

Fundación de los Comunes





Constellation
of the Commons

Date of the interview
March 4, 2019

Location
Madrid, Spain

Collective's name
Fundación de los Comunes

Name of the interviewees
Marisa Pérez Colina

Interviewer
Palmar Álvarez-Blanco

Contact
**fundaciondeloscomunes.
net/en/contacto**

Website
**fundaciondeloscomunes.
net/en**

Translated by
Claudia Hernández

Reviewed by
Emily Bruell



Who are you and what is your relationship with the Fundación de los Comunes (Foundation of the Commons)?

My name is Marisa Pérez Colina. I work as the coordinator of the Fundación de los Comunes. We're currently in Madrid in Traficantes de Sueños (Dream Traffickers) which is one of the members of the Fundación de los Comunes.

What is the Fundación de los Comunes?

Well, Fundación de los Comunes is a network of collectives of action and political production. Right now we're in five cities: Málaga, whose headquarters are La Casa Invisible; Iruña, whose headquarters are Katakarak; Zaragoza, whose headquarters are Nociones Comunes Zaragoza and Barcelona where we have two headquarters: in the Ateneu Candela in Tarasa, and in La Hidra. Finally, there's Madrid with Traficantes de Sueños.

Who started the Fundación de los Comunes and why?

The Fundación de los Comunes is started by a network of activist collectives linked with political action in collectives in the Spanish State. We know each other from fighting for the freedom of the feminist movement. They're people concerned above all with the political area of autonomy, therefore also linked to the reclamation of social centers as spaces of political aggregation and as spaces reproducing the common in towns and cities. We've known each other for a long time and decided to get together to, somehow, try to better focus politically on what we do. That is to say we act in a spontaneous way as a collective, but in this way, we wanted to create spaces where we could think strategically together about how to better use our resources. For example, if we're creating courses, publishing books, we talk about what we want to prioritize as our main concerns. Afterwards, each territory organizes itself because, of course, each territory has very different arguments. It's not the same being politically organized in a city like Zaragoza as in Málaga or in Madrid. Each one has their own space, their own political alliances, they have different issues in their cities, but there are things that we have in common. So, the way to better sharpen our intervention tools and take political action together lies in the things we share. There's that on the one hand. On the other hand, it's also about not competing for resources. At that moment, just after 2011, the bursting of the real estate bubble has already started, the crisis is beginning, but maybe we aren't yet able to predict the extent of its consequences and we still thought that there are public resources, especially from certain cultural institutions, and that we're still going to be able to channel to do formation projects, publishing projects that revert to the common that we try to build in the network. The idea is to not compete for the Institutions' resources but try to direct them to the common sphere. So, if we have a

cooperation agreement with a cultural institution, we can think between all of us what we want to do with that money or who we want to invite, for example, if it's a trip from someone from the United States and it costs a lot, we invite the person and bring them here and they can go to the other cities. We try to decide together what we want to do with the resources and then distribute them in a way that benefits the whole.

Why did you choose a foundation as your legal entity?

The foundation form was chosen because of the administrative control it's subject to, because it's controlled by an administrative entity called a protectorate. It seems hard to believe because the biggest frauds are made from the large foundations, it's true, but our experience in this Foundation is that the poorer foundations are very controlled. Then, also the objectives of a Foundation guarantee very clearly that everything you build materially will never end up serving other purposes than those that the common assembly has decided to designate. For example, if we have an endowment fund right now of thirty thousand euros, being a Foundation gives the security and the guarantee of knowing that money will never be used for instance to buy a building here and use it as tourist housing, but rather when the collective project, for whatever reason, is no longer useful and wants to allocate to another network, that money will always be money used to feed, satisfy, and respond to the same purposes that we decided initially for the Foundation. So, the legal entity guarantees it. For public administrations, in general, the entity of a Foundation is a legal entity that's easier to establish cooperation agreements with. So much so that one of the main purposes of the Foundation is to defend the sustainability of social centers; for us, we're really interested in having a structure that gives us the real possibility of negotiating, of agreeing with the public institutions on a system for them relinquishing the social spaces that make up part of the network. In particular, La Casa Invisible (The Invisible House) has been negotiating with the city government of Málaga for many years to release control of the space. We as a Foundation can sit at that table, finally reaching agreements, hopefully, although right now the political context doesn't seem the most favorable to get that concession for what we see as something beautiful for the common good of the city of Málaga, which is where La Casa Invisible (The Invisible House) is.

What relationship has there been between Fundación de los Comunes and 15M?

The discussions and debates that led to think about the opportunity to create the network and the Foundation happened before it, and I think that none of us could imagine that an event or an insurrection, whatever you want to call it, would happen like the 15M. So, of course, it didn't have to do with the foundation's creation, but it's true that, when it occurred, our discussions were completely flooded by a feeling of happiness that happened to everyone at that moment that's difficult to describe. I would describe it in this way: all of us in the foundation came from spending a long time in collectives, in small battles where we'd thought about self-organized politics, not representation-based politics but rather the construction of spaces of counterpower and autonomous spaces that generate alternatives in the day to day, not in the future, and that are generating material resources so that these alternatives can function and be useful to movements. I've experienced that only in marginal instances, because the world in general isn't paying attention to this and doesn't care how things are going in this area. At least, I felt that upheaval and that sense of marginality and minority. When the 15M exploded into reality and the whole world started talking about non-representation, about assembly, about self-organization,

about rethinking everything because this wasn't working anymore, well -- you can see I'm getting chills all over again. You realize that we're all much more connected than we thought. That, for the Foundation's work, was a new source of motivation because everything suddenly made a lot more sense; it wasn't connected to this marginal thing we'd experienced, it was connected to a massive common thread.

Who coordinates this network and how is the coordination accessed?

In principle, the only coordination figure hired would be me, but we function organically, so there are people from each of the nodes or territories who come to a virtual meeting that we have every month and we do it through a tool called Mumble, which is similar to Skype, and we meet monthly to find out what is happening in each city, we talk about the most tangible parts of each social center where people are organized in these five cities, and then we talk about the political conflicts each node is involved in, whether that be in a feminist movement, in a housing movement, in the anti-racist movement ... We also tell each other what's being done in each place in order to motivate one another and spread information so we can develop ideas that can be implemented as a whole. That meeting is virtual. Then, every three months we meet face-to-face in each of the cities. The idea of rotating and not centralizing in any city seems obvious but difficult to do because it's different meeting in Madrid, which is geographically cheaper for everyone, than meeting in Malaga. We've decided to make that effort because, in reality, the Foundation is made up of a lot more people than those who actually participate in the discussion fora. What inhabits the foundation is much bigger, it's much more fluid then, so even though only one or two people come from Málaga to the virtual meetings, if we go to the social La Casa Invisible and do the meeting there, we know that we're going to see all the people who usually come to the meetings and many people who don't usually come, but who are friends with people who do a lot of work in the Foundation, or other people who we don't know but they come by La Casa Invisible and that's our chance to talk together, to mix it up, to get to know each other more, to kind of land in this concrete area where the Foundation manifests itself.

You're employed as a general coordinator of the Fundación de los Comunes. What is the story behind the creation of the Foundation as a legal entity? How did you become its coordinator?

When the people in the collectives began to think about creating a Foundation, they also thought about creating a legal entity that would enable those communication pathways that we thought would be useful to obtain resources, including the self-organized spaces that we want to be able to stabilize themselves with local administrations ceding control of them. That's why the legal entity of the Foundation has been so useful as such. People had been debating and discussing why to create this Foundation and not another type of legal entity, or why to make a network together since 2009. I also think the Reina Sofía Museum had been a part of these debates because it was part of a collective discussion about what was an institutional relationship that would overcome barriers. On the part of autonomy, it was about overcoming mistrust regarding traditional institutions. It was about overcoming that ideal of purity of autonomy where we don't mix with anything that smells like Institution because it will corrupt us, it gives us money that forces us to deviate from the intentions we want to have. On the part of the traditional Institution, it was about overcoming habits of cooptation, instrumentalization or capitalization of things that are done in a self-organized manner and that the Institution exploits somehow.

So, somewhat overcoming that mutual distrust and thinking together, in this case with Reina Sofía, of if there was a common will to think beyond how there can be a collaboration that, without minimizing the undeniable asymmetries between an Institution like Reina Sofía and the small self-organized collectives that make up the Foundation -- collectives that although some have some material structure with certain strength like Traficantes de Sueños (Traffickers of Dreams), are nothing to the Reina Sofía compared materially. Is it possible to have a collaboration in which both parties win, and in what way, under what conditions? So, that's a debate that's been marinating for some time, and out of that they decided to create the Foundation. In 2011, that decision to make the Foundation was already made, we spoke to the lawyer, and from there the different groups were proposing nominees to be in coordination. They nominated me, and that was that. We've been working since 2012. That's actually when the legalization was formalized, but the decision was made in 2011 and when I started formally working as such hired as Coordinator it was March of 2012 actually, and I remember that I suggested back then that the position would rotate every five years but at the moment there has been no rotation; maybe at some point there will be volunteers and we will change it.

Is it common to hear a certain regret regarding the tendency of inbreeding within the social activist groups themselves? How do you ensure that a space like the Fundación de los Comunes is an inclusive, constructive, and democratic space?

This is difficult to explain, but I think it's important to try. I believe that any space that wants to be inclusive, constructive, and above all democratic, just because it wants to be, that marks out its limits and borders. That is, the Fundación de los Comunes isn't a network where anyone who wants to can enter, a space as absolutely open as 15M. No. It's a specific network with specific collectives; formally, there are four collectives on its board, because some things have to be formalized, but informally it's these five collectives with their five social centers, as political reference spaces of each city. How can more people join? Well, by working together. There was a moment, for example, where there was a collaboration with Cantabria, with La Voragine and La Repartidora in Valencia, and really, the only requirement to be part of the Foundation is that we have to work together. Working together means attending the monthly meeting and thinking together. What the requirement of attending meeting consists of is physically and virtually being present at the meetings and also seeing if what it's being done in the city at that moment matches with what is being discussed as a whole because, sometimes there are gaps with what is being developed in each city. For example, there are cities where devices or libraries startup like La Repartidora but that had very people, so then it's not sufficient simply attending a monthly meeting but also think about what you will contribute in those meetings. So, we're open to the organic growth of the network, but it's true that it's not like a party in which people affiliate themselves or that simply joins and that's it, but rather it's a network of affiliation and trust that people become part of beginning with a concrete collaboration. There's also a way of being part of the network that is absolutely broad and informal; we do not see it as necessary for the person to come to the meetings or be part of the Foundation's board. We're already in communication with a lot of collectives informally. For example, in Traficantes de Sueños (Dream Traffickers) through the bookstore, we're already connected with a lot of collectives from Madrid. There is a specific, daily, and useful relationship for everybody with the Foundation because you collaborate, for instance with the housing movement and you then know of that movement because you have that direct relationship in Madrid. We then know what materials we need, what we need to push forward, where we need to put our discursive forces, etc.

The whole time you're trying to make those resources useful to the movements. I'll give you another example, the Common Notions courses. One starts today related to feminism. What do we do before starting the courses? Before starting the courses, which is when you're thinking about them, well I put myself in contact with the feminist collectives in Madrid and I tell them the ideas we have regarding the course to see if they think they are priorities in the feminist movement or if they suggest specific people from the movement. In this manner, we make the devices that we set up and the resources that we open to others, truly serve the demands of the political movement that is around us. Each center in each city does it the same way, meaning we all respond to the things that happen around us that we're involved in.

Based on what you're saying, I understand that the Fundación de los Comunes, in some way, is a space of reference and brings together paths of citizen political transformation. How is it validated as a reference or authority?

It's true that the spaces become spaces of reference because they serve to channel, propel, and strengthen what is emerging in the city and in the specific territory where you organize. I would like to think that more than an authority or leadership figure, you're really useful to what is happening around you and reinforce in another way, and there are many more, what is being contributed to your city to make it more equal, more fair, and more democratic. In that way, other people and collectives contribute other things, and we try to contribute what we've dedicated ourselves to, the tools that we've developed, which is above all the political production of discussion, and that's why we have the books, the courses, the bookstore, and above all the physical space in itself, which is always open to the organization for debates, assemblies, those things that collectives need. They propose a press conference, an assembly, a workshop, and we offer all the resources that we have from the physical space to the production as well.

Thinking about the asymmetry of time, capacities and material resources as a product of capitalism and its way of organizing society in well differentiated social classes, how does the Foundation ensure that it brings together a diversity of positions and reaches people who do not normally appear in this type of course or in this type of Social Center?

Well, we don't have any protocol for this. The truth is that the Fundación de los Comunes has its strengths, but it's not so powerful as to think that it's capable of reaching -- we can't say 'the workers' movement,' anymore, but other social strata. What is certain is that the people who are part of the Foundation are part of the movements and collectives with the most plurality, not all there should be, but if I organize, for example, in the neighborhood in the housing movement, I'm with the people most affected by the housing problem. So I'm going to be especially working with women, with migrant women, with older women, with romani women, and there I make my heterogeneous space that translates to the Foundation because then in the Foundation we talk about this and I look for how this group can be supported with the resources that we have in the Foundation. Similarly, people who are in Vallecas' housing, through other types of networks, are linked for example with the Gay Pride people, and there they make other connections with other kinds of political efforts, with other types of conflicts, and that's where you get mixed in. You're tangling in the thousands of threads of self-organized spaces, where all of us are. There are people in wh atwe could call the anti-racist movement. A lot of people of the Foundation -- in fact it was one

of the things that united us -- were part of groups in the network El Ferrocarril Clandestino (Clandestine Railroad), a network at the time that later trailed into what we call social rights offices, whose main purpose was to fight for the freedom of movement. Many other things came from this network, including the first Association of the Undocumented in Madrid that worked directly with people with and without documentation to support, above all, the struggle at that time regarding decriminalization and to obtain better living conditions for sub-Saharan people that were arriving from 2007 onwards, basing their work on the needs the immigrants expressed in a shared assembly. So, we're connected to that as well. You end up naturally becoming linked to whatever comes up, and because each of us is working with a current issue in the city, and that's how all this comes together.

As far as the courses, it's the same process. They have their virtues; the discourse that happens has a certain heterogeneity, and the discussions that are held, from my perspective, transcend much more than they appear to, in the sense that not only are they enjoyed and used by the 70 people that fit in here right now, but also, when doing free access audio, they're downloaded and from there, the material circulates. We have a radio program where we try to make sure the information is heard. Now, how do you get it out of here? Well, for example, we did a course on neofascism last year and, from my point of view, very few people came in considering how heated an issue we saw it as. It was a very small course of twenty people who were very interested and it was very good, but that wasn't the plan, because what we had imagined initially was that all the young people who had organized an anti-fascist demonstration here 3 years ago would come. In that demonstration, the traditional way of anti-fascist fighting was broken in the sense that it was a very heterogeneous manifestation in which women and, above all, people of non-indigenous origin had a very powerful voice. I say non-indigenous and do not use the word "migrant" because that makes it seem like migrants are migrants for life and that isn't the case, from my point of view. They are migrant people who emigrated back in the day, but if they feel like they're from here, they're from here, and if they're born here, they're from here. So, young people from neighborhoods that have South American, Sub-Saharan and other origins were protagonists of this demonstration, where other voices could be heard as well. So, I thought that these people would come here, but, really as you say, this is the center of Madrid; it isn't that the courses are economically inaccessible, but yes, for a person who is twenty years old, paying thirty euros can be a lot and then there's the time commitment, and then the fact that at twenty years old, you don't attend courses downtown. We've now thought about traveling and doing another version of that course. So we want to organize it with people from Moratalaz, Alcorcón and people from Vallecas who have their organized spaces where these collectives usually meet, and be able to move ourselves from one place to another. It's true that this is a structure that has to be sustained materially. I say this because it's also important to take this into account. I would like to do many more things than we do, reach many more places, but we also have to make this replicable in the sense that we have to materialistically hold the physical space together, and that costs money; we have to support the people who work here who also pay their rent and eat and so on; and we have to keep doing that work. We have to support the publishing house, and people can download the books for free, but the reason the publishing house can sustain itself is because there are members who donate or pay money for the books. Those who can contribute financially do so for those who can't, and through that, we build free access, which costs money, for as many people as possible.

Can you explain what your experience has been with the Institutional reality?

The institutional scope is very broad, it's different talking about cultural institutions than public administration institutions such as a city council. For example, with cultural institutions, we've collaborated the most with the Reina Sofía Museum and also with the MACBA in Barcelona. I think that there's always an affinity, an alliance, shared purposes and that asymmetry that you have to deal with all the time because of the rhythms, the ways of deciding; it's hard to adapt the resources that a cultural institution like the Reina has to the different rhythms, objectives, resources and ways of functioning and deciding that exist in collective spaces characterized by being self-organized and having way fewer resources, like those that come together in the Foundation's network. So, there are imbalances of the asymmetries, but we've carried out common things that I think have left us all satisfied. We've been experimenting with the Reina Sofía, for example, we've experienced a space of shared coordination that was called the Laboratory of Social Imagination and from there some concrete projects came out. For instance, a seminar of new democratic sections that came out right before the 2015 Municipal elections here, which were a step to what has been called the governments of change. That space helped discuss what "non-representation" was, or what it meant that grassroots movements made it to the Institution or what we were talking about when we talked about the Municipal movement. We contributed and continue to contribute in a public discussion seminar project that we organize with Reina Sofía. Then, we also had a link that came out of the Laboratory of Social Imagination, it was called the LIS at that time, which were the archives of the commons, thinking of what the archives of the commons are, who builds them, what are the conditions of accessibility, of material support, and what type of file will be part of this set of things. We've done specific projects that I think have been good for all of us. Now we continue to collaborate, and a joint tour has been made. We try to coordinate in what we do. For example, We're now working on the subject of mental diversity; the Reina Sofía is also interested in these issues, so we want to coordinate the date of a course we want to do to invite three people to have a panel or workshop with collectives that are now organized. We try to coordinate this as much as possible and we believe that it can help all of us boost the things we're already doing.

Being part of the non-formal education movement, what relationship do you have, if any, to the Public Education Institution?

Well, I believe that's an objective of ours because I don't think we've reached that far yet. In Barcelona, I believe they have more reach with the Institution to make a member-formed space that's also recognized by more formal institutions. Here, I think it's something that we're thinking about but haven't managed to come up with a concrete plan to connect it to universities. Secondary education, for me, would be a dream, but we can't get there on our own. We don't have the capacity.

Thinking about the sphere of labor, are there workers hired by the Foundation?

In the Foundation, the way it is now, there are only two people hired. One who is the coordinator, which is the position that I have, and then there's the person who now coordinates the online educational platform that we call the Foundation's virtual class, and is run by Álvaro Briaes. We're the two people that formally receive our salaries from the Foundation. The rest of the people depend contractually and materially on their own collectives.

The financing of Álvaro's and my salaries actually is part of the virtual class. That is, we have to make sure that the virtual class is absolutely self-sustainable and that it pays the coordinator's salary. My salary comes from the Common Notions classes. Almost one third of the salary comes from the in-person courses in Madrid. Another third from the donations from people that form part of the Foundation and some other people that generously want to contribute to sustain the space. Another third of the resources that we've been able to get is the collaboration agreements with the Institutions that still give us a bit of support. The golden rule, which is a bit difficult to get sometimes, is that we have to generate projects that can serve the city politically, but can be financially sustainable; that at the same time can generate a space of knowledge that's fully accessible, fully Creative Commons, and at the same time, for them to be materially reproduced which always is a challenge. At times, I swear I don't know how it's sustained. Sometimes I don't know if tomorrow we're going to get a salary, at least those of the Foundation. The bigger and more known branches like Traficantes, which are working and pushing forward, have taken root.

And within each of the nodes that support the Foundation there are people who earn a wage and others who don't, right?

Precisely, there's a salaried structure that depends on the capacity to generate structure in each city. Here, with Traficantes de Sueños, there's the editorial, the distributor, the bookstore, there are the training courses, there's the design workshop; now, if I'm not mistaken, there are in between twelve and fifteen people with salaries, but because the productive capacity permits the support of that structure with its payroll and wages. In Pamplona-Iruña, the same thing. In Katakarak, besides having their editorial, their courses, and their bookstore, they also have a business leg in a restaurant, and from these resources, the political assembly is able to sustain those people that form part of the political project. And in this way, each node organizes itself as much as it can. It's the same thing with the relationship with the Institution, where they can obtain resources, for example like what's happening with the Candela Atheneum. To be able to materially sustain the space, they have their own collaboration agreements with the City Hall to obtain any form of institutional financing, and then self-management.

What does it mean for you to work in this context? How does this change your perspective of the work?

Well, for me it's a luxury because it's really the activist life that I chose many years ago, but now it's backed up with payroll. We don't have excessive payrolls, but when you can earn a thousand or a hundred thousand Euros, well, that allows you to dedicate yourself to what you what you did before, which is forming part of the social movements and of the political collectives of your city and of your broad territorial space which is the Spanish State.

When I spoke to other activists about this form of making work compatible with activism, they warned about the danger of self-exploitation. Has this been your case?

I don't agree much with the hypothesis of self-exploitation. It's true that there's a demand and no real line between what's political work and what isn't, that is, political life, and what covers your salary. It's very difficult for me to make that distinction. What I mean is that I'm not keeping count. I'm not calculating if on the weekend, or in any moment that I can, I should dedicate myself more to reading books and magazines or to something that will allow me to educate myself

more to be able to produce new courses. To me that doesn't count as work. I don't distinguish it. For an activist life, it's a 24-hour activist life. It's connected to what you've decided to do with your life. It's connected with your relationships, with the mutual support networks that you build in your neighborhood, with the relationships you have beyond. What I mean is that we activists aren't Martians that stop having families, lovers, aging parents, our own children, or children from our friends that we have to support. But all of this is part of the activist life.

What does the Fundación de los Comunes mean by “common goods”?

In the Foundation especially, the work is centered in the production of political discourse. For us, the free access to knowledge is fundamental. Then, the space of the production of knowledge, whether it's in the format of courses or bibliographies, it's fundamental that it's universally accessible. That the access does not depend on your economic resources, on your mobility, on your functional diversity, on your stage of life, or because you have been displaced to a city without one of the five organizations linked to the Foundation. That you can access all the discussions, the production of discourse, of debates that have been made through the Foundation's capabilities. In the same vein, for people to be free and for democracy to exist, there must be a world where this is possible; for us, free access to knowledge is also part of having access to the physical, material spaces where knowledge is produced collectively because there are physical spaces like La Invisible, Katakarak, The Candela Atheneum, where people unite and create and reinvent, reimagine new collaboration projects. It's linked to the spaces of fighting in the city, and from there, to days of debate, seminars, contests, joint reading seminars, or the occupation of a new building. For all of this to happen, it depends on many things, but also on the existence of the material spaces where that open, welcoming congregation is possible.

How is a “common good” managed?

By setting limits. A common good is managed because one has to understand that it's not a space open to anyone and that anyone has the same legitimacy and authority to decide or to have a say about that resource. Then, for a common good to be sustainable, people who decide the limits, the how, the conditions have to form part of that place in a clear way. And that happens by collaborating and working every day; that's what makes it sustainable and what limits it, but at the same time, makes it replicable. Not everyone can be an organic part of the network of the Fundación de los Comunes, of Dream Traffickers or of Katakarak, because the successful businesses have many limitations in what they can provide. The goal has always been to expand them, but the pace necessary to expand hasn't always been in our control, and the things we do aren't in the price ranges that permit growth in that manner. But the formulas are definitely replicable and, in that sense, each of us is absolutely open to collaborate with any other type of project that can begin within the same terms we have here. For example, when there's a new project for a bookstore or a new project on self-information courses, we're asked, “Can I be a part of the Foundation?” I tell them that there's no need. Then, I talk with people and we travel to make courses in other cities to then explain how we do it, which surely improves the formula. We can't experiment, for example, with many methodologies of self-training, precisely because of the need to sustain what other projects can do more experimentally with their dynamics or self-training methodologies, because their space may require less resources or because they're more open to activist work. We, at this moment, can't allow ourselves that much. So,

it's open in that sense, that it's replicable, that we always have those collaboration resources and fellowships to the project that we can open, but each of the collectives, their assemblies and respective groups, especially business, aren't moldable.

Do you differentiate between the public, the common and the social spheres?

Well, for me, the public sphere, in its most classic sense, is what's still tied to the central state forms that, in some way, think of politics as something democratically decided through the vote, but in the day to day carried out by the people who represent us and who manage, in principle, based on the public interest or common interest. The problem is that this common interest, in the representative and parliamentary democracy that we know, we all know that it's very perverted and very skewed by the economic interests that in this country have to do with real estate, etc. That is to say that the public sphere in some way, insofar as it's state-centered, has enabled this economy that we call neoliberal and that's actually an economy putting public institutions at the service of international private corporations and diverting many programs/resources from serving the collective interest towards other purposes. As the public sphere has perverted or displaced what should be the common interest, we should define what this is, in contrast to the interests of the large private capitals in Spain which are the financial and real estate investments. What would differentiate the common? The common, somehow, and I tell you in the abstract because we should see how we're thinking about water, air quality, fundamental public services for a community such as the health system or the education system, etc... It's easy to talk about things and then it's difficult to carry them out, but what the common sphere adds is a space of control, in a good way, for the people who are part of the community so that, precisely, that public interest doesn't stray from the interests of the people directly impacted by that issue. For example, during the Marea Blanca¹ movement's big fight for public health, what they actually were fighting for, although there was talk of the public, was precisely to say, "Okay, healthcare here, as it's being privatized and beginning to respond to other interests, for example by extracting profit, is a resource that shouldn't be focusing on extracting a profit but rather one providing comprehensive healthcare for the entire population." It was requested to be a universal resource accessible to people, regardless of their administrative status, etc. What did the people fighting in the Marea Blanca tell you then? They didn't tell you, "We're fighting for our interests as professionals, as workers." No: "We're fighting for a resource that users and people who professionally work in this field, from doctors to cleaners, have to sustain for the good of all." What would that democratic addition introduce? Well, to begin with, it would de-privatize what's been privatized, and then it would allow users to enter the spaces of decision-making and configuration of possible reforms and improvements of the healthcare system, not just so-called health professionals but people from the neighborhood where the health center is who use it.

This is very obviously necessary, for instance, in the area of mental health. The only way to make the traditional hierarchy of medical power open to opinion, to experience, to the knowledge of people in mental health is to create spaces for discussion, organization and configuration of the system that must attend to all directly affected people. And in the case of mental health, people who are diagnosed as having some mental diversity, whatever it may be. So, the common sphere has

¹ One of several movements known as 'mareas,' or 'tides,' branching out from the 15M moment. Each tide was color-coded and associated with a specific issue, such as water rights, health care, housing, etc.

to do with thinking about spaces for setting up these systems, making decisions, and reflecting on and transforming them -- spaces including people either directly affected or directly interested because they're part of the issue being addressed or because they're part of the territory where this issue is taking place, etc. It's something at the same time very old, because everyone knows that forests being managed through the common sphere is still something alive in some small places of the Spanish State and of course in other countries, but it's something that we've forgotten in other contexts and have to recover and adapt to the new culture. It's something that you have to practically reinvent. One paradigmatic example of what the common could be also comes from understanding that the network has been an example of something that can't be controlled from a center, it can't be controlled by any one place set hierarchically above the rest. It serves us in some way as an example to follow, of something existing materially rather than virtually.

We're talking about the common sphere and really, we're referring to a project of non-capitalist society. Can you explain to us what kind of social-political project is thought from a Fundación de los Comunes? Is Municipalism your political commitment to achieve this social-political project?

This is very complicated because for me, they're experiences that don't have ... it's not like in the past when the big emancipatory models were part of closed-off utopias that the world was trying to reach: Well, state-centered communism has to be like this, the political subject is this and, in the end, society will be like that. I believe that now, partly because you have the experience of history and things are more complicated, you don't have an already pre-drawn out future to reach, but you do have the day-to-day experience and the experience of other places. I believe that right now, for example, as far as lessons of what common management of goods can look like, what a common management of decisions can look like, what an assembly is and when it should be open or closed and how community justice can work, we have these more in places like Latin America, for example, in indigenous culture. And in Europe, in a more distant past. The example of the Social Centers is a kind of prototype of common space since it renounces representative political decisions. In other words, no one is going to represent others anymore; now, you decide how the space you belong to is organized. You become part of those decisions by contributing and collaborating. It tries to put into practice what horizontality is and also question it, because it's always crossed by many more power relations. We talk a lot about counterpower and what counterpower is. And what counterpower is now in the new Municipalista (Municipalist) movements that try to think of the institution not as that Other that doesn't have anything to do with you and that you don't have to talk about it, but as an area to intervene in.

It's harder for me to speak from the representation of the entire Foundation, or what everyone thinks. I believe that the municipalist position, the municipalist movement, is something that there are different ways of handling in each of the territorial spaces connected in the Foundation's network, and there's discussion; it's not taken for granted, nor is there one singular position. I do believe that it's true, and I believe that we aren't deceiving anyone if we say that in its day, before 2015, from the space of the Fundación de los Comunes a book was produced that was *La apuesta Municipalista* (The Municipalist Bet) and there was an agreement, mostly shared that municipalism was the politically transformative bet of living conditions, although there were some people directly distanced from the idea who did not agree and did not trust this bet, but it was a bet that was shared basically by the entire network, and part of the people were involved in those municipalist projects of the cities. And in fact, now we're

trying to address this again, because we think they've been distorted by some so-called municipalist proposals. What's the tension? Well, differences aside, it has to do with what I was telling you before about the cultural institutions, because somehow those same asymmetries are manifested. That is, you're playing with fire thinking of the intersection between a self-organized space and an institutional space that has its own rules, its subjections to laws that have been decided in a certain way and that have certain applicable times and that serve interests comparable with organized spaces. But that isn't the intention. The intention of the Municipalist movement isn't to storm the skies, it's not to take spaces in the Institutions in order to transform from there, it's about being able to carry... I don't know how to say it, that that institutional leg serves precisely to strengthen our practices, we'll have to see which ones at each moment because I can't speak generally, but practices of disobedience; through practices of power, being able to give resources to the generation of free, self-organized spaces, which is what we call spaces of counter-power.

In reality, it's very interesting because when the crisis broke out and they started to dismantle what we call the Social Protection Institutions -- welfare institutions like health, education and social security, it was curious because what people and manifestations defended as a response was the commons, resources "for all." But it's never been "for all." It's a mechanism managed by public employees and, as we all know, serving a certain economy that's tied to the interests and objectives of the great elites, financial or economic oligarchies, however you want to call it. The key is to recover that "of all" and to put in question whether we can rebuild that "of all" in the same way from the state-based public sphere. That's not to say that from one day to the next you switch from the state-based public sphere, which is what we've been living for centuries, to perfect self-organization. It doesn't work like that. That's why, in that intermediate step, we thought and continue to think that the Municipalist movement is a tool that facilitates that transition. It might last until the end of the world -- it has no clear end goal or final utopian stage, but it does have to do with returning those Institutions to the service of the common based on the practices of disobedience, based on the voice of the living conflicts of cities, towns, territories where that institutional structure is organized, what is heard and that power is gained, in the sense of distributing it in those Institutions and not vice versa. Whether this is possible still remains to be seen, right? Because, it's true that things have been obtained from working with the Institutional position, but it's not entirely true, from my perspective, that in a city we've managed to create a Municipalist movement as such. That is, a movement capable of ensuring that elected officials within the institution are really governed by the needs and wishes of the population. What does that mean? Well, those people are going to have to hold certain people accountable; that they're really linked to what's happening in that city; that they're not held back by the 'It-can't-be-done's, the 'We-didn't-know-it-was-like-this's, the 'We-don't-have-the-skills-for-this's, the 'This-is-harder-than-it-looks's. No. Instead, the 'Yes-you-can' keeps expanding, lending more strength to street organizing because that's what lets you push and make that power relationship between the institutional sphere and the organized common sphere change balance. And the self-organized can say what the policies of the city need to be.

Given the climate of political discontent and instability, what keeps hope and energy alive in the Fundación de los Comunes?

Well, we talked before about the communal, which is so difficult to explain, but when you live it, I don't know, it's very clear. The change you make when your life is no



longer an individual project, and when I say individual it doesn't have to be alone, it can be in a family or as a couple or it can be in pairs and with children, but when you make that change so that your life is affected by the collective, the link with life, for me, is much more powerful and I would tell you that, in some way, it helps you fight feeling discouraged because all the time, you're building communities that give you energy where you don't have it. For example, at one point I was involved with people without documentation, so you think of life not so much as just something that happens to you, if you're less lively one day, if you're better or worse in health, but rather you're surrounded with a collective energy where what affects others affects you as well and rather than weakening you, that gives you strength. I'm just with others, and they give me the energy that many times I don't have. They give me ideas to think of another possible society that I couldn't think of by myself, because they're people who come from other cultures, from other countries or because they are younger or because they are much older or because they have other problems that I don't have. I'm neurotypical and not differently-abled, and a differently-abled person is going to give me a vital focus that I've never thought of. So, all this nourishes you and gives you much more strength. We're living in very difficult times of precariousness and difficult conditions of existence, so if you don't think it can change, I know, you'll throw yourself out the window, and that's not what we're here for.

What does it mean for the Foundation to “grow”?

Well, to be able to extend experiences like this or the ones that exist in many other cities: Collective spaces where you can see that it's possible to function cooperatively, make decisions as a whole, distribute resources in a democratic and non-hierarchical manner, based not on exploitation, on the extraction of surplus value, but on the fair distribution of decision-making power and of resources, and making that useful for the world and the environment that surrounds you. So, for me it's these experiences. Well, I don't know, each one is its own place, so growth would mean to replicate them, to make them translatable to different contexts, to different territories. And above all, something Raquel Gutiérrez always says and that I like very much from her experience of the community in Mexico, in Latin American societies: generating caring communities that produce material resources that short-circuit the paths of accumulation of capital. Because you short-circuit every time when you join the neighbors to fight for the house that one of them was losing. At that time, you're clearly short-circuiting the subtraction paths of capital. At the same time, you're creating a caring community that materially deals with the day-to-day life of the people who are part of it and that caring community transcends that specific problem of that neighbor that day and will deal with many more issues that will be brought to the common focus in assemblies, because no specific problem is isolated within the greater issues that are being fought. I haven't known any space of fighting that starts fighting for housing or that starts fighting for documentation and doesn't end up talking about the problems of gender violence and other things that you end up worrying about, because when you generate collective spaces you generate politically caring spaces. The thing is, material conditions and what happens to others isn't something that you can close the door to. Something like that. I have been very serious about that.