more we face every-day situations in which the internal processes of public pedagogy, as developed by these groups, contribute to the formation of what Sandlin (2010) calls "transitional spaces." These are appropriate contexts which enable a critical learning aimed at de-constructing the precarised neoliberal identity. This idea springs from a view that public pedagogy possesses a strong political dimension which works to produce subjectivities which transcend the neoliberal logic (Ecclestone & Brunila 2015). This idea connects with Giroux 2003, p. 9):

> theories of resistance involve more than simply registering models of oppression, they also point to the possibility of intervening productively in those educational contexts where reality is being continually transformed and power enacted in the interests of developing new democratic identities, relations, institutional forms, and modes of struggle.

Additionally, from a member of Hortigas:

> We aim to propose alternatives to that neoliberal capitalist model and (…) all those levels of precariousness. With Hortigas, this has a lot to do with agroecology and consumption, but also with participation and social organization, taking great care to include the affective, emotional element. That is to say, we

> try to propose alternatives that sometimes work and sometime do not, but that seek to embrace all that precariousness. (Interview: Javi)

We have here a clear example of 'prefigurative practices' in which Hortigas members work under modes of organisation and operation very different from the competitive logic of markets (Flesher, 2014).

> Hortigas raises an alternative (…) to consumption, an alternative to management and use of global resources from the local environment. But it also raises, at other levels, different ways of organising tasks, of making decisions and ways of asking what needs to be done and by whom. We seek ways that are more participatory, in which everyone is taken into account. We also focus on care, affections, of caring for the individual (…). We consider the care perspective (…), even in the decision-making mechanisms, throughout the entire process. (Interview: Ruipe)

Collectives like Hortigas articulate processes of critical pedagogy from the moment they start to question the mechanisms of the symbolic, political and material power which lies behind the social inequalities that bear the mark of precariousness. According to Hill (2002) they modulate learning spaces in which they exercise different mechanisms of resistance. For example, the assembly is a tool of great critical educational potential, which helps to activate social awareness, thus emphasising the importance of making decisions by consensus to collective problems:

> Finding a balance between individual freedoms and collective interests passes 'on a great extent' through the participatory decision-making process and how it is organised, at what stage it is, in what processes and what mechanisms. It always springs from an individual thought which is discussed in stages until a final decision is made by consensus. This is a 'super-complex' mechanism, but one in which everyone raises, at increasingly higher levels, their individual thoughts on the collective issue to be decided on. (Interview: Ruipe)

Here, the principle of "shared responsibility" is put into practice (Näsström and Kalm, 2015) in the sense that Hortigas' actors end up integrating, assuming and making publicly visible the discrepancies under discussion as a collective problem that affects the whole. In conclusion, and based on the thoughts of Ball (2016) on how neoliberalism speaks through us and builds us, we can say that, from their cooperative practice, the members of Hortigas learn to see, feel and act from a logic totally different, a logic of shared responsibility which changes competence for collaboration as a method of conflict resolution and fulfilment of needs.

Final thoughts

The financial crisis of the last decade has fostered the inevitable emergence — and the consolidation in some cases— of citizenship initiatives as a way of confronting the needs created by the economic crash. In this paper, our aim was to show that we are not facing a specific and temporary crisis, but one which is part of a broader civilisational design led by the logic and practice of neoliberal ideology. On the other hand, we also wished to show that there is an increasing number of social collectives and initiatives which advocate other ways of understanding human relationships in addition to providing for their needs by overcoming the rationality of the market.

From an analytical perspective, we have connected the inner dimension of neoliberalism (endogenous privatisation) with the current democratic processes which weaken the shared responsibility of citizens, claiming that personal responsibility is the cause of all our woes (Näsström & Kalm, 2015). As a result, precarised individuals feel isolated, fragmented and psychologically weakened. Moreover, given these conditions, they rarely have the possibility of carrying out active resistance work with others and much less at the individual level. Basically, they have been colonised by neoliberal logic. Neoliberalism

speaks through them; it manifests through their language, actions and gestures (Ball, 2016).

However, critical socio-educational practices like those of Hortigas allow us to short-circuit the relationship between democracy and internal precariousness. This is because they encourage cooperative work which yields positive results, given that they are built in a way which is contrary to the neoliberal vision. Consequently, from this inner dimension, both in precariousness and neoliberalism, these practices of resistance are extremely valuable as forms of personal and collective learning about those alternative subjectivities which flow contrary to the neoliberal direction.

The fact that there exists a collective learning —of having a common purpose, of sharing and discussing new ideas, and reaching agreements— helps these groups to shed their anomie, apathy and individualism. Furthermore, this process of internal reconstruction encourages people to share some of their ideals and seek shared strategies in order to enable them to escape from the psychological dimension of precariousness. The recovery of their own self-esteem and the value attributed to group work, helps them to feel good about themselves and brings them happiness, regardless of their material status and success.

From this perspective the internal dimension of individuals is now crucial. This is because the fight against neoliberalism has to take place, at this point in time, in the full knowledge that it is hidden by colonising subjectivities. Although we should not lose sight of the external aspect of social mobilisations, what matters most is whether they are capable of confronting the most unseen aspects of neoliberalism. From this we conclude that a key element of future work and research should focus on this inner dimension and, additionally, on how current

social collectives and types of resistance address it and learn from it. This kind of group working then becomes a different form of critical education which goes way beyond mere traditional education and schooling (public pedagogy).

Critical socio-educational experiences, like those of Hortigas, contribute to face the subjective processes of insecurity, anxiety and risk characteristic of neoliberal precarisation:

> Working collaboratively, we feel more secure, more free. It helps us to fight stress and anxiety in these 'crazy' times. (Interview: Cristina)

Collaborative work, feeling part of a community with common objectives and goals, seems, in this case, to guarantee a confrontation with the internal processes of precariousness.

We agree with Wolff (2019) that traditional socialism and representative democracy have failed, especially since the period when social democracy embraced neoliberal logic. In this model, citizens have been left in the background without real decision-making capacity (representative democracy) and without the power to decide, manage and organise their own lives. Experiences like Hortigas help to highlight other ways of attending to the needs of people and exercising active participation. They also help to combat neoliberal precariousness by overcoming the individualistic competitive logic that is responsible for producing current social fragmentation. Creating initiatives, such as Hortigas, could bring us closer to the practices of a direct political democracy and an economic democracy, both necessary if we are to move towards a new socialism.

However, these kinds of practices have some negative aspects in that they are local and limited to specific contexts and with a specific user profiles. Importantly, many of their members have a high level of education. Around 80% have studied in university and are very aware with a highly developed critical sense, as their members tell us. That is why, a priori, these practices seem difficult to generalise and extend to other realities and contexts, at least for the time being. Some of the interviewees admit this when they accept that practically:

> We are like a drop in the ocean (…). I do not see the possibility of big changes within the current capitalist system. It is very difficult to normalise and extend practices like ours. People are scared of change and abandoning their 'comfort zone.' (Interview: Javi)

> I am aware that this type of initiative, like ours of Hortigas, is very difficult to undertake. Today these are just alternative spaces in which people can participate, rather than being an alternative to the system itself. I am aware that we cannot speak of an alternative to the system. That would be very arrogant (…). But the positive side is that this type of experience works and transcends over time. Hortigas is already many years old, and the fact that a group of people can continue functioning in this way, self-producing their food, self-managing at different levels, and taking participatory decisions, with dedication, time, commitment … that already seems to mean excellent example. People say: 'So much assembly cannot work!' But, yes, it is possible and it can work. (Interview: Ruipe)

In spite of everything, including powerful limitations, enormous and increasingly complex global challenges, scarcity of resources, omnipresent power of capital, structure of classes, cultural differences, factual powers …, we highlight the positive aspects of these alternative groups and experiences. Furthermore, we encourage colleagues and other researchers to value these

courageous critical socio-educational initiatives. We must recover the transforming potential of utopia.

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