Against indifference: Interweaving public spaces.

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ABSTRACT.

Starting from the concept of public place as a dynamic construction (Arendt, Innerarity), we examine some cross-boundary experiences in public spaces in Barcelona, in 2007-2008. We consider some examples of projects which favour a democratic experience, and their limitations: the Catalan government in school-neighbourhood, a science museum, an independent radio programme, a public library. From the actual examples of how people learn to participate in public places in Barcelona, we pondered on what we, as educators, can learn from those experiences. We reflected on the ways in which people learn, the kinds of spaces that arise, the positioning of participants within the public spaces and the different spheres of the public, as well as the boundaries that rise from the very awareness of the action of making the public and where it is made.

1. INTRODUCTION.

Every day, decisions are taken that alter or maintain conditions, including personal decisions on health and personal conditions which affect others. The agents who take the main decisions can be more or less indifferent to the interests of their fellow citizens. But ignorance or indifference can also prevent the citizens who are affected by those decisions from participating. The remedy to this situation does not lie exclusively in increasing the number of schools or teachers or even improving schools alone, and structural conditions will not change exclusively due to more or less schooling opportunities.

Participation and public interests take place and develop at very different levels, and in different fields of interests: Schools can be a public space. But the power of the school is limited in terms of space, time, target public, influence, and the capacity to assimilate realities that are not comprised within the institutional borders. The mass media and other public spaces can reach more locally, in depth, and over a wider range of age and culture combinations. They may
constitute means for more direct action. The policy makers, the main financial, economic, and scientific power occupy altogether different places, but they need labour, consumers, votes, public support. They also need long term ecologic and humanistic perspectives.

Educating ourselves as citizens able to understand and have a say, no matter how indirectly, in the material conditions we share, as well as in the cultural and conceptual constructions that govern the existing structures, might be a step towards contemplating the building, from the bottom, of a more democratic society. Public spaces, and learning to participate in them, could provide a link between demanding a greater participation in material conditions (jobs, housing, income, health, transport, administration, information, control) and creating the opportunities for understanding and getting to know about the world we live in (sciences, technical and social skills, philosophy, arts, religions).

A joint authorship.
Both of us, Beatriz and Melitta, live in Barcelona. Although we go to different Universities for our respective PhD programs in Education and seldom have time to meet, we both believe in the power of people to rise above unfavourable circumstances and struggle through education and solidarity for a better world. We believe that people nowadays do not rely solely on school for their education. We are also aware of the many questionings and challenges that some educational agents, whether they are in the position of teachers, students, monitors, government officials, are dealing with, and some of the ways in which they are responding. We are part of this struggle. We teach traditional subjects like maths, science or English, to private students of all ages at their home or place of work, and also at more spontaneous formations in the community (for example, Melitta does occasional volunteer work for language development at the local library). Besides, Bea has a radio program on Saturdays, where people from the audience can participate by e-mail, telephone or otherwise to give their opinion and ask questions. Moreover, Bea has participated as a monitor at workshops for a science exhibition. We have a first-hand experience of the two-way road of learning through participation, across the boundaries of classrooms, age, culture, life and community experience.

We don’t believe society is or should be a homogeneous block where differences are annulled or ignored. Neither do we believe that society is a mosaic of juxtaposed indifferent detachable pieces. Rather than that, we feel society is a way for us people to travel together. The quality of the trip depends on how well we can relate to the material conditions and to each other. It is the experience of friendship, participation and well-being which creates the utopian image of what to expect. We keep witnessing and experiencing that inner personal growth springs from dealing with others, and that life with others involves processes over time, learning, giving and losing as much as growing, but no personal growth can happen without somewhere that grows along, where growing is possible. It is only among others that we can be different and make a difference. This is something that has to be learnt, and the first step is against indifference.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

2.1 Overall pedagogical view.
We are indebted to many educators, but if we have to pick one who has had a major influence on the way we view education and life, we can safely name Paulo Freire and his idea that education is a tool for freedom, empowerment, happiness and social justice for all human beings. Those are the goals of education and they, rather than schools or any other institution, represent our starting point. Not as simple abstract concepts, but as abstract concepts that have issued from the experience of witnessing and participating in actual people’s lives transformed by the making of tools of inclusion like literacy or other skill learning.

2.2 Specific concepts.
Following that abstract concepts are engendered by experience, we consider that SPACE, or PLACE is the actualization of a “WHERE?”
When you answer the question: “Where are you going this weekend?” by saying “I’m staying home” meaning you are going shopping and taking the children to a birthday party (drop the rubbish on the way) and you are planning to talk to your cousin who lives in another country, you are talking about doing things, and about relations, but of course you would not be able to do those things without an actual set of buildings and streets and a market, a working telephone, some money, a few skills, and a notion that what you do or keep from doing makes or will make a difference, sooner or later.

So, our concept is action-related and dynamic. It is about materialization, but not just that. It has to do with the making an action or phenomenon real and organic. It has to do with places and distances in the sense that scientists understood this in the 19th century when they were trying to measure the earth in every conceivable way, but only partly so. It has more to do with territorial relations among living organisms, specifically human beings. And once it is about relations, space is a concept related to travelling distances: conceiving, creating, shortening, bridging distances among people and each other, among people and their goals and their fears and the obstacles that have to be overcome. There is always a material element in a space, but we are dealing with a space in which communication is possible. And sometimes the first thing that needs to be done in order to communicate is imagining a distance, like when we want to talk about what is going on with our own body, our emotions. We have to create an outside image, find words that another person will understand, appeal to the other person’s feelings, experiences and knowledge. The conception of distance is both creative and relational. We have chosen the example of “home” because our concept is dialectic, and although home is the opposite of “public” it is, just for this reason, one of the sources of the making of public spaces.

PUBLIC SPACES then are the actualization of a where regarding public life. We have mentioned Paulo Freire as a reference for our general educational viewpoint. A more direct inspiration for this paper came from reading the book on Social Justice and Intercultural Education, especially on the experiences of ICT on trainee teachers and students of minority ethnic backgrounds, by
Ghazala Bhatti (2007), and the paper by Morwena Griffiths and her colleagues: *Learning to be in Public Spaces* (...) (2007). These teachers-researchers draw from Hannah Arendt the concept of Public spaces, which is an active response of people to their ‘specific, objective, worldly interests’ that draws them into collective action. They define the characteristics of such a space:

> It must be a space in which people can interact socially in a joint enterprise, so although it need not be a physical location it must be a place where people can enter discussion with everybody else there. (Griffiths et al. 2007:54-55)

What is inspiring in both articles is the telling of actual experiences of joint teacher-student activities which came to be cultural productions, stories of overcoming children and adults’ difficulty believing they have “the capacity of exercising voice and agency”, and furthermore extending this capacity beyond school and the limits of classroom activities, and the ensuing awareness of participating creatively into society.

The interaction of people to reach their objective interests entails the making of a set of conceptual references, which present two distinct major aspects: a verbal, usually written and institutionalized legal system, and an ideological, more difficult to grasp system of attitudes, ideas, and beliefs.

Two very important concepts constitute the basis of the official discourse on the public thing: rights and duties. These two concepts are intimately related, but there isn’t a direct correspondence between rights and duties. Simple logic would imply that the notion of having a right entails a set of corresponding duties, and vice-versa. Actually, just as there is a division of labour, there is a division between rights and duties, and many tensions that arise from the unequal appropriation of rights and duties.

Besides these two concepts that constitute the basis in the discourse which is instrumental for the making of the public, there are two other concepts which are traditionally considered as belonging to other areas of understanding, like social sciences or philosophy, but which we feel should necessarily be included in the understanding of the making of the public.

One concept that is crucial for the actualization of a where is communication. For ethologists, like Richard Dawkins (1989) communication happens when one living being influences the behaviour or the state of the nervous system of another one. So there cannot be communication without a response from a living being. Sending signals is not, in itself, communication. We feel that the same principle applies to social realities. Juan Luis Iramain (2006:31) states that there is communication when a meaning is shared, and that only happens at the moment of reception. He emphasizes that it is the recipient who is the subject of communication, and reminds us that the words communication, common, and community have the same etymology.

As Morwena Griffiths and her colleagues point out, the existence of public spaces is not enough for everybody to use it. Making use of public places
requires skills that have to be learnt! As we have seen, not only does it require different types of skills at a given moment, it can require a whole social process of making which includes personal skills, but which also includes material subjective, interpersonal, institutional and generally social doings and circumstances.

Therefore, another concept which is essential for the existence and the making of public spaces is EDUCATION. Very often the concept of education is limited to the institutions that a society imposes to determine what kind of education it wants from its citizens. There used to be some logic and purpose for this identification which we feel no longer applies to current historic circumstances. Although the traditional institutions devoted to education are important, they are increasingly inter-dependent on other institutions (health programs, for instance) as well as extra-institutional entities and dynamics. Although we may use the concept of Communication as a general concept that includes educational functions, it is important to make a difference. Communication implies a response. Education implies a sustained behaviour backed by attitudes, principles and beliefs. It also implies a model of reference for immediate as well as deferred action, as Mercè Izquierdo (1999) reminds us. Both can be developed and learnt.

The narratives contained in the book edited by Ghazala Bhatti and others (2007) inspired us to look around for instances of learning to be in public places within the city of Barcelona. Rather than making an exhaustive list, which would be quite impossible, we decided to focus on a few examples that were approachable, and draw some conclusions from there.

3. THIS STUDY.

With the above concepts in mind, and inspired by narratives of struggle for inclusion, we decided to look around for concrete instances of learning to be in public places in the city of Barcelona. We are including basically examples that we know something about from direct experience. We could mention quite a few, but the following examples will suffice to base some remarks, and specially to convey the conclusion that this is a field that needs exploring urgently, if we are really concerned about a more responsible and effective participation from caring citizens, if we want a citizenship for a world that works towards peace, wellbeing and social justice.

Our first goal, then, was to answer the question: how do people learn to be and participate in public spaces in Barcelona? By trying to answer this question we observed that different ways to communicate give rise to different public spaces, and that this, in turn, generates different ways of learning to participate in public affairs. This gave rise to a second question: What can we educators learn from people’s learning about being and participating in public spaces?

4. HOW DO PEOPLE LEARN TO BE AND PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC SPACES IN BARCELONA?

We observed that, contrary to some opinions around us, most spaces of traditional top-bottom communication can become spaces for learning to
participate with others, or to reflect with others on the common good, and that
this is actually happening, as has always been the case, within boundaries.
We don’t mean to make a list of all there is, but just talk about things we have
been more or less directly in touch, so we can draw from our experience to
reflect on both the spaces and the limits of participation. The following are all
instances of public spaces where people learn to be.

4.1 The media.
There seems to be a widespread notion that the mass media are a source of
passive consumption and that it does not foster critical thinking. As Daniel
Innerarity (2006) points out, this notion has been transmitted by the media
themselves. We observed that, however often this might be so, it doesn’t
necessarily have to be, as the examples below come to show.

4.1.1 Letters to the media agents.
In ADN, a paper of free distribution to the users of public transportation in
Barcelona, journalist and writer Espido Freire commented in her column on the
last page on the 18th of January 2008:

Readers often send me e-mails telling me what they think. Almost all of
them say they find the paper on the bus or the underground. (...) They
are on their way to work, they lead normal lives, with very short and very
valued gaps in their time. They are, in general, very beautiful e-mails,
and it surprises me that they almost always include some abstract
thinking. (...) Journalists who (...) observe readers from a distance, as if
they were nothing but a driven homogeneous mass, are wrong. We
[readers and I] share this fondness for reflecting on men, women,
injustice, hypocrisy, deception, and suffering. What they are really
interested in is in what will survive (...) what allows them to go on thinking
and writing (...) no matter how much threats of lack of culture or low
levels of reading hover over us.

4.1.2 The audience response to the radio activities.
Bea has a weekly radio program called El aleteo desequilibrado (Unbalanced
wing-flap) on CONTRABANDA, FM 91.4, Barcelona. The program covers
different subjects with a gender perspective. The public (not always an
“audience”) have different ways to participate:

1) Audience phone calls or e-mails to the program.
Bea recalls some special moments that seem to be an eruption of a deep
conversation between the individuals who contact the radio and a long history of
social dealings. On one occasion, a woman phoned to tell about how reading
Simone de Beauvoir, many years back, had awakened her to a long and
profound process of awareness for which she felt grateful. On another occasion
a young man pointed out that if human health is related to what we eat, we
should be more careful of the living condition of the animals we eat. After a
program on romantic love, a man sent an e-mail expressing how confused he
was. After all, he had always tried to be such a nice man towards women, but
he was left with a feeling of not knowing what on earth women want.
2) The radio takes to the streets.
From time to time, the radio people go out to cover various activities organized by different collectives. They are approached and receive precious feedback on the current events that are being covered, and also on radio programs, especially on programs where a survey has been conducted in the street. Sometimes this is an opportunity to contact groups who are later on going to be invited to be interviewed in live-programs. Some groups that have been interviewed after such contacts are MAMBO, a group of women squatters, and women who demonstrate, do research in natural or social sciences, or in some way are involved with social movements in other countries, like the MST (Movement of landless rural workers) in Brazil, or the Zapatistas in Mexico.

4.2 School.
School and community joint projects.
El Prat de Llobregat is where your plane will land if you go to Barcelona. It is a 15 to 20 minute drive from the centre of the city of Barcelona. Of course, there is a Telepizza shop there where you can work part time if you are a student in Barcelona and can speak a little English, because many international travellers who have to spend a night or two between flights or business will phone to have a cheap meal delivered to their room. Sant Cosme is a neighbourhood in El Prat. If you order a pizza to be delivered there, the attendant will tell you: “ah, but if you live in Sant Cosme your pizza will be delivered in front of the police station, not to your door.” The gangs, the violence, the ghettos make people afraid of getting into this neighbourhood, and the people who live there resent the rest of the world. Of course, this situation reflects in the schools, the work market, and in all aspects of social life. There seemed to be no way out of this vicious circle, but the PEESC (Plan Educativo de Entorno de Sant Cosme) has come to change this view. It hasn’t brought a solution to all evils, but it has brought hope and a line of action. The PEESC (Equipo de coordinación PEESC, 2008) is a joint project of the Generalitat (Government of Catalunya) and the town hall which includes the schools, the teachers, the families, many professionals and entities in the community (educational, social, health, etc). All five schools in the neighbourhood from pre-school to adult education work in a net and there has been an opening of the schools to the community, as well as the participation in the Consell Veïnal (neighbours’ council). This is a good reminder that a school, as a public place, includes a lot more than curricula, and reaches far beyond classrooms.

4.3 The traditional public places.
We are used to considering museums and libraries as places for public use, but we seldom think of them as more than a few rooms where very few people do little besides attending and obtaining some information in a rather passive way. This is changing significantly, but a lot needs to be done and can be done for the education for participation in such spaces.
4.3.1 The science museum.

The exhibition *Approaching Science: from research to innovation* was from October 2006 to August 2007 in Palau Robert, in Barcelona. It was designed to explain the Catalan Government’s (Generalitat de Catalunya) plans about research and development in science to a general public, having in mind young people from primary and secondary schools. It was focused on the relation between scientific knowledge and technological innovation.

The most interesting aspect was that active participation was required from visiting students. Scientific and ethical problems were presented to be discussed in smaller groups and later in a single larger group. Bea was a monitor and she had the opportunity to interact with around a thousand people there. These activities allowed the youngsters to grow awareness to the relations among science, technology and society. It forced them to talk about science but also about their lives and beliefs and take decisions. The activities were presented as role playing games over 9 different workshops.

One workshop was “histories of science”. A hypothetic case of a factory that polluted a place was presented (actually based on a real situation). The students had to think as if they were an engineer, a journalist, a company boss, a factory worker, a doctor, and other inhabitants, all people who lived in the town except for the general manager, and take decisions in accordance to their roles. Then, at another stage, they had to forget about their former roles and talk about what decisions they themselves would take in a similar situation. The students at the beginning kept asking what the monitor thought they should say, but eventually they understood that their opinions were expected and valued and that, if they projected this experience as citizens, they could and should take active roles in social decisions related to science.

Another workshop was about how to face an epidemic situation, and the students in cooperative groups worked as scientists to find a solution. They also had to think in terms of public health, and the measures that had to be taken to prevent a new outbreak. Finally, they had to think about how they would explain their findings and decisions to society at large. Laia, a young student who had participated, later wrote in a blog:

> That workshop on epidemics was really good because every group had a concrete function and it led me to understand that behind an epidemic there are many people who research and many groups who, from the cases, formulate hypotheses about the illnesses and the solutions we can find.

4.3.2 The public library.

*Vapor Vell* is the name of the municipal library in the neighbourhood of Sants. It has several notice-boards strategically placed, which show ads like: “join in the readers’ club”, or “learn about ITCs” followed by an indication of place within the library, and a time. Melitta was attracted to one that read: “join in the language exchange project” a few years ago, and showed up for the day when people met to speak Catalan. Very soon she was also attending the English-speaking
group, on Thursday evenings, from 9:30 to 11PM. One of the characteristics of the language exchange groups is that, no matter how many teachers attend the session, nobody has the role of teacher, but one person is needed to be the expert leader. The participants are free to attend as often as they wish, they can have any level of proficiency. During the two last years, many people have appeared. Participants who have either a very low or very high level of language proficiency have never come back, with a couple of notorious exceptions on both ends of the language mastery spectrum. A few participants with an intermediate level come regularly. The number of the assiduous participants is over twenty, but on any given Thursday there are seldom more than 16 or 17. Most of the participants are well acquainted with each other, but there is a constant shuffling of faces and voices. The person in the role of the group monitor prepares certain activities, games, brings some short text or suggestion for topic of conversation, just like any language teacher would, but there are no tests, no pressure for anybody to attend, except everybody is very disappointed if the monitor announces that she won’t be coming the following week. In any case, no matter what the monitor has brought or prepared, most of the time is spent discussing topics brought up by the other participants. One of the few rules that have been set among the participants is that we can always express whatever we feel, but if anybody feels hurt or offended, he or she has to express this in turn. In general, this has been a source of learning about each other and ourselves, but the monitor has a very demanding role as a mediator, and ends up having to resort to his or her authority maybe more than in a regular class, where the institution plays the invisible role of imposing self-restraint.

We feel that if the language exchange at the library is a public space, the topics raised by the participants can all be considered of public interest.

4.4 Profit-making companies.

When people ask us what we do, we usually tell them that we are teachers, so the question that follows is about the school we teach in. Neither Bea nor Melitta teach at any particular school.

When Melitta says she teaches at companies, or to professionals such as lawyers or physicians, the reactions vary. She may get a very positive response, something like “oh, you have a real occupation, then!” or “so you do something important!” or, on the contrary, something that sounds like “so, you are a filthy mercenary working for the advancement of the capitalist system and consumerist values.” Of course, both kinds of conceptions are true in a sense, but they could be said about most occupations, and besides, they correspond to complementary aspects of reality.

We feel that it is high time we understand that within a capitalist society, we are all more or less working for the system, but for the same reason we can all be working against it from a very privileged position: from within.
4.4.1 The in-company language classes.
Some students are executives who need the language to make better business, both for their companies and their self-improvement, some are workers who need to communicate with claims on production problems, raw material, technologies, communication with other workers from other companies in other countries. Some of these students resent the fact that they have to use a foreign language, and although they learn to be efficient enough sending and interpreting e-mails, they tend to refuse to use the language for conversation. A lot of negotiation takes place in order to have some conversation going. Recently, Melitta decided to quit one such group. To her surprise, Marta, a student who had been especially problematic during the course phoned her at home, some time after the teacher had quit, to express her thoughts and feelings:

*I always had the feeling that I had to oppose the company, because they have always exploited us so much, but I have had the opportunity to see that in a way I belong to that company, and maybe there are ways in which to have a say in what goes on, not just within the company, but as somebody belonging, and therefore acting from the company. I still don't know what we should do, or what we can do, but the language classes forced us to think and talk, and since you left, I have missed that opportunity terribly.*

4.5 Non-profit making organizations.
Barcelona is becoming fertile soil for the blooming of NPOs. Volunteers meet people on the streets to explain one cause or another, and people can talk to them, sign for or against, ask questions or even state their opposition to the cause. Couples adopt children from third world countries through NPOs and comment about the process with friends and relatives. NPOs also represent an alternative destination for tax money, and this circumstance also favours reflection and comments among citizens. Non-profit making organizations are also becoming an increasing source of employment. In the case of volunteer work, having worked for no wages can look as a plus in a CV. Besides, there is a movement from some profit-oriented organizations, like La Caixa, to engage in activities “for the social good”.

4.6 The State.
The State has different channels to communicate with citizens. Some are strongly institutional, like schools, universities, hospitals, health centres, but big campaigns take place through a multiplicity of channels, as we can see from billboards and advertisements in the media.
One thing that has provoked some debate in and through the media over the past couple of years has been the inclusion in the school curriculum of compulsory education of a subject called “*Educación para la ciudadanía*” (Education for citizenship).

For some or our students, who see it as a school subject, it just means an extra load on their overcrowded schedule. Some opponents to the project see it as the opportunity for the government to brainwash the vulnerable passive minds
of children. Some educators, through projects like *Proyecto Atlántida*, consider this subject as a link to articulate the action of children and youngsters, teachers, schools, and communities into a joint education. It represents, as Antonio Bolívar (2007:10) points out, school is not the only educational context there is, and teachers are not the only educational agents. Family and the media have an important educational role. Therefore, it is important not to reduce the project of educating for citizenship to transferring educational responsibilities to schools, increasing the vulnerability of teachers, as they could not possibly cope with them on an exclusive basis.

Another school subject that is being introduced in the curricula without the controversial media coverage is “*Ciencias para el mundo contemporáneo*” (Science for the contemporary world) which aims at dealing with current topics of scientific basis, enabling the students to acquire basic skills to look for information and build an informed opinion.

Building citizenship cannot be limited to education through schools, but if it is hard for schools to cope with this heavy responsibility, communicating from the State is not an easy task, when the State has lost the prestige and the power it used to hold. Sandra Castillo (2006) points at the problem generated by the lack of two-way communication between the citizens and the State. Although she refers to another country, we believe this applies very well to the Spanish State and the citizens of Barcelona, as it most probably applies elsewhere: A lack of interest from the population makes it hard to convey the information that would be essential for them to fully exercise their rights:

> This vicious circle of lack of communication operates to deteriorate the quality of the action of the State, which does not efficiently perfect its functions. This erodes the condition of ‘citizens’ of the people who drift away from the responsibilities granted by citizenship. (146)

Of course, there are powerful historical reasons for the people’s mistrust of the State. But an indifferent *laissez-faire* towards National States from the citizens might lead to a further colonization of the States by capital, global or national. These are worries, though, that lie beyond the realm of this paper.

5. **WHAT CAN WE EDUCATORS LEARN FROM THE PEOPLE’S LEARNING IN PUBLIC SPACES?**

Having chosen a few instances of actual learning to be in public spaces, we can reflect on what is the public space that we are learning from those experiences. If we focus on what we have observed about the scope of the public, based on our examples, we can consider the aspects and dynamics of WHAT, WHO, WHERE and HOW: What public spaces? Where within each particular public space, or among the spaces? Who are the people who learn (who learns participation, who learns exclusion, what participation, what exclusion; Where do people situate themselves in the geography or ecology of inclusion-exclusion? Which are the ways in which communication, participation and learning occur; how do people turn occasional participation into education?
5.1 What public spaces?
The public good is greatly symbolic. Every symbol is connected to actual referents, people who interpret and misinterpret it, and also conditions for its relative values. Public spaces are a good example of this connection. Even a public swimming pool or a park bench depend on rules and public money that determine who, what time, how, how often it is used and maintained, in aspects which are often separated: participation and inclusion, rights and duties. We can speak about public spaces in terms of spheres, levels, or power relations that determine degrees and forms of inclusion-exclusion and action.

5.1.1 Different spheres.
From our experience in Barcelona we can see that there are different spheres in which public life comes into being. It is the spheres that determine the physical places for public life to come into being. Maybe the more visible spheres for the actualization of public life are, on one hand, the activities that revolve around the State, Companies, and Non Profit Organizations; on the other hand, there is the sphere of Science and scientists, which deserves special consideration, although it is beyond the purpose of this paper to probe deeper. Like for education, the State seems to have a limited say in what scientists and institutions which have scientific goals do. Yet, science is more and more a public good and an activity which relates to the making of citizenship. It is a challenge for the citizens and their actualizations of democratic representation to relate in more aware, better instructed ways. On the other hand, it is a challenge for science to serve the common good. Nevertheless, there is a trend towards de-legitimizing or excluding science or deep thought and knowledge from the daily lives of citizens in the image of their identity. So, even though scientific activity can be related to either the State or NPOs or profit making companies for funding, interests, and economic dealings, there is a feeling that science is the doing of individual scientists who operate in a world which has been severed from our own, and is often idealized or despised, and lacks the actuality of the public good: something which belongs to all and is therefore worth participating in and developing.

5.1.2 Levels of the public.
Within the different spheres of public being, there are levels. To the effects of this paper, we can talk about three:

a) **Non-public** (either by negation or in opposition to the public interest). It is possible and even likely to find seeds and possibilities to develop public spaces in places which are non-public (everybody will agree on the influence that intimate reading or family life can have over future politicians, for example). On the other hand, there is a public aspect in every actualization of non-public life. The owner of a successful business can have only his own interests in mind, but the effects of his or her actions are sure to affect public affairs. Also, as Marta’s words remind us, working for a company with capitalistic goals and practices does not exclude people from being citizens, have social responsibilities, and try to find ways in which to participate in public life.

b) **Non-domestic, not intimate**: talking in public, participating in a neighbours’ association, represents a very concrete, although reduced
level of participating in public life. This is the level where we have taken our concrete examples for this paper. Acting on this level can be a useful link between non public and powerful public politics.

c) **Important political or economic decisions** that affect a nation, a geographical area, or the whole planet. This is a very high level and affects the lives and way of living of huge amounts of people, but it can be too abstract to grasp and direct participation at this level seems to be restrained to the chosen few who appear as having the natural merits endorsed by the popular will, who tend to be the sons and daughters of the former big-decision takers.

5.1.3 Where?

Both within and among these spheres and levels there are correspondences, channels of action and learning, articulation modes, being created and developed and abandoned in various degrees. All these connections feed on power relations which, in turn, are fuelled by interests of oppression, resistance, needs and drives.

The public both as a good or an indefinite set of rights, and as a responsibility, is taken hold of by people, separately, into wealth and rights on one hand, and responsibility on the other hand, in various combinations. Inclusion and exclusion fall accordingly. Also, within each public space that works there are active and passive ways to participate which are learnt by the individual participants, and also by the group. Considering the inheritances of past social practices, the current ways do not necessarily improve in fairness or education. (After playing the role of a supporting audience, the group might put pressure on me to continue playing that role).

Within each instance of the making of a public space, there are boundaries, limitations and exclusions. No place is all inclusive at all time and every aspect, as we can observe in the examples we have considered: So, if we consider the language exchange group at the public library, we will see that a great deal of topics of conversation have to do with fields that have traditionally been the object of science. Nevertheless, the approach during the sessions is not scientific. Almost by definition, a conversation on viruses, exploring Mars, animal or human rights, or transgenic agriculture, is conducted at a low level of expertise. Participants learn from each other one or two facts that make them wonder or enable them to formulate an opinion, but they also learn to keep at a level which might exclude the systematic learning of scientific attitudes, like perseverance, rigour, and the need to probe deeper into the subject, or the application of scientific methodologies in the pursuit of knowledge.

In the in-company language classes among workers, the participants learn to obtain information and talk about the specific tasks they do, and they also have a chance of gaining awareness about their situation, and their own specific working condition within the company, but they do not learn to think of themselves as sharing conditions with other workers, and some of them even learn to gain power of dominance over their workmates. Unions and political parties can still play an important role.
In the example of the science museum activities, on the other hand, the student visitors could gain awareness of some attitudes necessary to a community oriented scientific action, thus complementing the school learning, transforming school learning into community education helped by science. Nevertheless, the often frustrating day-to-day making of science can only be conducted over time, and schools, universities, and labs are better physical institutional places for it.

In turn, schools, universities and science-oriented institutions in general would greatly benefit, from the point of view of the society they are supposed to serve, from the vision of a contextualized science oriented to the public welfare. Besides, as no science can be fully objective or neutral, the advancement of a scientific attitude is not possible without considerations from different social and scientific agents, on which science is being taught, learnt, forwarded.

5.2 Who are the people who learn (who learns participation, who learns exclusion, what participation, what exclusion)

As we can see from what the people say when they phone Bea’s radio program, or when they participate in the language exchange program at the library, many people are learning to participate, demanding rights, and getting involved with small or micro-projects (recycling, voting, signing a petition which is submitted to them). Many people are also learning to go one level deeper in speaking out (internet, letters to the media). From the experience of the children at the science museum, we have witnessed what a wonder it is when people realize that a would-be catastrophe or plague can actually be fought against by people united through joining forces among scientific awareness, social coordination and personal commitment!

But sometimes an increasing awareness in the possibilities also entails an increasing awareness in the limits (*English is not for me: I don’t have time, it’s for the boss, not for the people like me who have to work so hard. I might be able to help in case of a plague, but the scientific research must be in the hands of scientists.*) This may be a healthy realization, but it may be pushed to some negative sorts of participation. As it turns out, just as people learn active participation, they may also be learning to be left out or to participate by excluding themselves. This role-assuming from the part of social actors within public acting has come down from long ago, but it is important to recall the existence of a process which is not receding with time. On one hand there are the officially, discursively self-excluded: The powerful: companies, politicians, governments, unions, scientists, the army. On the other hand we find the ones who may not always be officially recognized as such. Their exclusion is, discursively, nobody’s wish. They are, so to speak, excluded “by their own merits”: they are relatively powerless, although not hopelessly so. They are the poor, the ignorant, the foreigners, the different ones.

There is an acknowledged wish for the excluded to belong to an inclusive world, but, it is often a vague, romantic feeling, expressed among deep contradictions: In the course of language exchange sessions, just as it happens in class, a
participant will say things like: “scientists don’t know anything” but then he or she will give you detailed pseudo-scientific explanations on the drugs other people should take, based on statements like: “it’s serious because it was on TV” (or in the paper), and very often things are, discursively, absolutely right or wrong based on the scientific trend the speaker supports.

5.3 How: ways in which communication, participation and learning occur.

The spheres and levels in the public are intimately related with who occupies what roles and relations. Increasing awareness is directed towards the limits and exclusions rather than actual, practical ways to pierce through them, as Marta’s words made us realize. Marta’s class consciousness is limited to “belonging to the working class of salaried workers within the factory” and the exclusion of the teacher prevented her from discussing important issues during the English conversation class. But just as Marta, many people who are increasingly aware of their need to participate are growingly anxious or discouraged.

Some teachers, are overwhelmed and aware they are performing badly, that what they do is not enough (and defensive-aggressive about it). As Pilar, one participant at the language exchange at the library said:

*It is all very well to say that School, the community, and the media have to work together, but how do I do this, how do I effectively play my part. How do I listen to students when they are going to be evaluated on what they know about the programs, the books, and through the point of view of somebody who has no idea what their life is like, anyway! Teachers need special training.*

Also, many people still talk of competition among media, school, State and citizens’ interests. The interests of global capital are kept out of the picture as if they belonged to another world, so when young people finally get a job working for a big company, they are either doomed to not having to worry about the public interest any more, because they fall into the disgrace of becoming bourgeois, or they are saved from the petty worries of penniless idealistic people and become ambitious and aggressive businesspeople with a realistic sense of the world.

6 CONCLUSIONS.

People often refer to the Ancient Greek Polis model of citizen realization of the public. That model was based on the exclusion of women, slaves, and business people. As a society, we have taken the challenge to include every human being in the conceptual right to be citizens. But a right to be doesn’t imply automatic being. A right implies possibilities, opportunities, creating and developing conditions to ensure and take in the consequences of the actualization of the right. It implies duties, awareness, responsibilities, learning communication and education, building a body of knowledge and attitudes and mechanisms for sharing and participation and a need for mobility. All this could
not possibly limit itself to the work and doings of separate individuals and groups. Although it demands every individual’s participation, it is only possible in a society which organizes itself for the achievement of such goals as universal citizenship and education. While a nobility title or a family name are given tokens, a right needs to be actualized. It requires learning and the making of conditions in which to take place. Having a right given by a society requires that the right has to be actualized by those who have it, but this in turn requires passing it to everybody else at this moment and everybody to come, for everybody.

The idea of universal citizenship and rights is only a few centuries old. If we want to grow in it we need to grow as a society that communicates and educates. The concept of universal citizenship implies a complex, very inclusive concept of what is public. As it embraces huge and numerous differences, it demands a commitment against indifference and a management of inclusion which cannot be left to one specific class of citizens, within one and only unit of space. To reach the goal of a dynamic citizenship always in the making, communication, education, and knowledge are crucial. Nevertheless, no single institution or medium can ever be enough. It is essential that we understand that whatever the place we are working from, we have to acknowledge the other public places, the other agents, the different positioning possibilities within each place, and include others’ knowledge and actions within our joint action. Therefore, we need to learn to use the media, and specially, we have to address media agents, real people, so that they can address not just the abstract “general public” equaled to consumers, but real living people. We feel that the State, in spite of its diminished social role and deteriorated image still has a definite and strong role in articulating the action of the main institutions and it still might be a powerful tool for the rule of law.

Schools are still an essential and basic public space where people acquire skills and knowledge, social and scientific, but it is an archaic concept to separate it from the discussion of the media, and of students’ lives (work, home, knowledge) and museums, library, chess club, etc. where various kinds of knowledge and skills are also learnt and practiced. And this interweaving includes national or local official campaigns on public social or health issues, which have to be highly education-concerned. Some of them are, some seem to be just propaganda, but the basic general education should allow people to reflect and discriminate. As a matter of fact, as there are more agents that are fulfilling teaching and training roles, and more socially legitimate sources of learning, students have to learn to learn, to discriminate, and here is a new role for the school. It is simply not acceptable for any institution to declare that all else is wrong, or inferior.

The same goes for unions and professional associations. We feel that workers are not only workers for production or against being exploited. They are full citizens and should have the right and the responsibility to develop as such.

We propose 1) working towards building awareness among all social actors, including people of all ages and experience, within and without institutions; 2) a call to people in all different spheres and levels of the public to, not only not
ignore the others, but to find ways to articulate different spheres and levels of the public. Sustained actions between the educational authorities and a local television channel, or between a health campaign, a library contest, a museum, and a worker's union, can be examples of things that can be done; 3) educating through action, not mainly at a theoretical level, to develop skills towards the public interest in different spheres and levels; training teachers jointly with media professionals aiming joint action. This is a highly complex task which cannot be learnt on one's own.

Accepting or tolerating all differences should not mean becoming an indifferent society. On the contrary. But caring and participation have to be learnt and coordinated so that it becomes a constant feature of our society, and not empty discourse or passing fad.

Public life involves the possibility of access and participation of all. All human activity is of public interest, including the defense of privacy, intimacy, and not overloading some people with more work or responsibility than they can handle. Organizing and articulating all public spaces cannot be left either to individuals or groups alone, nor to governments alone. There has to be a constant activity of checking, supervising, communicating, educating, upwards as well as downwards, from sphere to sphere and backwards, weaving the tapestry of a new democracy where the public good springs from diverse communions of intimacies, flows through multiple channels of care, to rain on differences, where knowledge and wisdom can grow against the draughts of indifference.

NOTES.
1. All translations from languages other than English are our own.
2. Laia, Marta and Pilar are not the people's real names, although the student, factory worker, and teacher whose views we reproduce are real people. Except for Laia, whose words were written, what they said was retrieved from our memory.
3. CONTRABANDA is a free independent radio. Among their aims: “approaching and sharing (...) the work of people, groups and sectors who contribute with values and attitudes capable of affecting the sociocultural landscape of the city, either from a social, artistic or scientific angle” meets their belief that oppression and injustice are partly based on ignorance.

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