

“Las ansias de participación”: the offensive of urban social movements in the process of political change in Spain (1975-77). A view from Barcelona's metropolitan area

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ABSTRACT

This article tries to point the maximum social and political impact of the urban social movements in Barcelona and its metropolitan area. The triennium 1975-77, which frames were two key moments as the dictator's death and the first democratic elections, is considered the time when social movements tackle the ultimate battle against Franco's regime, preventing its continuity and advocating a break with the dictatorship. The aim of this paper is to outline the process of political change from the perspective of the urban social movements, fixing attention on the struggle that it waged with Francoist local power. The intention is to bring out its major role in the process of delegitimation and disintegration of the Francoist authorities. Similarly, it will pay attention to the discourse and the collective actions and practices that were developed which show a strong aim of rupture with the dictatorship, an urban project and a proposed alternative political articulation of democracy to build that involve the effective participation of citizenship.

KEYWORDS

Urban social movements, Barcelona, Political change in Spain, 1975-77, Break with Franco's dictatorship

The historiographical debate about urban social movements in Spain in the 1970s has produced countless books, articles and papers, both from academic and purely journalistic points of view. From different perspectives, the prominent role of the collective actions and experiences of the movements has either been denied or highlighted. Various interpretations have highlighted the role of the Francoist political elites or the importance of the socioeconomic modernization process of the last stage of the dictatorship compared to other visions that stress the impact of socio-political mobilization and conflict in the collapse of the dictatorship. This article is allied to the latter interpretation, aiming to propose a model for analyzing the process of political change from a study of social movements, such as the urban social movements, that have traditionally been at the margins of the historical narrative.

This study attempts to highlight the maximum social and political impact of the urban social movements in Barcelona and its metropolitan area. The opening and closing moments of the triennium 1975-77, which frames the analysis, were two key moments of this process: the period began with the death of the dictator Franco and ended with the first democratic elections and was the period in which social movements fought the ultimate battle against Franco's regime, preventing its continuity and advocating its demise. The aim of this article is to outline the process of political change from the perspective of the urban social movements, focusing on the struggle that it waged with the local powers of the Francoist regime. The intention is to bring out the major role of the urban social movements in the process of the delegitimation and disintegration of the Francoist authorities. Similarly, it will pay attention to the discourse and the collective actions and practices that were developed which showed a strong desire to rupture with the dictatorship, construct an urban project and propose an alternative political articulation of democracy that involved the effective participation of citizens.

In the mid-1970s, when one of the last great urban battles against the General Metropolitan Plan of Barcelona was taking place, the urban social movements had reached a clear organizational and discursive maturity, after already organizing powerful struggles beginning in the late 1960s. Some of them involved great conflicts against various partial urban plans that had tried to drive out and expropriate large numbers of people throughout the metropolitan area or in campaigns for repairs and maintenance of public and private housing; others, in the early seventies, involved struggles against landfills in *Montjuïc* (Barcelona) and *Cinco Rosas* (Sant Boi de Llobregat), for a hospital in Santa Coloma de Gramenet or for the final canalization of the river in Cornellà de Llobregat after the severe floods of 1971, in addition to thousands of other struggles for traffic lights, schools, public transport, public health or parks in the neighborhoods.¹

¹ On the origins and evolution of the Catalan neighborhood association movement, see Molinero, Carme and Ysas, Pere, eds. *La construcció de la ciutat democràtica. El moviment veïnal durant el tardofranquisme i la*

Urban social movements had also established stable organizational structures – open, horizontal and based on democratic assemblies – through Neighborhood Associations (*Asociaciones de Vecinos*). These entities were formidable instruments of mobilization and also provided certain leisure, recreational and cultural services, serving as a significant site of meetings, socialization and politicization for the popular classes and a place where the political groups and parties found a space to exercise the struggle against Franco, overcoming the limits imposed by underground activities.² This presence and this political nature did not escape the notice of officials of the dictatorship, as is shown in a 1974 police report on the Federation of Neighborhood Associations of Barcelona (*Federación de Asociaciones de Vecinos de Barcelona*, FAVB): of the ninety-five member associations that formed part of this umbrella group, sixty-five were marked as *blue* – supporters of the regime – and twenty as *red* – “anti-establishment and making demands”.³ Different police reports on the Barcelona district of Nou Barris adduced that “some time ago [...] communist penetration has been detected in the ranks of the Neighborhood Association”, identifying various political parties that “have found in the legal existence of the Neighborhood Associations a fertile ground to carry out tasks of agitation, proselytizing and recruiting new militants.”⁴

These *red* Neighbourhood Associations, such as in Nou Barris, were the organizations that truly composed the urban social movements as they are understood here, representing the popular neighborhoods, hosting a greater number of partners and comprised of those who ultimately staged the urban and anti-Francoist struggle based on a combination of complaints against shortages in the neighborhoods and demands for freedom and political and social rights. These movements centered on discourses and practices that were both implicitly and explicitly anti-Francoist, to a certain degree anti-capitalist and therefore against the current of the dictatorial order. They demonstrated this through the assumption of open conflict and *the struggle for the street*, democratic forms of assembly, the development of proposals that went beyond complaints or opposition to a given situation, the advance of their own projects of co-management or self-

transició. Barcelona: Icària, 2010. I recently wrote my PhD thesis on Spanish urban social movements from their origins to the triennium 1975-77. Bordetas, Ivan. *Nosotros somos los que hemos hecho esta ciudad. Autoorganización y movilización vecinal durante el tardofranquismo y el proceso de cambio político*. Cerdanyola del Vallès: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2012. It can be consulted at <https://www.educacion.gob.es/teseo/imprimirFicheroTesis.do?fichero=33320>

²The relationships between political parties and neighborhood associations is analyzed in Martí, Josep. *Relació entre Associacions de Veïns i partits polítics. Barcelona 1970-1980*. PhD thesis. Barcelona: ICESB, 1981.

³Archivo Histórico del Gobierno Civil de Barcelona (hereafter AHGCB), “Informe sobre la Federación de Asociaciones de Vecinos de Barcelona y sobre el «enfoque correcto de la F.A.V.B.»”, April 27, 1975. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 52. Ayuntamiento de Barcelona. Años 1974-1975. Most *blue* associations were, in fact, *street associations*, called *light bulb associations*, which grouped mainly traders of certain streets and whose only activity was managing public subsidies for the adornment of streets with colored lights during the holidays.

⁴AHGCB, “Semblanza político-social sobre la «Asociación de Vecinos del sector Vallbona-Torre Baró-Trinidad» («9 Barrios»)", Police Report, August 11, 1974. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 52. Ayuntamiento de Barcelona. Años 1974-1975.

management, and the construction of collective identities with a strong working-class component based on what was considered the social debt to those who had built the city.

Other evidence highlights the ties of solidarity between the Neighborhood Associations and other social movements that fought against the dictatorship. This was emphasized in a police report that noted that the president of one section of the Neighborhood Association of Nou Barris was suspected of being “connected to the Workers’ Commissions” [*Comisiones Obreras*].⁵ Such relationships would only strengthen in this period through the public positioning of Neighborhood Organizations in support of workers in conflict, either through support for the amnesty of imprisoned trade unionists, the right to strike or the need for free and representative trade unions as is demonstrated by the following resolutions of Neighborhood Associations:

The signatories of the neighbourhood associations see the need to support the requests of the SEAT workers [in the Volkswagen auto factory] (...) Given these new facts once again the need arises for creating adequate channels of participation for the free exercise of human rights of assembly, association and expression.⁶

This committee has decided in a meeting to provide full support to the struggle for demands developed by the Motor Ibérica workers [...]. It fully agrees and identifies with the workers regarding the three points raised: the overturning of disciplinary actions and sanctions [...], the reemployment of all those dismissed, and a linear increase of 4,000 pesetas for all.⁷

In the same way, the neighbourhood organizations of Terrassa were considered in police reports in the following manner:

They usually integrate people of the political opposition or against the Regime or sympathizers with the progressive or anti-establishment clergy [...]. Through collective action, these so-called Neighbourhood *Juntas* aim to capture of the maximum possible number of elements and establish intercommunication with one another, in search of a mass solidarity to confront problems affecting a particular neighbourhood.⁸

⁵ AHGCB, «Dos votos en contra adhesión S.M. el Rey de España por parte Corporación Municipal esta localidad», Police Report, November 27, 1975. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 105, Ayuntamiento de Terrasa, 1974-1975.

⁶ Archivo Nacional de Catalunya (hereafter ANC), Letter from the Neighbourhood Associations to the Provincial Delegate of Official Trade Unions, November 12, 1974. Fondo PSUC. 2352. Barcelona: Crides i manifestos unitaris. 1973-1974. The document also appeared in the mainstream press and in *Nuestra Voz* [organ of the Neighbourhood Association of *Turó de la Peira / Vila Piscina / Ramon Albó*], 2 (1974). The document was signed by eighteen Barcelona Neighbourhood Associations.

⁷ ANC, «Precisiones respecto a los trabajadores de Motor Ibérica en huelga», Committee of Labour Commissions of Neighbourhood Associations of Barcelona (*Coordinadora de Vocalías Laborales de las Asociaciones de Vecinos de Barcelona*), September 6, 1976. Fondo PSUC. 2353. Barcelona: Federació d'Associacions de Veïns de Barcelona (FAVB). 1973-1980. This Committee published several numbers of a specific journal about workers' issues called *Correo Laboral*.

⁸ AHGCB, «Asociaciones de Cabezas de Familia y Juntas de Vecinos», Police Report, March 4, 1975. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 105, Ayuntamiento de Terrasa, 1974-1975.

A detailed police report on urban social movement activities in the suburban city of Santa Coloma de Gramenet in 1975 pointed out the real danger for the Francoist authorities: “the gravity of this situation is that it is a true unity of Marxist political formation, which extends its activities to the factories where they work”. Thus, it warned of the involvement of various priests in working-class districts, certain journalists and certain “cells of the Communist Party and the Workers’ Commissions [*Comisiones Obreras*]” which, side by side with Neighborhood Associations, caused a “constant social unrest, with riots and public demonstrations”.⁹

But not only by the presence of political party activists could the movement be considered anti-Francoist or political in its actions and not only in its demands, since its very configuration, against the current of the organizational forms of the dictatorship, gave it a political nature in practice. This political condition was also given by the relationship that the Franco regime established with the movements, moving from purely repressive responses since any expression of dissent and conflict was considered anti-regime, to negotiations or concessions unwillingly granted to the powerful neighborhood mobilizations. Thus, the local authorities, formed in the fascist political culture of the dictatorship, were forced, in many cases, to give in to or negotiate popular demands. In some cases, this obtained, as this letter from a city councilor to the governor shows, because “the situation of the city councilors who are in charge of the districts, is very delicate and fragile in relation to the Neighborhood Association of the *Distrito Quinto*, which considers itself the representative across the district [...] [and which] is echoed in some newspapers of our city”.¹⁰ In others, it was directly due to fear of the escalation of the conflict as this appeal by a local mayor to the sub-governor of Barcelona demonstrates:

In view of the street demonstrations in recent days [...] we appeal to you to consider the alarming situation we face in regard to social and political issues and we have to make you know that without immediate help [...] an overflow can occur in all areas that we would be unable to contain.¹¹

In April 1975, the Mayor of Santa Coloma de Gramenet pleaded with the civil governor for the acceleration of efforts around school shortages and public transport that “are now the most urgent and more political dangerous” in view of the escalation of local pressure which resulted in massive collections of signatures, press campaigns, constant

⁹AHGCB, «SANTA COLOMA DE GRAMENET.- Informe socio-político», enero de 1975. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 205. Ayuntamiento de Santa Coloma de Gramenet 1974-1975. This is one of three documents that compose the report prepared by the Provincial Leadership of the *Movimiento* and was sent to the Civil Governor Rodolfo Martín Villa in January 1975.

¹⁰AHGCB, Letter from Juan Abellán Hernández, city councilor of Barcelona, to Rodolfo Martín Villa, Civil Governor of Barcelona, September 16, 1974. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 52. Ayuntamiento de Barcelona. Años 1974-1975.

¹¹AHGCB. Letter from José M^a Ferrer, Mayor of Cornellà de Llobregat, to José Donadeu, civil subgovernor of Barcelona, September 26, 1977. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 616. José M^a Ferrer Panadés. Caja n^o 29 [Subgobernadores]. Carpeta Asuntos Varios 1980.

demonstrations and mass meetings or bus boycotts.¹² A year later, the mayor kept insisting on “The serious school situation of the municipality and the extremely serious incidents that lately have been raised because of this problem. [...] The situation is unsustainable for next year as all members of the Corporation have received serious threats and are willing to resign if it is not given an immediate solution”.¹³

These protests, which were gradually closing in on the dictatorial authorities, were based on a wide repertoire of collective actions that both directly bordered on or transgressed the law and that, progressively, were acquiring explicitly anti-Francoist tones with public assumption of the struggle for political and social rights, for amnesty for political and trade unionist prisoners, with expressions of solidarity with industrial disputes and demands for democratization. There are numerous examples of the public positions of the neighborhood associations in campaigns against the death penalty or for amnesty for political prisoners and the Federation of Neighborhood Associations of Barcelona (FAVB) also prominently promoted the mass demonstration for amnesty in February 1976.¹⁴ Increasingly, urban and political struggle was constituted as a indiscernible part of a larger united fight back because, for example, a conflict by healthcare workers not only showed the need for a united front and solidarity, but demonstrated the necessity of the “unavoidable and urgent reform of the healthcare structure that takes into account the needs of all people (workers, unemployed and residents in general), which can be carried out with the democratization of the entire healthcare section and with the participation of the entire population”.¹⁵

By the same token, but putting forward concrete alternative proposals, the Committee of Healthcare Commissions of the Neighborhood Association of *Nou Barris* demanded “healthcare control in all matters” with the establishment of “Control Commissions of Healthcare workers, neighbors and doctors”.¹⁶ As was expressed in a contemporary study of urban social movements in Barcelona:

¹²All documentation on the conflict and the letters exchanged between the authorities may be found in the AHGCB. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 205. Ayuntamiento de Santa Coloma de Gramanet 1974-1975.

¹³AHGCB. Letter from the Mayor of Santa Coloma to the Civil Governor, July, 1976. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 398. CG: 126. I Delegación provincial Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia. Sánchez Terán Ortiz Sánchez. 1976-2977.

¹⁴“Amnistía. Nota sobre la campaña de 'Justicia y Paz’”, *Nuestra Voz* 2 (1974) o “Poble Sec ¡por la Amnistia!”, *Poble Sec*, 3 (septiembre de 1974). About the demonstration see “1 de febrer, Barcelona per l’Amnistia. Grandiosa manifestació”, *Treball*, 434 (2 de febrer de 1976). Researchers may consult the document of convocation and the relation between the diverse signatories in the ANC, “Relación de firmantes del escrito presentado al Gobierno Civil, el 19 de enero, solicitando autorización para realizar una manifestación ciudadana por la Amnistía”. Fondo PSUC. 2350. Activitat de diverses entitats i moviments ciutadans reivindicatius. 1970-1979. News of the action may be found in “Manifestaciones callejeras para pedir la amnistía”, *La Vanguardia Española*, 3 de febrero de 1976. Ballester, Véase David and Risques, Manel. *Temps d’amnistia. Les manifestacions de l’1 i el 8 de febrer de 1976 a Barcelona*. Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2001.

¹⁵ANC. «Informació sobre el problema sanitari», elaborado por la Asociación de Vecinos «Joan Maragall». Fondo PSUC. Barcelona: barrio del Guinardó, 1975-1976. Original in Catalan. In the same direction was the proposal by the Committee of Health Commissions of the *Nou Barris* Neighbourhood Association.

¹⁶The whole proposals in “Sanidad”, *9 Barrios* (December, 1976).

The demand for participation – at the neighbourhood and city level but also at the trade union, professional and general level –, usually projected onto the neighbourhood, in close relationship with urban problems, a number of issues [...]. Amnesty, the abolition of the death penalty, the promotion of the Catalan language and culture and industrial disputes do not arise at assemblies or in declarations simply because neighbourhood associations play a subsidiary role in politics. In popular neighbourhoods there are dismissed workers, the unemployed, political prisoners ... It is difficult to be aware of urban problems – and to verify that the mayor or the city councillors do not represent the interests of the population – without bringing to the table political freedoms, the right to culture, free trade unions or assembly, to demonstrate and to express themselves without preconditions.¹⁷

This evolution of the discourses, the objectives and the actions of the urban social movements, which was linked to a wider politicization, was the cause of increasing repressive pressure on these collectives: the authorities denied permission for and prevented neighborhood meetings, exhibitions and other activities, suspended and fined public entities for their political positions, delayed indefinitely or shelved new laws, arrested activists as well as brought constant police pressure to bear.¹⁸ At the same time, the authorities created new puppet entities or promoted similar existing bodies. The case of Mataró, in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, is significant: the correspondence between the Mayor and the Civil Governors shows attempts to control the organization, extension and consolidation of new associations, denying their legalization and encouraging others¹⁹:

In the city of Mataró they are trying to win approval for two neighborhood associations. 1.-Cerdanyola Center: all of it consists of anti-regime elements (...) 2.-Sea Sector: individuals who sign the application are all components of the Young Communists [*Juventudes Comunistas*] or PSUC [*Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya*]. (...) We express the view that all possible objections should be raised and approval delayed as long as possible.²⁰

The link between urban social movements and anti-Francoism identified by the political authorities during the period of official repression also made activists and their premises the target of attacks by fascist groups.²¹

¹⁷Alibés, Josep Maria; Miguélez, Faustino; Pardo, José María *et al.*, “La lucha de los barrios de Barcelona, 1969-75”, *CAU*, 34, November-December, 1975, p. 114.

¹⁸This was denounced in various forums: “Ofensiva contra las Asociaciones de Vecinos”, *Mundo Social*, 219 (March, 1974), Tudela, Joan, “El difícil parto de nueve asociaciones”, *Gramma*, 73 (January 1975) or Giralt, Enric, “Cinco asociaciones de vecinos llevan un año esperando su legalización”, *El Correo Catalán*, March 25, 1976. Other areas of the country, including Madrid, did not escape this reality: Lucas, Modesto González, “El difícil arte de asociarse entre vecinos”, *Mundo Social*, 226 (November, 1974).

¹⁹AHGCB, Expediente “Asociaciones de Mataró”, November, 1974. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 249. Ayuntamiento de Mataró, 1974-1975.

²⁰AHGCB, Letter from Luis del Pozo to Martín Villa, April 30, 1975. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 249. Ayuntamiento de Mataró, 1974-1975.

²¹«Repulsa por el atentado a unos locales de la Asociación de los Nueve Barrios», *La Vanguardia*, July 23, 1974; «Atentado contra el Centro Social de Sans», *La Vanguardia*, June 28, 1975; «Atentado contra la

Despite all the obstacles, the political and cultural background, the experiences of struggle and conflict, the organizational resources, the discourses and the solidarities that were developed allowed the urban social movements to face the battle beginning in the middle of the decade not only from a defensive standpoint, such as refusing certain infrastructure projects that threatened homes or complaining against the inadequate provision of facilities and green areas; they also prepared the movements to develop and put forward an urban alternative, with proposals for the provision not only of the facilities, services and infrastructure required in their respective districts, but also for the management and democratic planning of the urban framework, for the articulation of a real and effective popular participation in public services. The diversity of forms of struggle that were used give a good account of this broad and qualified opposition: from the accumulation of more than 21,000 collective challenges against the Regional Urban Plan – both by the Neighborhood Associations and by other citizens' organizations – to the organization of mass meetings and demonstrations, occupations of land, stopping and dismantling public and private urban works, self-construction of parks and gardens, self-management of schools and the preparation of so-called Popular Plans. The latter were authentic studies not only of the deficiencies and requirements, but also of the installation of such facilities, services and infrastructure that were considered necessary, because, as was considered at an assembly which decided to devise one of these plans, “the city is ours because we have made it with our efforts and sacrifices”.²²

The urban social movements reaffirmed themselves as one of the main spaces of popular participation in Barcelona, as one of the central nodes of a highly mobilized society that undertook the final offensive to overthrow a dictatorship that, even with the death of the dictator in 1975, still maintained a strong repressive and social control capacity that was intended to allow the continuation of Francoism without Franco. Between 1975 and 1977, in addition to the urban struggles we mentioned against the Regional Plan, there was also a diversity of conflicts that clearly revealed the pressure exerted on the authorities by the urban social movements, even before the death of the dictator as we have seen. If at the beginning of 1975, Barcelona's Neighborhood Associations undertook a campaign for the resignation of the “eighteen *not* city councilors”, who voted negatively for the approval of a small budget for the continuing education of Catalan teachers²³, between June and November the associations of Cornellà

Asociación de Vecinos de San Andrés», *La Vanguardia*, July 10, 1975; «Artefacto explosivo contra un centro de vecinos», *Informaciones*, January 5, 1976. These attacks and violence by fascist gangs continued throughout the whole process of political change and, as recognized in a document from the Police Headquarters in Barcelona in late 1977, had not only the acquiescence of the police, but their protection and direction. AHGCB, “Panorámica general de los grupos y organizaciones derechistas y actividades desarrolladas por los mismos”, Report of Investigation Service of General Security Headquarters. Barcelona, November 14, 1977. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles, caja 323. Quoted by Casanellas, Pau. *Morir matando. El franquismo en crisis ante la violencia política, 1968-1977*. PhD thesis. Cerdanyola del Vallès: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2011, p. 433.

²²«¡Sí! Plan Popular. Plan Comarcal ¡No!»», *9 Barrios*, (December, 1976). These Popular Plans were mostly devised by 1977-1978. An example may be consulted in «Plan Popular», Grama (1978).

²³Castellà i Gassol, Joan, *Los papeles del no al català*. Barcelona: Dirosa, 1975. A declaration signed by various civic and neighborhood organizations demanded the immediate resignation of the city councilors, the political normalization of Catalan and the election of “those who hold public offices [...] that are

de Llobregat and Santa Coloma de Gramenet explicitly expressed in two public declarations the demand for democracy. These documents, endorsed by different personalities from the local scene – trade union members, presidents of neighborhood and citizen organizations, priests, teachers, professionals, etc. – openly raised the problems of their cities, the urban chaos, the poor facilities, services and infrastructure, unemployment, the high cost of living, and noted, finally, that “the divorce between the city and the people [...] is the cause of this accumulation of problems and its tendency to get worse [...]”. According to the activists, this was because:

A municipality that has not been elected by the people, which depends on those who have elected themselves, represents the interests of the minority. Only a democratic city council which is responsible for their actions before the population will answer to the general interests of the population, and only this popular power can deal with the vested interests.²⁴

The urban social movements had reached a point of no return in the process of empowerment: their organizations were strengthened; they built increasingly audacious mass actions and radicalized their discourse. This was what led them in the mid-1970s to hoist the banner of democratization and deepen their proposals for political change. In a public document of support to the Catalan Assembly (*Assemblea de Catalunya*), a diverse political platform that motivated a break with the Franco Regime, the neighborhood associations of Terrassa recognized this entity as “the right space for advancing, in a unified manner, the democratic goals [...] in defense of popular interests”²⁵, while the associations of Sabadell, endorsed by over nine thousand signatures, demanded the democratization of the City Council and the subsequent resignation of the councilors. They also demanded a “general amnesty including the political, trade union, religious, academic and administrative spheres, and allowing therefore the return of all those in exile”, in addition to the abolition of the death penalty and anti-terrorism legislation.²⁶ On this question of the politicization of the urban social movements, the neighborhood association in Carmel spoke forcefully:

Actually, we are politicizing [...]. For many years, residents and members of this Association have fought against the policies of big business, speculation, cost of living, unemployment ... and against municipal politics in

representative of the will of the people”, «Repulsa de varias entidades barcelonesas», *La Vanguardia*, March 8, 1975.

²⁴AHGCB, «Situación política en el día de hoy en Cornellá», City Council report, June 4, 1975. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 50. Ayuntamiento de Cornellá de Llobregat, 1974-75. The declaration was published in «Manifiesto de los 22. Cornellá por un ayuntamiento democrático, *Tele/eXprés*, June 1, 1975. The other declaration, that reproduces entire passages of the preceding one, may be consulted in ANC, «¡Salvemos Sta. Coloma! Manifiesto ciudadano de los 51». Fondo PSUC. 2392. Santa Coloma de Gramenet. 1970-1975.

²⁵ANC, «Declaración de las Juntas de Vecinos». Fondo PSUC. 2393. Terrassa. Setembre, 1966 - juny, 1975.

²⁶Vinader, Xavier and Benaül, Josep M. *Sabadell, febrero de 1976: una semana de huelga general política*, unpublished, Sabadell, 1976 and “Pleno Municipal (30 diciembre 1975). Informe de las Asociaciones de Vecinos de Sabadell”, *Can Oriach*, 90 (1976), p. 31-34. Quoted by Martínez, Ricard. *El moviment veïnal a l'àrea metropolitana de Barcelona durant el tardofranquisme i la transició: el cas de Sabadell (1966-1976)*. PhD thesis. Barcelona, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 1999, p. 252-253.

neighbourhoods, abandonment, expropriation, lack of hygiene, transport, schools [...]. We believe that the struggle to improve our neighbourhood is the same struggle of the workers in their factories, the same as the many citizens who struggle for amnesty, freedom...²⁷

In the same way, the association in Nou Barris affirmed that it was:

A neighbourhood association that since its birth has engaged in politics [...] since it is the only way to defend our interests. [...] That is why the associations take side with anything that affects the neighbourhoods; the boycott of the referendum [of the Political Reform Act of Adolfo Suárez's Government] is a recent example.²⁸

Moreover, the neighbourhood associations' clear break with the dictatorship was expressed in their active involvement in this boycott of the referendum in December 1976, whose positive result would come to sanction the reform bill that was being imposed from above.

At the same time, the Nou Barris association was carrying out different urban struggles in its neighborhood among which was the struggle for the elimination of a polluting factory that was adjacent to a group of homes and whose space was claimed for needed facilities. Given the lack of attention to their demands, the neighbors decided to remove the factory:

Dismantling meant the demolition of two huge chimneys, dismantling of the entire electrical installation, [...] several motors and conveyor belts were immobilized. The removal was done by *nontechnical* residents expelling an asphalt plant that endangered their health. [...] Once again, they had forced residents to take the law into our hands.²⁹

In September 1977, a meeting was held between the civil governor of Barcelona and the respective ministerial delegates. A meeting that, from the reports of different authorities in the context of regime transition, denoted the strong pressure they were receiving by urban social movements tired of waiting for democratization from above in the period after the legislative elections in June of that year and faced with an uncertain future that was marginalizing neighbourhood associations in the political process led mainly by the political parties.³⁰ The documents generated at this meeting not only show the great capacity of mobilization and the protest repertoire of the urban social movements, but the impact they were having on the remains of the Francoist dictatorship, struggles that meant an obvious continuity with the protest and social conflicts that forced

²⁷“Acerca la Federación de Vecinos”, *El Carmelo*, 19 (February, 1977).

²⁸“9 Barrios y la Federación”, *9 Barrios*, 1 (January-February, 1977).

²⁹“Planta asfáltica”, *9 Barrios*, 1 (January-February, 1977).

³⁰On this situation, see Bordetas, Ivan, “El movimiento vecinal en el tránsito de la resistencia a la construcción de alternativas”, *Historia del Presente*, 16 (2010), p. 55-61.

political change in the first place. The delegate of Public Works reported, after presenting the organ's main infrastructure projects and their implementation, that

Almost all these works are the object of disputes, mostly by people affected who lead inexperienced masses who do not know the matters. Obviously a tough stance cannot be taken, but it is also obvious, that once all disinterested opinion is collected and certified, we have to take decisions and carry out them with absolute determination. Recently, the Ministry of Public Works has not been supported by other sectors of the administration [...] and attempts at demonstration organized by parties, neighborhood associations, etc..., even with only a few people have forced essential works for the province to stop.

As for the Ministry of Housing delegate, he referred to the thousands of challenges and appeals that had been filed against the Metropolitan General Urban Plan, most of them by neighborhood groups, and the various repairs in public housing that had been forced after long struggles by the residents. He also referred to "illegal, and in some cases violent, occupations by people who have not established their status as beneficiaries, of several hundred homes in Ciutat Badia and in San Cosme".³¹ Similarly, the representative of the Ministry of Education complained about "the strong desire for 'participation' in public affairs [that] involves the interference of Parent-Teacher Associations [...] and the Neighborhood Associations' 'demand' not infrequently 'solutions' against current legislation".³² What this delegate did not recognize was precisely that this legislation contested by social movements was still the Francoist one and for the same reason neighbourhood organizations were maintaining the struggle against the authorities, who, at the same time, admitted their powerlessness in the situation and that they were in a state of "total isolation and total oblivion", forcing them to notify their superiors of the "impossibility to continue in our posts without a serious approach and clarification of our situation."³³

These mayors complained of political disintegration, the crisis of authority and the difficult situation in which they were in after the elections in the summer of 1977, the insults they received in the numerous popular protests, the coverage and collaboration offered by the press to these actions, the pressures of the urban social movements and the municipal political party committees that were supervising their acts, the complaints of retired or unemployed workers and, finally, the insubordination of municipal officials who were organizing constant assemblies and joining unions. This situation was also reproduced in the Rubí district, where the mayor admitted that "the rise of the 'neighborhood associations' and their constant interventions in 1977, which revealed their real mission as a labor political project, forced the resignation of the mayor and then of

³¹In fact, housing occupations spread throughout other neighborhoods and cities from the summer of 1977, happening again in this massive form in 1978 and 1979.

³²AHGCB, "Reunión de S.E. con Delegados de Ministerios 1977". Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 444. Reunión de S.E. con delegados de ministerios 1977.

³³AHGCB, Collective letter from several Mayors of Barcelona province to Civil Governor José María Belloch, October 10, 1977. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 328. Subsecretaría de la Gobernación.

some city councilors”.³⁴ In a letter to the civil governor in September of that year, the Mayor of Sabadell –substitute of another who had resigned after the general strike of 1976 – and the City Council claimed that the situation was “increasingly precarious and unsustainable” because

We support on our backs someone else's burdens, [...] we have resisted to the limit of our strength. [...] We are accused of lack of representation [...]. If socio-political conditions of the country have changed and new institutions have been created where new men have gained access, the municipalities are still the same, arousing constant invectives by those groups who assumed popular representation [...] our administration has neither form nor support, [...] it is obsolete in a society devoid of any appeal of authority, we are at the mercy of their demands [...].³⁵

The urban social movements could not force all political change in the sense that they were demanding for some years – not so much because of the limits of local democratization, which was achieved in April 1979 with the local elections, but rather because of the lack of a true grassroots, participatory and horizontal democracy at the national political level. What is certain, however, is that their actions, struggles, protests and constant pressure on the authorities, even as an undercurrent to the political parties that focused mainly on institutional battles from 1977 onwards, were essential to block a continuity solution to the dictatorship and to the definitive acceptance of several demands such as the right to adequate housing and the need to build neighborhoods and cities based on urban standards that emerged largely through their own proposals and actions.

³⁴ Murillo, Manuel. *40 años de Rubí*. Rubí [the author], 1995, p. 174

³⁵ AHGCB, Collective letter from Sabadell councilors to Civil Governor, September 19, 1977. Fondo Gobernadores Civiles. Caja 360. CG: 47. Ayuntamiento de Sabadell 1976-1978.