Introduction and overview

Evidence in many places around the world suggests that increasingly, citizens are self-organizing to produce innovative solutions as they face the collective problems that governments are failing to solve in a context of scarcity and austerity policies. Some of these responses are socially innovative initiatives. They are social in their roots – growing from societal actors like social movements, the third sector, the nonprofit world and grassroots organizations – and also social in their goals, which aim to address unmet social needs. They are innovative because they constitute alternatives to the hegemonic solutions provided by governments and markets. Hence, social innovation is not found within the workings of government or markets, although it may be significantly related to both. While innovative, such initiatives are not necessarily entirely new, and they should be understood in the context of historical and geographical processes of collective action.

We define social innovation[1] as a complex process of the introduction of novel solutions to face social problems – ideas, products, services or models – that profoundly change the basic routines, beliefs or resource and authority flows of the social system in which they occur (Westley and Antadze 2010). These solutions are introduced by citizens and civil society actors who find no adequate responses in the private market or in macro-level welfare policies (Oosterlynck et al. 2013). The aim of such initiatives is to satisfy alienated social needs, to empower citizens and to transform social and power relationships (Moulaert et al. 2013).

Starting from this definition, this book explores and compares several socially innovative initiatives that have emerged at the community level. As we will see, neighbourhoods' historical and geographical features on the one hand and collective leadership practices on the other are both crucial to better understanding not only how social innovation flourishes, but also how can it become a driver of genuinely democratic social change.

CONTEXTUALIZING CONTEMPORARY URBAN SOCIAL INNOVATION

Social innovation is not a new concept. It has been used in different contexts and with different connotations since the end of the 19th century (Godin 2012). The aim of this book, however, is to analyze contemporary cases of social innovation. Two key recent historical events must be taken into account to better understand social innovation in the way it will be conceived of, contextualized and analyzed in this book.

The first important event is the 2008 global financial collapse and ensuing economic recession. The financial crash – which occurred following and as a result of the speculative bubble – brought with it a new stage of the neoliberal project: public bailouts and austerity regimes embarked upon by assorted states and international organizations in order to save the global financial system (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012; Davies and Pill 2012; Peck 2012; Swyngedouw 2015). A huge wave of privatization and cuts was implemented across western countries, especially in Europe, retrenching the role of the public sector. This opened up new opportunities for markets but also for social initiatives. The second phase of modernity – reflexive or liquid modernity (Bauman 1999; Giddens 1999; Beck 1992) – definitively evolved into a non-state-centric model in which the state is no longer the principal means of compensating for market failure. At the same time, the internet created new conditions in which any intermediary actor – and the state has traditionally acted as an intermediary – could be easily replaced or substituted, hence changing the nature of social and political relations (Subirats 2011; Benkler 2006).

The recession and subsequent austerity policies brought about dramatic effects in terms of poverty, social exclusion, unemployment, foreclosures and so on. We witnessed – and in most places we are still suffering – a global crisis with multiple local effects that exacerbated social problems. Such effects were not the same everywhere, and some places proved more resilient than others in coping with the consequences of the crisis. Trying to understand why some communities are more resilient than others to events such as economic recession is one of the main goals of this book.[2] Thus, we will use the 2008 Great Recession as the backdrop to analyze those neighbourhood capacities that foster resilient communities. Furthermore, we will focus on how some of these neighbourhood features enable or constrain the production of socially innovative processes when facing the effects of this economic shock.

The manifold urban uprisings that took place in 2011 constitute the second key contextual historical event. The Arab Spring, the *Indignados*[3] movement in Spain and the Occupy Wall Street movement in the US are

significant examples of how urban protest has multiplied and been reconceptualized by some as 'Revolution 2.0' (Ghonim 2012). Mobilizations began in Tunisia and Egypt, travelled to Spain and the US (Romanos 2016) and were linked to a proliferating series of eruptions of discontent in cities as diverse as Barcelona; Athens; Lisbon; Rome; Istanbul; São Paulo; Mexico; Hong Kong, Paris and New York. Insurgent citizens and incipient urban political movements unsettled the neoliberal status quo and the aforementioned austerity paradigm (Swyngedouw 2015; Fregonese 2013). Despite the fact that these urban political movements occurred in a wide variety of historical and geographical contexts, they spread a new way of conceiving of and engaging in collective action (della Porta and Mattoni 2014; della Porta 2015; Flesher Fominaya 2014), new organizing practices and new forms of collective leadership characterized by networks (Baker 2014; Cullen-Lester and Yammarino 2016). At the same time, in many local communities these new forms of collective action have transformed the social fabric and/or have led to insurgent urban practices that could be considered as social innovations. As Blanco et al. (2012) point out, in the face of a weak and delegitimized state, community responses focused on social transformation could emerge as new institutionalities, (re)distributing resources and power in each community.

In this context of rising social needs, decreasingly state-centric politics and emerging forms of insurgency, communities are tackling their specific challenges in many different ways. As noted, this book explores how local communities are dealing with the effects of economic recession in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crash. However, we focus on those responses that are emerging from below: socially innovative initiatives offering alternative solutions to common problems and fostering social change.

Many urban neighbourhoods have experienced poverty and severe public and private disinvestment. These conditions have spawned community activism that attempts to address tough problems such as housing affordability; unemployment; evictions; displacement; social exclusion; access to food; small business retrenchment, cultural provision and so on (Subirats and García-Bernados 2015; Brandensen et al. 2016). Such neighbourhoods and their strategies of resilience are our subjects of interest. In this book we will draw lessons from several innovative initiatives carried out by social change organizations (SCOs) at the neighbourhood level. We will also, however, provide strategic guidelines and suggested leadership practices to all those communities and social change organizations facing hard problems and trying to provide alternative responses.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

At its most basic level, this book is about democracy. Liberal–representative democracies conformed to a consensus-based post-political paradigm in which there was no space for alternatives and dissensus (Mouffe 2005; Swyngedouw 2007). Dissidents were excluded from the political debate and politics was divided between haves (those with access to and control over resources, and who influenced public polices and produced dominant and hegemonic discourses) and have-nots (those without resources or policy influence, and who were marginalized). Nevertheless, as we have already shown, the 2011 global uprisings brought new winds of hope for alternative forms of understanding and practising what some authors had earlier named 'radical democracy' (Mouffe 1992). This book explores new forms of democracy in practice, from below, for and by the have-nots. Thus, this book is about an alternative way of conceiving of democracy in theory and practice – democracy understood as *equality*, *inclusiveness* and *transformation*.

We refer to democracy as *equality* in the sense that democracy – and its practices – should transform power relationships, empowering the have-nots and positioning them in an egalitarian relation to those who traditionally occupy powerful positions. This is not only a procedural question of how policy-making processes are carried out or how decisions are taken (though it is clearly about these issues too), but also a question of social justice. In this vein, this book focuses on socially innovative initiatives committed to social justice and human development.

By democracy as *inclusiveness* we mean that no one should be excluded from democratic processes. Focusing on social practices emerging from below, we conceive democracy not as a delegation – through representative electoral processes – but as a social commitment in which citizens are engaged in tackling social problems in collective ways, coming together through socially innovative practices. In such processes, social diversity must become a strength rather than a weakness. Differences should be bridged through inclusive practices.

Finally, democracy as *transformation* means recognizing that different and alternative social imaginaries not only exist but also are disputed; they are therefore in political conflict. Democracy ought not to be about consensus-oriented debates framed inside the boundaries of hegemonic understandings of 'the possible'. Rather, democracy is about thinking the impossible and struggling to make it possible. Thus, radical democratic social practices must pursue and foster social change, must challenge the pre-existing hegemonic framework and must propose alternative imaginaries, alternative frames and alternative solutions. This is a key point

regarding the purposes of this book; we focus on SCOs that are satisfying human needs, empowering individuals and changing social relations.

Understood as egalitarian practices that emerge from below, are based on inclusive democratic principles and are transformative in their aim, democracy demands collective leadership practices appropriate to these goals: egalitarian leadership practices that empower the have-nots, releasing their human energy; inclusive leadership practices that bridge differences between social groups; and transformative leadership practices that reframe the discourse and produce effective social change (Ospina et al., 2012). Introducing, analyzing and understanding these democratic leadership practices as they occur in initiatives of social innovation is precisely what this book does.

We understand democracy, then, from a grassroots perspective. Hence, this is not a book about how governments are coping with new fundamental problems through innovative policies; rather, it is a book about how communities are doing that – communities that are embedded in the geographical context of their territory.

Social innovation is usually conceptualized as a way of improving territorial development in disenfranchised neighbourhoods (MacCallum et al. 2009; Moulaert et al. 2010; Van Dyck and Van den Broeck 2013). This approach highlights the importance of context – historical and geographical – and path dependencies in understanding how socially innovative practices emerge and how they may become processes of social change. However, little attention has been paid to the dynamics by which responses emerge, how social impact or scalability could be achieved or how social change could be effectively accomplished through socially innovative responses at the community level. Indeed, the study of leadership as the agential dimension of change has been almost entirely absent from studies of social innovation.

This book draws on leadership theories to introduce agency to the structural and context-dependent lens emphasized by disruptive theories of social innovation. Concurrent to new forms of social innovation arising around the world, concepts such as distributed, shared, collaborative and collective leadership have gained currency both in the academic literature (Uhl-Bien and Ospina 2012) and in the world of practice (Heifetz et al. 2009). These concepts challenge traditional views of leadership and shift attention from formal leaders and their influence on followers to the relational processes that illuminate the contribution of all as constituting leadership in a group, organization or system (Ospina and El Hadidy 2013; Ospina 2006). To the best of our knowledge, an approach that brings together critical theories of collective leadership and disruptive theories of social innovation is a novel undertaking.

In short, combining theories of social innovation and collective leadership we aim to analyze how communities are facing the effects of economic recession through socially innovative initiatives. We explore the extent to which they are based on new forms of democratic leadership that positively transform their quality of life and their capacities. In doing so, this book proposes an understanding of social change that is alternative to the economic and managerial approaches to social innovation dominating both theory and policy (Schumpeter 1974; Murray et al. 2010; European Commission 2010). These approaches have fuelled apolitical and neoliberal trends, such as the 'Big Society' discourse, suggesting that the role of the state could be substituted by an engaged society, self-providing socially innovative responses to current social problems. From this perspective, practices of social innovation are just an efficient way of providing certain services – in lieu of the state – when the market fails to do so. Thus, from this standpoint, initiatives of social innovation do not address the pre-established framework of the regulation of social life.

Here we espouse a very different ontology. Our approach does not address the genesis of efficient organizations and societal structures; rather, it focuses on the generation of socially innovative processes and strategies for the promotion of human development and social justice. Our research starts from a social ontology that considers 'society' as a horizon of action defined by one or several competing 'social imaginaries'. This means that social practices have a constitutive and performative role – and therefore a transformative potential (Jessop et al. 2013). In other words, we understand social innovation as social practices that could potentially be drivers of social change, in political terms.

In this sense, this book connects everyday practices that have emerged from below at a community level to political acts that are able to transform existing social frames of reference and therefore to produce social change. It is likely that not all practices of social innovation could be considered as genuine political acts that effectively produce social change. However, all the practices presented in this book involve struggle against unjust situations and make claims for alternative social imaginaries. Thus, we use a political approach to social innovation where values and interests are in conflict, where practices change social relations, where participants are empowered, and where the aim is to transform the existing order. Democratic leadership practices, as we will see, are crucial both to achieving such goals and to doing so in an inclusive way.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES

This book results from the SOCRISIS[4] research project, funded by the European Commission through the Marie Curie Program (2014–16). The project is a continuation of the research on urban social innovation[5] carried out by the UAB Institute for Government and Public Policy,[6] and of the research on collective leadership in SCOs[7] developed by the NYU Wagner School of Public Service.[8]

The SOCRISIS project focused on exploring why social innovation emerges and is more effective and scalable in some places than others. It started from the assumption that both *effectiveness* and *scalability* are necessary for a socially innovative initiative to develop into a social change process.

According to our definition of social innovation, *effectiveness* is understood as the extent to which a socially innovative initiative achieves the desired social transformation with respect to a) resolving the social problem it set out to address; b) empowering citizens and c) producing changes in social and power relations.

Scalability refers to the capacity of a socially innovative initiative to expand or grow by way of either scaling out or scaling up. Scaling out refers to an initiative engaging more people, being more inclusive and broadly solving the problem it set out to address. Scaling up refers to an initiative expanding up from the local level to a new geographical context beyond the neighbourhood.

The book aims to contribute to three debates regarding social innovation and democratic leadership practices (Figure I.1). First, the question as to what extent historically and geographically influenced features (such as civic capacity; social capital; urban morphology; public facilities and amenities; sense of belonging, socio-demographic composition and so on) enable or constrain the emergence of social innovation, its effectiveness and its scalability.

Our hypothesis is that those neighbourhoods with greater civic capacity[9] – understood as the ability to articulate governmental and non-governmental actors concerned with collective problems (Stone 2001) – produce socially innovative responses that are more effective and have greater potential for scalability.

Second, assuming that processes of social innovation are spatially and institutionally embedded, we claim that some leadership practices (at the community or organizational level) not only enable the emergence of such processes but also foster their sustainability and increase their impact.
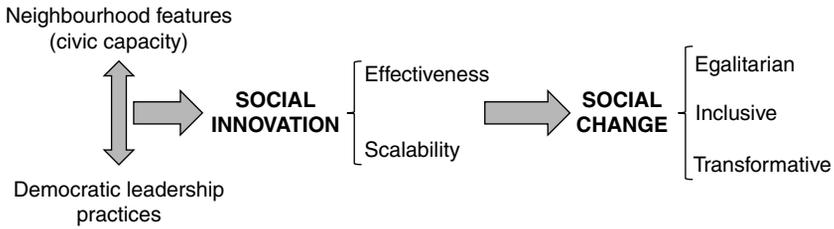
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Figure I.1 Research diagram

Our hypothesis is that democratic forms of collective leadership[10] produce social innovation that is more effective and has a greater chance of being scalable.

Hence, agency – in the form of leadership practices – is also important for understanding how social innovation works, especially in those contexts where neighbourhood features constrain socially innovative initiatives. We explore the extent to which new forms of leadership that emerged following the 2011 urban rebellions could constitute interesting practices with respect to doing things in a democratic and inclusive way.

As noted earlier, the third debate we engage is at its root about democracy. We want to show that social innovation can effectively contribute to social change, and to better understand how it does so. We aim to demonstrate how socially innovative initiatives, through democratic leadership practices, can be understood as an egalitarian, inclusive and transformative form of radical democracy.

We assume that social innovation is context-dependent and must be historically and geographically explained. The main contribution of this book, then, is identifying and unpacking those leadership practices (aimed to unleash human energy, to bridge differences and to reframe discourses) that make social innovation democratic in terms of equality, inclusiveness and transformation.

METHODOLOGY AND CASE STUDIES

This book compares eight socially innovative initiatives taking place in four neighbourhoods of two global cities: Barcelona and New York City. These two cities share significant similarities: they are both important cities that are not the capitals of their countries, they attract large

numbers of tourists and both experienced similar changes to house prices in recent decades. Nonetheless, the 2008 economic crash has had different effects on each city, and both governmental and social responses to the recession have been different. In New York, gentrification has returned following the recession, particularly affecting the poorest areas of the city where the crisis had the largest impact and the recovery is proving slower. In Barcelona, the foreclosure crisis combined with a dramatically high unemployment rate constituted the worst consequence of the 2008 financial collapse, leading to many housing evictions in the most vulnerable urban areas. Addressing these contemporary issues, two neighbourhoods that represent comparable case studies have been selected in each city: Bushwick and South Bronx in New York, and Nou Barris Nord and Sants in Barcelona. In each case study we analyzed a) neighbourhood features; b) processes of social innovation and c) leadership practices implicated in those innovations.[11]

In Bushwick, a dramatically gentrified neighbourhood, we consider Small Business United (SBU), a Latino initiative of a longstanding SCO in the area (Make the Road NY), which aims to address small business harassment and displacement. We also examine Ecostation, a new food justice organization that bridges Bushwick's longstanding community with more recent residents implicated in the process of gentrification in the area. In the South Bronx, an area with persistent social exclusion, we analyze Nos Quedamos, a traditional Community Development Corporation (CDC) that has adapted its programmes to the post-recession scenario. We also consider South Bronx Unite, a new coalition influenced by the Occupy Wall Street movement that fights to protect and improve the social, environmental and economic future of the South Bronx. In Nou Barris Nord, a highly vulnerable area on Barcelona's outskirts, we focus on Centre Cruïlla, a nonprofit service provider working on youth labour inclusion. The second initiative in this neighbourhood is 50×20, an emerging effort promoting social resistance in the face of the failure of public authorities to address significant social problems. In Sants, a neighbourhood with a strong tradition of political activism, we consider Can Batlló, a former industrial complex that has been taken over by neighbours and self-managed through a cooperative approach. Lastly, we examine the Platform for Mortgage Affected People, which emerged in 2009 to address housing evictions across Spain and is headquartered in Sants.

THE AUDIENCE FOR THIS BOOK

This book is for an international audience, since it discusses social innovation in two different parts of the world and engages international literatures on social innovation and leadership. The target audience includes scholars researching social innovation, leadership, governance and neighbourhood development, and faculty who teach these topics. It also aims to be relevant for postgraduate students in public administration, geography, urban planning, politics and nonprofit management.

We also hope it is of interest to social activists tackling problems at the community level. The socially innovative initiatives analyzed in our case studies, and the leadership practices implicated in them, could be good examples for SCOs, nonprofits and other social or political actors. At the same time, the neighbourhood approach used in the book could provide inputs and ideas for policy makers working on neighbourhood development.

BOOK OUTLINE

The book begins with two introductory chapters (Part I) that lay out the theoretical and empirical challenges and present our research project. Part II then offers a review of those theories that will be used and discussed in the book when addressing the tension between context and leadership. Part III presents the results of our empirical investigation; here, we apply the theoretical discussion to an analysis of several embedded cases of social innovation.

Chapter 1 brings together theories of 'social innovation' and 'relational leadership' in order to propose a new paradigm for social change studies based on a systemic approach to social innovation. Chapter 2 then introduces our empirical research, comparing the consequences of and responses to the crisis in the United States and Europe.

In Part II, 'Theorizing Social Change through Neighbourhood Features and Leadership', two theoretical chapters review the approaches and concepts used and developed in the book. Chapter 3 focuses on the contextual side of our approach: neighbourhood features. This chapter links communities and resilience, breaking down historical and geographical features of neighbourhoods that could be understood as assets for resilience. One of these assets is explored in depth: civic capacity. Chapter 4 develops the agential side of our approach: leadership practices. Here we introduce our constructionist understanding of leadership as collective practices that emerge from the interactions between organizational members, viewed as

both constituents and citizens, as they pursue a common goal. Beyond the relational and collective approaches to leadership, we propose democratic leadership as a counterhegemonic way of thinking about leadership in the contemporary post-crisis period.

In Part III, 'Communities Engaged in Social Change: Analyzing Social Innovation from Below', we present our empirical research reporting on our four primary case studies (Bushwick, South Bronx, Nou Barris Nord and Sants). Each chapter (chapters 5–8) documents several processes of social innovation to show how neighbourhood features and leadership practices influenced the emergence, effectiveness and scalability of social innovation. Part III ends with a comparative case study analysis (Chapter 9) in which we synthesize what we learned from socially innovative initiatives and their leadership practices. Finally, a methodological appendix describes the research methods and the case study selection.

NOTES

1. This concept will be analyzed in depth in the next chapter.
2. See Chapter 3 for a further discussion on neighbourhood resilience.
3. Also known in Spain as the '15M movement'.
4. Social Innovation against the Crisis: how leadership practices and civic capacity improve neighbourhood development (www.socrisis.net). Grant Agreement Number 625070 under FP7–PEOPLE–2013–IOF programme.
5. Through research projects such as POLURB, *Barris i Crisi* and ISOP (http://barrisinnovacio.net).
6. For more information, see the Research Group on Urban Governance, Commons, Internet and Social Innovation (www.urgocis.net).
7. Research and Documentation of Leadership for a Changing World, 2001–09, which included many co-researchers from the SCOs studied, and other research projects that built on it, authored by Angel Saz-Carranza, Jennifer Dodge and Iván Darío Sánchez.
8. For more information, see the Leadership in Action virtual platform (http://wagner.nyu.edu/leadership).
9. This concept will be discussed in depth in Chapter 3.
10. Collective leadership practices will be introduced and discussed in Chapter 4.
11. For methodological details of our research and the case study selection, please see the methodological appendix at the end of the book.