The transformative potential of dissensus.

Contesting hegemonic agendas of urban regeneration in El Cabanyal, Valencia.

A thesis submitted to Cardiff University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Welsh School of Architecture.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to explore the potential of dissensus as a concept and practice in order to contest hegemonic discourses and narratives in the context of urban regeneration. Particularly, I look at the spatialisation of dissensus within what I identify as counter-hegemonic spatio-temporal sites. I show how these practices, which I refer to as ‘agonistic urbanisms’, have the potential to be sources of alternative practices of urban transformation and how they can facilitate the inclusion of political subjects currently left outside the mainstream production of space and knowledge within the city. I do so by looking at the case of El Cabanyal in Valencia (Spain), a coastal neighbourhood that has been the focus of intensive speculation and regeneration planning in recent years. Ultimately, I argue for how ‘agonistic urbanisms’ can repoliticise what neoliberal governance arrangements have profoundly depoliticised worldwide.

Through the research, I looked at how dissensus has shaped urban development and regeneration processes in El Cabanyal through two main periods, including their impact on citizens who have resisted and contested them. In connection to this, the thesis has looked at the ways in which hegemonic discourses have been challenged through the materialisation of dissensus as agonistic spaces in El Cabanyal. The first period between 1998 and 2015, under the government of conservative mayor Rita Barberà’s, was characterised by the staging of dissensus from those who resisted the neoliberal entrepreneurial urban agenda that sought to erase El Cabanyal from the map. The second period extends from May 2015 to late 2017 under a new progressive left-wing government, which has seen the emergence of new hegemonic discourses and new dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.

The transformative potential of dissensus and its materialisation into agonistic spaces has been investigated by looking at resistance and contestation practices to hegemonic discourses and urban agendas, together with shifting identities during these two different political contexts in Valencia.

My original contributions to knowledge are two-fold. First, I add to existing scholarship by showing how dissensus is not an instance or a rupture in El Cabanyal’s history but a long process that has shaped the place and its inhabitants. Second, I reveal how that dissensus is materialised through a variety of practices that can contest hegemonic urban agendas and empower people to negotiate and reach their goals, desires and aspirations. In doing so, I show how agonistic urbanisms can challenge the consensual giveness of a place by materialising urban imaginaries that stage and define equality and have the potential to inform an alternative to the planned city.

In conclusion, I argue that spatial practices must move from their technocratic and managerial
approaches and deal with dissensus and embrace agonism to escape non-critical engagements with spatial and designs practice, resisting static Cartesian solutions and profit-based visions of urban futures.
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1. INTRODUCTION

“Here, you can find all options, which is the brightness this can have. There can be many different options. The key is that there are people who buy property, there are people interested great, they are Spanish, great, they are Germans great too, great, everything is fine. There are many options here, all of which are positive because this is something the neighbourhood needs. The neighbourhood needs to turn the page, and it would be interesting if this happens while maintaining a change that is sustainable. Because in the end, if this turns into something else, that interest you have right now will disappear. If we die of success in that sense, the neighbourhood will disappear. If many people from outside arrive and cannot keep our traditions here, it will disappear; If many people with a lot of money come to live here but won’t buy a pair of shoes from the Mercado dEl Cabanyal, it will disappear. But there must be people with a bit of everything. And that is the challenge. How can it be achieved? I do not know. I do know that we will not be packed with Germans because certain inertias prevent this. This is not a gated development in Altea where they print out a poster of 200 detached houses and hang it in the window of a real estate agency. El Cabanyal is different, it’s something else. I believe that, luckily, those inertias, inherent to the neighbourhood, will prevent these sorts of processes.” (Interview 25)

Figure 1.1 Picture of the outdoor seating area of bar *La Paca*. The owner has several bars in the neighbourhood. They emulate the local customs and cuisine, but most customers are not neighbours of El Cabanyal. Source: Author.
1.1 Introduction to the case: The struggle to dissent.

On November 2003, the Mayor of Valencia, Rita Barberà and the Regional President, Paco Camps, appeared victoriously, celebrating what they considered an outstanding achievement. Valencia would host the America’s Cup, the most relevant sailing competition in the world. This celebration was the prelude of ‘greater’ change for a city that had historically neglected its coastal districts. However, for the neighbours of El Cabanyal, this seemed more of a threat rather than an opportunity to regenerate their local area. At the time, the neighbourhood was holding a long and intense battle with the municipal government against a tabula-rasa regeneration plan, which became one of Spain’s most notorious and long urban struggles. The plan comprehended the extension of Blasco Ibañez Avenue to the sea through El Cabanyal, destroying part of the historical urban tissue, around 600 houses, splitting the neighbourhood into two, and ultimately erasing it from the map.

El Cabanyal is a historic residential neighbourhood on the coast of Valencia, part of the maritime district, Poblats Marítims. With a population of 20,493 in 2016, available data since 1991 shows it has been slowly losing population (Las Provincias 2016). The neighbourhood’s official name is Cap de França – Cabanyal – Canyamelar. It is located in the East of Valencia, 5 km from the city centre, and lies north of the Port. The urban morphology responds to a homogeneous gridded system of small plots of longitudinal blocks along north-south streets, transversed perpendicularly by smaller streets, east-west.

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1 The actual name of the neighbourhood is actually ‘Cabanyal-Canyamelar-Cap de França’, referring to the three areas that compose it. However, the central area gives name to the entire neighbourhood, as is popularly known and referred to as El Cabanyal. Therefore, in this study, El Cabanyal refers to the entire neighbourhood unless otherwise stated.

2 According to the urban sociologist Fernando Díaz Orueta (2006; 2007), Valencia is one of the cities in Spain that has produced the most important social response from its civil society in recent years.

3 Valencia according to official census data had a population of 791,632 inhabitants in 2016.
Figure 1.2. Map highlighting the location of El Cabanyal in Valencia, neighbourhood 11.2. Source: Author using data from Ayuntamiento Valencia.
Figure 1.3. Map of El Cabanyal. Source: Ayuntamiento Valencia.
A unique and picturesque neighbourhood, El Cabanyal has its origins in the XV century as a fisherman’s village. The vernacular architecture of the time and the livelihoods of the inhabitants shaped the urban tissue in the form of a dense grid parallel to the coastline — a distinctive urban pattern in the city. After several disasters, the old traditional barracas disappeared and were replaced at the beginning of the XX century by terraced houses with a unique and particular Art-Noveau style, which followed and adapted to the existing urban grid. These houses, built by the neighbours with vernacular materials and decorated with colourful tiles, follow the same style of that period but with their very personal reinterpretation, conferring a unique value to the neighbourhood. This popular and particular architectural style, defined as Modernismo Particula d’El Cabanyal (Simó Terol 1973; Simó Terol 2013) is the most distinctive feature of ‘El Cabanyal’. The gridded urban tissue and this eclectic architecture are the two elements why the historical area was protected in 1993, declaring it ‘Asset of Cultural Interest’ (BIC).

Figure 1.4. Aerial view of the neighbourhood towards the city centre. Source: Author
Starting in the mid-nineties, the government of Partido Popular promoted speculative urban development through land deregulation (Gaja i Díaz 2002) to attract private investment through a policy of mega events such as America’s Cup and F1 championship and mega projects like Ciutat de les Artes y las Ciencias. These large-scale projects were primarily planned along the coastline to revitalise the port area and increase the land value of coastal districts.

One of these mega-urban projects was the ‘Plan Especial de Protección y Reforma Interior d’El Cabanyal-Canyamelar’, commonly referred to by its acronym, PEPRI, which aimed to connect and absorb the deprived and isolated coastal neighbourhoods into the city. The plan would have destroyed the central part of the gridded urban tissue, resulting in the division of the neighbourhood into two disconnected halves, not only from a spatial view but also destroying the existing social and economic networks and the livelihoods of the inhabitants, a great number of whom have been living in the neighbourhood since they were born (Gaja i Díaz 2002; Campos 2008; López Nicolás & Bodí Ramiro 2009; Martínez 2010). The intention behind this regeneration plan was to redevelop and unlock land in the affected area to private investors so they could build and sell expensive high-

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4 Officially Ciutat de les Arts i les Ciències is an architectural, cultural and leisure centre design by world known Valencian Star architect Santiago Calatrava.

5 Together with the traditional houses, two historical buildings reflecting the district’s historical identity as a fisherman’s village would disappear: the old ‘Lonja de Pescadores’ (now occupied by local people that have reconverted it into dwelling) and the ‘Casa dels Bous’.
rise blocks. These properties were not for the neighbours of El Cabanyal. The two thousand people affected by evictions and demolitions would not have been able to afford the new houses in the open market and thus would have ended up abandoning the neighbourhood. What they labelled as a ‘regeneration and protection project’ was a de facto state-led gentrification process (Lees 2000; Herrero García 2006; Martínez 2010). To accelerate this process and justify the need for the urban plan, the local government had been systematically excluding and outcasting the neighbourhood in what many described as ‘real estate mobbing’ from the municipal government (López Nicolás & Bodi Ramiro 2009; Martínez 2010; Herrero García 2006). Far from trying to address the socio-spatial problems of the ‘El Cabanyal’, these were exacerbated by the total abandonment of the district and the lack of public investment in preservation, basic infrastructure, and social services. As a result, many owners left the neighbourhood, and prices went down, typical of the first stages of gentrification (Fainstein 2005; Fainstein 2014; Slater 2009; Brenner et al. 2009; Purcell 2003; Díaz Oruet 2006).

The main discourses formulated by Rita Barberá’s government around the PEPRI revolved around the plan being the only possible solution to connect and absorb the supposedly deprived and isolated maritime districts of Valencia into the city, the only way to address and solve the issues El Cabanyal was experiencing (most of them caused by them), and that there were no alternatives to it. The PEPRI was fiercely opposed by many neighbours of El Cabanyal, who organised themselves through different organisations. Since the late nineties, the platform ‘Salvem El Cabanyal’ was the main civic movement staging and channelling the neighbourhood’s struggle to resist the PEPRI, preserve itself and decide its own future, or in other words, to stay on the map. Their struggle unfolded through a variety of political, social, and legal strategies over the span of 17 years, from 1998 to 2015. The plan faced not only the fierce opposition of many local people who were fighting for the neighbourhood that catered for their lives and aspirations but also from all layers of society: civic society, re-known architects like Siza or Nouvel, urban planners countrywide, academia, politicians, national and international media. The legal and social dispute of the municipality over this issue had two scales; national with the previous socialist government who declared the project illegal and accused Rita Barberá’s municipal government of heritage spoliation; and local with the affected neighbours of ‘El Cabanyal’, who mobilised against the plan.

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6 The authorities, with “market enablement policies” aimed to make economic surpluses and political profits out of it.
Figure 1.6. Support banner created by Paula Cabildo for Plataforma Salvem El Cabanyal in April 2010 with the slogan Cabanyal *I love you alive and complete* that was used to symbolise the struggle and resistance of the neighbours against the PEPRI. Source: Plataforma Salvem El Cabanyal (http://cabanyal.com/2010/04/23/pancartes-solidaries-amb-el-cabanyal/)
What started with the opposition of some groups of local neighbours against a tabula-rasa regeneration plan ended up being one of the most successful examples of local resistance against neoliberal urban development in Spain. Residents claimed against oppression and injustice, reaffirming their marginal condition as someone who had been neglected a basic right, and as Agamben argues, resistance to oppression is a right and a duty of the citizen (Agamben, 2005). El Cabanyal was both the container and object of the struggles (Lacan in (Secor et al., 2008). And as a result, the neighbourhood today is the spatial manifestation of those struggles and frictions that have shaped it, but the conflict was also shaped by the planning of the city (Brown, 2010).

### 1.2 Motivations for this research

These observations raise questions on how urban planning and urban design are used to politically and physically regenerate deprived areas in Valencia as part of wider urban and economic development strategies and what this means for local people currently residing in El Cabanyal. This raises questions about who the beneficiaries of this plan were, what the impacts would be for local residents, and who it was planned for. It also explores how local authorities navigated through the opposition they encountered through the process of developing and implementing the PEPRI, not only from the neighbours of El Cabanyal but also from wider civil society. And definitely, it raises questions on how we could embed the neighbour’s dissentient view into the regeneration process as a viable alternative option.

However, after almost twenty years of resistance and actions, that diversity of interests was in a precarious equilibrium, with different groups and collectives fighting to live in a neighbourhood that was lived and perceived in almost opposite ways. The neighbourhood in 2015 presented a complex scenario produced by an amalgam of squatters, Romanian Roma groups, Spanish Roma groups, local residents who were not able to leave or resisted abandoning the area, neighbours who wanted the plan to be developed and neighbours who had made their life around the defence of it. This fragile balance broke when the local elections of May 2015 unexpectedly brought in a new municipal authority in the political antipodes of the previous administration. The PEPRI was repealed immediately, and after the initial hopes for positive change, during the first year, besides political will, not much had changed in the area, which in turn, raised different concerns amongst different neighbours. Fears of the dangers of gentrification or further ghettoisation have been tabled together with demands for investment or the lack of social services or secure housing solutions for the most vulnerable groups. Trapped in the contradiction of being threatened both by the stigmatisation of further ghettoisation and the pressures of gentrification, El Cabanyal has become this cake everyone wants a piece of.
Having been a citizen of Valencia most of my life, I have witnessed the different forms all these struggles have taken, which in turn have revealed broader issues related to urban development and the transformation that the city has undergone in the last three decades. And precisely, these struggles form the focus of this thesis, with a view to investigating the potential that resistance to planned change has to inform alternative, counter-hegemonic approaches to urban planning via a theoretical framework focused on the notion of ‘agonistic dissensus’. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to explore how agonistic spatial practices can facilitate the inclusion of those political subjects that are usually left outside the mainstream production of space and knowledge within the city. Cities, as many have argued, are the spatial context where urban conflicts materialise, thus becoming both the object and the subject of struggles (Lacan, Secor 2008). These struggles and resistances materialise in counter-hegemonic spatio-temporal sites where dissensus has the potential to be a source of creative and innovative practices (Agamben, 2014; Mouffe, 2005; Baeten, 2007; Fezer, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2008a; Žižek, 2002a).

This chapter has begun locating and exploring the urban conflict of ‘El Cabanyal’ in the city of Valencia and a brief historical-political development. In the next section, I will explore the meaning of dissensus and its potential as an agent of transformation in the current ‘post-political’ arrangement. It will do so by acknowledging that the same urban development which transforms cities as sites of capital accumulation and exclusion is, conversely, setting the conditions for urban political movements, critical practitioners, and citizens to create Agonistic Urbanisms that can contest and subvert these processes. In the final section, I present the research aims and questions, methodology and structure of the thesis.

1.3 Theoretical approach. Dissensus, agonism and their potential for spatial practices?

Inspired by all the tactics and strategies of resistance and actions staged by the neighbours of ‘El Cabanyal’ through the platform ‘Salvem El Cabanyal’, this research engages with a concept of dissensus as a disruption of the hegemonic order that is far from being understood as irrational or violent and occurs in the boundaries of different discourses (Jones 2014a). Engaging with the work of Marcus Miessen, I understand dissensus as “micro-political practices through which the participant becomes an active agent who insists on being an actor in the force field they are facing” (Miessen, 2010, p93). The opposite of consensus, dissensus is a catalyst for the participation of what
Rancière terms the ‘ochlos’, in the form of critical engagement of social and spatial concerns, that empowers them to negotiate and reach their goals, desires and aspirations. However, these negotiations must be framed between adversaries or ‘legitimate enemies’ who share the same ethico-political values, what Mouffe defines as the agonistic mode of politics. And this mode is one which implies recognising the fact that some conflicts can simply not achieve a rational solution and that “absence of a final ground and the undecidability that pervades every order” (Mouffe 2016, p.1), but at the same time, it implies that this agonistic expression of dissensus empowers citizens to have the possibility of freedom, of choosing between real alternatives.

The concept of dissensus is the key in the broader debates on what is termed as the post-political. Post-democracy is the political condition that actually excludes and expels the “properly political” (Rancière 1992; 1996; 2000; Mouffe 1993; 2005a; Crouch 2000; 2004). According to Rancière (2001) the ‘political’ is related to the principle of equality and arises when the hegemonic order is questioned, disrupted or transgressed by those who are not constitutive of that order. For Rancière, ‘proper political’ events performed by the ‘ochlos’ are those acts that unsettle the apparatus of the established hegemonic order. Subsequently, they initiate a rupture in the hegemonic order of things (Swyngedouw 2011a;2014b).

Rancière argues that in the post-political order, there is a hegemonic consensus that no alternative to neoliberal globalisation is possible, and freedom and choice are permitted only within the consensual frames of the “police” order with neoliberal hegemony. Those who are outside the order, the ‘ochlos’ (such as squatters, homeless, immigrants and protesters), do not form part of the demos and are seen as outside the democratic play (Rancière, 2001, p.32). For them, as Agamben (2005) argues, the law is suspended; they are literally put outside the law and treated as extremists and, as Swyngedouw points out the only way to deal with them is repression and violence. The post-political relies on either “including all in a consensual pluralist order or excluding radically those who posit themselves as outside cultural, economic and political mainstreams.”

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7 This research will adopt Rancière’s concept of the ‘ochlos’, which constitutes that otherness outside cultural, economic and political mainstreams.
8 Agonism according to Mouffe is a confrontation of legitimate adversaries both entitled to defend their positions (Mouffe 2014, p.150)
9 Here related to the Police order and the Foucauldian notion of governmentality.
10 This process, Swyngedouw writes, is a disruption of the existing hegemonic order, is the arena “where the ochlos (‘the part of no part’) stage their conversion into demos and, in doing so, “inaugurate a new ordering of the sensible”. It is the process by which “those who do not count, who do not exist as part of the polis become visible and audible, stage the count and assert their egalitarian existence.” (Swyngedouw 2011b, p.375)
11 Rancière defines the ‘police’ as the existing order of things and constitutes a given ‘partition of the sensible’ (Rancière 2001, p.8). It refers to “all the activities (of the state ) which create order by distributing places, names, functions” (Rancière 1996, p.173), as well as to the ordering of social relations and “… sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task” (Rancière 1998, p.29)
outside the consensus.” (Swyngedouw 2014b, p.127)

However, the same post-political condition, in its intrinsic contradictorily nature, has a porosity that allows the formulation of new imaginaries outside itself by those who are left outside, the ochlos. This sets the conditions for the production of “new material and discursive spatialities within and through the existing spatialities of the police” (Swyngedouw 2011b, p.376). These new alternatives can be ‘destituent’ powers (Agamben 2014a) that can challenge that same framework that determines the functioning of the system and even challenge the dominant discourses that justify and shape the existing framework, inaugurating a new reality, a new counter-hegemonic project, what I refer to in this research as Agonistic Urbanisms.

‘Agonistic Urbanisms’ are defined here as the series of material and symbolic spaces created as a result of subversive socio-spatial tactics within the permeability of the post-political condition. These tactics are performed by the ‘ochlos’ themselves, those transgressive citizens that challenge and contest their position with the post-political hegemonic order. In doing so, dissensus materialises in a symbolic space of encounter and critical engagement between diverse adversaries (Schneider 2013 quoted in Boano & Talocci 2014) and has the potential to produce new urban imaginaries that represent an alternative to the planned city. To explore how dissensus materialises into counter-hegemonic spaces, we need to understand the current conditions that exist in our cities that enable this spatialisation within the post-political hegemonic order. For this, it is essential not to detach the spatial dimension from the socio-political claim and dig into the materiality of the spaces where these resistances and transgressions are manifested.

People like the neighbours of ‘El Cabanyal’ do not fight for a utopian image of the city they envision but for the essential rights that have been violated in the urban space, re-appropriating public and private spaces, transforming the city in so doing. These ‘performed’ spaces, as they ‘happen’ in the process of dissensus, acquire distinctive characteristics that have the potential to inform the outcome and the form of the conflict. These emergent spatialities thus represent different ways in which participating citizens tend to conceive the spaces that will house the life they fight for. At the same time, those spatialities “reflect the ways in which collective action […] attempts to create its own space” (Stavrides 2009a). In doing so, the different desires and aspirations of these people bring them to work in an agonistic coalition in which every actor, with individual aspirations, works together to

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12 Where no alternatives to the neoliberal system and to this commodified urban life are rendered,

13 And if revolutions and insurrections correspond to constituent power, that is, a violence that establishes and constitutes the new law, to think a destituent power we must imagine completely other strategies, whose definition is the task of the coming politics.
obtain their own benefit through achieving common goals.

Agonistic Urbanisms in this research are not spaces for manifesting an opinion or claiming a demand but spaces within the city that go beyond the logic of the consensual and the given political order. Agonistic Urbanisms materialise within the thresholds (Stavrides 2006, p.177) of the post-political mechanisms of order and control, inclusion or exclusion. Rather than creating spaces for specific identities, this provides a platform where new spatial imaginaries can be envisioned and identities can be reconfigured.\(^\text{14}\) When embedded in the agonistic approach, these material and symbolic spaces enact dissensus revealing what the post-political consensus wants to hide. These existing urbanisms\(^\text{15}\) are the spatial manifestation of the counter-hegemonic political practices of the ochlos that operate within the cracks of the system. In doing so, they are ‘destituent’ powers that challenge the mainstream development of neoliberal and post-neoliberal systems and inaugurate new urban alternatives

1.4 Research aims, questions, methodology and thesis structure

The aims of this research are structured to reflect my interest in dissensus in processes of Urban Regeneration. I am particularly interested in understanding how an agonistic approach is key for people to engage critically and fight for the city they envision and how the city and the conflict unfold into and shape each other through time.

- Firstly, I aim to explore the transformative potential of dissensus in creating agonistic urbanisms in ‘El Cabanyal’, which are urban alternatives that are open and inclusive, geared towards the creation and inclusion of new political subjects, those otherwise left outside the current mainstream production of space and knowledge within the city. This is explored theoretically in Chapters 2 and empirically mainly in Chapter 6.

- The second aim is to draw together ‘a history of dissensus’ in El Cabanyal and the processes that have shaped the socio-spatial configuration the neighbourhood in relation to wider historical processes of urban transformation in Valencia. I consider how El Cabanyal has been subjugated to the aspirations and economic interests of Valencia and how these conflicting interests have reconfigured and shaped the neighbourhood. This is explored in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

\(^{14}\) This platform represents the “common symbolic space” Mouffe calls for that enables the agonistic dialogue between legitimate adversaries.

\(^{15}\) Agonistic Urbanisms represent what Shatkin calls “actually existing urbanisms, that are rooted in alternative social dynamics and are manifest in a variety of appropriations of space and social behaviours that contravene master planning” (Shatkin 2011, p.8).
• Third I seek to explore the spatiality of the different ways in which neighbours of El Cabanyal have challenged hegemonic discourses on urban regeneration and their positionality in relation to Valencia. I consider how the main hegemonic discourses have been elaborated in the main two periods covered in this study, 1997 until 2015, and 205 until 2017. This is addressed in Chapters 5 and 6.

• Lastly, the thesis seeks to contribute to wider debates on the potential of embracing agonistic theory to help spatial practices engage with the political and social realities of our cities, as interdisciplinary, spatially complex, and holistic practices. Aim to explore if agonism can us escape non-critical engagements with spatial practices, resisting static 2-dimensional solutions and profit-based visions of urban futures while dealing with conflict as immanent constituent of urban life. This is discussed in Chapter 7.

The retrospective and in-depth analysis of El Cabanyal’s history and planning, together with the historical, political, spatial and ethnographic research conducted in the neighbourhood during my fieldwork, will try to answer the three following research questions.

• **Research Question 1**
  In what ways has dissensus shaped the socio-spatial configuration in El Cabanyal throughout time? How has this shaped ongoing processes of urban change in the neighbourhood?

• **Research Question 2**
  To what degree and in what ways has dissensus *contested hegemonic agendas of urban regeneration processes in El Cabanyal* through different periods

• **Research Question 3**
  How have narratives of dissensus materialised as Agonistic Spaces at the scale of the micro-politics of people’s everyday life in El Cabanyal?

To address these three research questions, the methodology of this thesis is designed to explore the spatialisation of dissensus and agonistic practices in relation to resistance to urban change in El Cabanyal. The methodology of this research stems from acknowledging both as a researcher and a practitioner that some conflicts do not have a rational solution (Mouffe 2014), and the firm belief that spatial practices need to be concerned with the discursive and the material organisation of the political as a process where conflict is staged to resurface the ineradicable agonistic dimension of all kinds of social relations amongst human beings (Keshavarz and Mazé 2013).
Based on the research questions and the characteristics of the project, my study of the spatialisation of dissensus is based on a single case study and adopts mixed methods approach, primarily focusing on qualitative methods. The methodology of this research is designed to investigate how dissensus has shaped the urban fabric of El Cabanyal. Adopting a transdisciplinary approach, a variety of qualitative methods are employed, including in-depth interviews, mapping exercises, ethnography, documentary analysis, photography, attendance at public meetings, focus groups, informal conversations, and the collection of archival materials and planning documents related to the case study.

The methodology of this research acknowledges the limitations that arise from analysing processes of different contexts and different scales of time, space, and impacts. It will also understand the limitations of using that might arise from embedding other cases in the literature and analytical frameworks, which could potentially act as merely a retrospective lens through which ‘El Cabanyal’ were to be analysed. This limitation will be overcome by complementing the spatial and political analysis with agonistic theory that will help us understand the specificity of the case. Lastly, the research will address methodologically the challenges of researching a dynamic, ongoing process using social, anthropological, ethnographic, and spatial research methods.

The cases in El Cabanyal selected to ground the theoretical framework will be considered as ‘agonistic practices that represent how dissensus can be transformative by creating alternative meanings and spatialities. The research will assume that these cases managed to transgress the consensual principles around the political order of the time by putting forward their own alternative visions and constructing new urban imaginaries that respond to the needs, desires, and aspirations of those who materialise them. The research will retrospectively and actively use dissensus as a lens of investigation. The main features of the methodology are the following:

- Through the analysis of the discourses of the actors that have taken part in the development of the case, it will unpack the process through which alternative urban narratives were being written historically through time, and new uses of space were being invented or ‘rediscovered’.

- In ‘El Cabanyal’ observation, interviews, individual and collective moments of discussion, and mapping will serve to collect data. In doing so, it will look at the same time at the individual and collective level to deconstruct those structures of power that inevitably rise up also in what is assumed to be an agonistic space.

- Interviews, individual and collective moments of discussion will focus on personal narratives that will resurface the subjectivities that embrace the personal and collective desires of the
neighbours. It will try to understand the psychological and emotional relationship of the Neighbours with ‘El Cabanyal’ and Valencia, while at the same time, I will try to unpack the topological mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion and those same scales.

- Following Keshavarz’s experience in *Forms of Resistance* this research aims for a “critical role of the design researcher is to better understand [other] sensitivities, relativities and limits in situ” which demands a “more political, or disruptive and even destructive, form of indisciplinarity […] to facilitate “a non-hierarchical design research that leads into the ‘de-compartmentalisation of each discipline” (Keshavarz and Mazé 2013, p.24) and demand the urgent need for practices of design to foster *dissensus*.

This research, methodologically speaking, will understand that urban planning and design, as spatial and social practices, must be “a performative act that both stages and defines equality, exposes a ‘wrong’, and aspires to a transformation of the senses and of the sensible, to render common sense what was non sensible before”. Hence practices of design must start “framing and staging a diversity of subjects as adversaries to confront and engage” (Keshavarz and Mazé 2013, p.8) in an agonistic dialect.

### 1.5 Structuring this thesis

Following this introductory Chapter, the thesis is organised in 6 more chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical stance of the research building a theoretical framework that bridges together literature on post-politics, dissensus and agonism with planning theory. I then draw the Rancièrian concept of dissensus as an interruption of the post-political hegemony which emphasize the importance of acknowledging conflict and engaging respectfully with adversaries. The impact of the post-political order on urban governance and policies is examined, revealing how managerial technocratic approaches and universal consensus have led to the displacement and disenfranchisement of citizens. The chapter also explores the emergence of counter-hegemonic practices within cities, that enact and spatialise dissensus challenging dominant discourses and creating new alternatives in the form of agonistic urbanism. I conclude highlighting the need to unveil mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and emphasise the crucial role desires and passions play a crucial in motivating collective action.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the methodology of the research. Drawing on qualitative methods, supported by quantitative data and based on a single case study, the methodology of this research has been designed to explore how dissensus has shaped El Cabanyal throughout time, to unveil the spatial, social and political relationship of Valencia and El Cabanyal has been, and
understand how resistance to urban change has spatialised in different ways. I have discussed why the interdisciplinary approach to the methodology of this thesis is most suited to answer the research questions at hand and deal with the complexity of the case while keeping the focus on the spatial dimension of what I was analysing.

The main goal of Chapter 4 is set to unveil how dissensus has shaped spatial, social and political relation between El Cabanyal and Valencia from its emergence as a fishermen’s village near the port area, flourished into an independent town, until it was annexed to Valencia as a neighbourhood in 1897, and finishing the analysis in 1997. Feeding on historical documents, drawings, planning documents and cartography this chapter shows how El Cabanyal’s development had always been subservient Valencia’s maritime aspirations and its wider economic and political interests of Valencia as a capital city, and how El Cabanyal has tried to challenge this.

Chapter 5 covers from 1998 until 2015 and is set to explore the neoliberal urban development agenda behind Valencia’s aspiration to become a world-class city, which guided the urban transformation of its maritime façade. It will discuss the political motivations behind the PEPRI, one of these mega projects that wanted to extend Blasco Ibáñez Avenue through El Cabanyal until the sea, destroying a significant part of the neighbourhood. Analysing plans and documents itunpacks the different ways in which these were used to manipulate and silence dissenting voices, imposing a hegemonic vision for El Cabanyal that negated and foreclosed any alternatives of the PEPRI. The chapter then examines the spatial, emotional and cultural impact of the PEPRI on El Cabanyal throughout 17 years of struggle against the PEPRI. It concludes with an analysis of spatial practices of dissensus channelled by the platform ‘Salvem El Cabanyal,’ which employed various strategies to oppose the plan.

Chapter 6 focuses on the period from 2015 to 2017 examining the political change brought by the results of local elections of May 2015 and its impact of the future regeneration of El Cabanyal. I argue that a new political hegemony in Valencia's marked by its departure from the previous neoliberal urban agenda. I then go on to analyse what this change implied in terms of expectations and discuss the desires and frustrations of residents regarding the neighbourhood’s regeneration, in contrast to the concerns of minoritised groups about gentrification and displacement. The participatory process that took place in Autumn 2015, Va Cabanyal, reveals hegemonic discourses in El Cabanyal and unveils the tension between the different narratives of dissensus amongst different actors. I conclude by examining the materialisation of dissensus into potential agonistic urbanisms in El Clot and in the Zona Cero highlighting the potential of agonistic urbanisms to challenge dominant narratives and envision alternative inclusive urban futures.
In the concluding chapter, I address the research questions, which are each related to my research aims. I then proceed address the fourth research aim which discusses the wider lessons of my research for planning theory and practice and urban processes regeneration more widely. Based on my research the chapter engages with agonistic planning theory and spatial practices as a way not only for the re-politisisation and inclusion of all those who are otherwise excluded from the mainstream production of space, but also to engage that silent majority of people who authorities, architects, planners and researchers find difficult to engage and motivate.
2. TOWARDS AN URBANISM OF DISSENSUS IN THE POST-POLITICAL CITY

2.1 Introduction

Dissensus in El Cabanyal, as discussed in the introduction chapter, has been shaping the neighbourhood intensely in the past two decades and is conditioning its future social, political and spatial development. Dissensus is the immanent disruption of the hegemonic order, which occurs in the boundaries of different discourses (Jones 2014b, p.14). As such, it has also entered the urban discourse to question equality and inclusion in our cities. Yet, while much literature looks at how dissensus articulates political discourses, less has been investigated on how people negotiate their different needs and aspirations and how this is materialised at the scale of the neighbourhood in spatial terms. This chapter aims to understand how dissensus spatialises at the scale of the micro-politics of people’s everyday life in El Cabanyal. To explore this spatial dimension of dissensus, this thesis draws on literature that helps to elucidate how dissensus has shaped the social and urban fabric of El Cabanyal in relation to wider processes of urban transformation the city of Valencia has gone through, especially over the last two decades. Reflecting on my research questions, a particular emphasis is placed on how neoliberal urban policies have shaped Valencia and El Cabanyal in what is known as the ‘post-political’ context.

This chapter starts reviewing the theoretical accounts of the post-political condition where consensus has been built around the impossibility of alternatives to the neoliberal-global hegemony in Western and European contexts. Characterized by managerial technocratic approaches and universalist consensus leading to the displacement and disenfranchisement of citizens, the post-political has expelled dissensus from the urban arena. I engage with the Rancièrian concept of dissensus as a theatrical and performative process that exposes the inequalities and injustices within the existing post-political order. I then draw on Mouffe’s concept of agonism to argue that the response to conflict is transforming ‘enemies’ into legitimate ‘adversaries’. I discuss the importance of engaging with Mouffes’s concept of agonism in recognising the inherently conflictual nature of society and the need for respectful engagement with adversaries rather than enemies. This approach enables the possibility of real alternatives to the dominant consensus.

The second section of this chapter I look at the ‘post-political’ in the context of urban governance and practices to provide insights into recent social and spatial changes in cities. I unpack the effects of the post-political hegemonic order in our cities, understanding how it affects urban governance
and policies based on managerial technocratic approaches and universalist consensus. As a result, I argue that spatial practices have been used to enable the spectacularisation of our cities as sites of capital accumulation, producing a ‘Photoshopped urban’ life that is by no means responsive to local realities, disenfranchising citizens from their neighbourhoods and ultimately displacing them.

Following on this, the third section looks at how cities are reacting to all those issues around counter-hegemonic logics and strategies. I then go on to discuss how those othered within the hegemonic order find spaces within the porosity of the system where conflict and dissensus can resurface and enable the formulation of new alternatives. These spaces allow marginalized voices to reclaim the “properly political” and challenge dominant discourses of the dominant neoliberal project.

I close the chapter with a section examining the complex ways in which different views about urban change are spatialised in the micro-political scale of the neighbourhood to understand how ‘dissensus’ amongst legitimate adversaries materialises into ‘agonistic urbanisms’ that can potentially inform urban futures. Agonistic urbanisms in this research are understood as spatial practices of those groups that have been othered, that can challenge the consensual frameworks of hegemonic order, contesting the distribution of power, spaces, roles and functions in that order. I argue that agonistic urbanisms are spaces of subversive contestation that go beyond the logics of the planned city and are characterized by a sense of solidarity among those who share them. I highlight the need to unveil mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and emphasise the crucial role desires and passions play a crucial in motivating collective action of political subjects.

2.2 Back to the ‘Political’.

In recent years, the post-political discourse has become a fashionable concept used in political, social and urban studies as an analytical framework to understand the turbulences of our democratic systems and the ongoing discontents and global civil struggles all around the world. However, post-political analysis at an urban and spatial level can potentially provide useful insights into interpreting recent social and spatial changes in our cities. Using the ‘post-political’ as an analytical framework based on Rancière’s concept of dissensus can show us how spatial practices have been used to legitimise and consolidate hegemonic orders, but also ways in which these spatial practices can be materialised into counter-hegemonic strategies.

2.2.1 Post-political Hegemony and Discourse

Our current political state has been defined by key theorists like Rancière, Žižek, Crouch, and Mouffe or geographers such as Swyngedouw and Allmendinger & Haughton, as ‘post-democracy’ or the ‘post-political’ condition, which traces back its roots to the post-Cold War period. The post-
political provides a critical view of the processes and associated practices since that period that have contributed to the development of our modern Western democracies. According to post-political theorists, these not only have been instituted and inscribed within the framework of neoliberal interests and globalisation but have also been subjugated to global financial interests during the last decades, where “powerful minority interests have become far more active than the mass of ordinary people in making the political system work for them; where political elites have learned to manage and manipulate popular demands; where people have to be persuaded to vote by top-down publicity campaigns” (Crouch 2000, p.12). As a critique of the current state of modern political systems, many authors, under the lenses of post-politics, convey a sense of failure of our democratic political system (Rancière 1999; Žižek 1999; Mouffe 2000b; Crouch 2004; Mouffe 2005b; Rancière 2005; Rancière 2007; Žižek 2008a; 2008b; Rancière 2009a; Mouffe 2010). The fundamental question here for post-political theoreticians is to define what constitutes the ‘properly political'? What political and democratic systems should we aim for and construct? These authors define post-politics as the political condition that actually excludes and expels the ‘properly political’ and impedes the politicisation of individuals (Žižek 1999; Mouffe 2000b; Mouffe 2002; Mouffe 2005b; McDonough 2011).

Hegemonic post-political discourse is one in which consensus has been built around the “inevitability of neo-liberal capitalism as the economic system and parliamentary democracy as the political ideal” (Swyngedouw 2010, p.7). Neoliberal globalisation is the only democratic system, and no other alternatives to it are possible (Mouffe 2005b; Baeten 2007; Fezer 2010; Swyngedouw 2010). This widespread established discourse around the impossibility of alternatives to neoliberal-global hegemony has even been accepted by the traditional left. In Mouffe’s words, “In most of Europe, nothing very radical can be expected […]. And even when there is a centre-left government, it is incapable of proposing alternatives. This is, of course, due to the fact that Socialists and Social-Democratic parties have long been accepting the idea that there was no alternative to neoliberal globalisation” (2010, p.139).

The post-political relies on either “including all in a consensual pluralist order and on excluding radically those who posit themselves outside the consensus” (Swyngedouw 2009, p.610). It disguises heterogeneity and diversity into pluralist tolerance and universalist consensus (Swyngedouw 2014b). For Agamben, “Western politics is first constituted itself upon that which it excludes from politics” (Agamben 1998, p.11). The post-political order includes ‘the majority’ as a universalist ‘we’, rejecting and foreclosing any possible ways of conflict and dissent (Mouffe 2000a; 2005a; Swyngedouw 2009; Mouffe 2010; Swyngedouw 2010; Mouffe 2016).
The post-political is fundamental to engage back with Laclau and Mouffe’s post-foundationalist ontological framework of discourse analysis and hegemonic strategy, which originated more than thirty years ago, as it brings it to the foreground again. Reinterpreting Gramsci’s theory of hegemony beyond working-class struggles, Laclau and Mouffe highlight the role of meaning and interpellation in the subjectification of political identities and in articulating and establishing political discourses and hegemonic orders (Laclau and Mouffe 2014). For Rancière politics is conceived as “a community of worlds in community that are intervals of subjectification: intervals constructed between identities, between spaces and places. Political being-together is a being-between: between identities, between worlds[...] Between several names, several identities, several statuses.” (Rancière 1999, p.p 137-138). In this subjectification of political identities “refers to an enunciative and demonstrative capacity to reconfigure the relation between the visible and the sayable, the relation between words and bodies: …the partition of the sensible” (Rancière 2000, p.115).

Mouffe’s ‘Hegemony and Discourse’, based on Foucault, understand that discourse is how power and knowledge came into contact, creating political subjects and shaping practices and social relations, as “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together[...]Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are[...]Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 1978, p.101). This is key to understanding how current democracies, in the form of governments and their institutions, have established a hegemonic order to which they –the constituents of that hegemonic order– claim there is no alternative model of politics to neo-liberal globalisation. In this consensual assertion of the non-existing alternatives to our modern democracies, “Consensus in effect became the suppression of the litigiousness constitutive of the political, and identitarianism became the flip side of this suppression: that is, it became the malady of consensus politics” (Rancière 2000, p.119).

2.2.2 The negation of dissensus in the post-political city

“Today we are dealing with another form of the degeneration of the political, postmodern post-politics, which no longer merely represses the political but much more effectively forecloses it [...].In post-politics, the conflict of global ideological visions embodied in different parties which compete for power is replaced by the collaboration

16 Also Žižek or Mouffe.
of enlightened technocrats [...] via the process of negotiation of interests, a compromise
is reached in the guise of a more or less universal consensus”. (Žižek 1999, p.198)

In line with this, Mouffe points out how our current political model negates the potential of conflict
and opposition and asks for a challenge to this neo-liberal idea that there is no alternative to it
(2005b). Critical opinions, dissent and conflict, have been completely emptied from the political
arena. The parameters of democratic governing have been transformed into new forms of
governmentality, in which through “disembedded networks of governance…traditional disciplinary
society is transfigured into a society of control” that “forestalls the articulation of divergent,
conflicting and alternative trajectories of future (urban) possibilities and assemblages” (Swyngedouw
2009, p.608). In our consensual hegemony, for Agamben, dissent is used as an excuse whereby “the
declaration of the state of exception has gradually been replaced by an unprecedented generalisation
of the paradigm of security as the normal technique of government” (Agamben 2005, p.14).

The concept of dissensus and its broader significance in the context of the post-political city
hegemonic order. The term was first used by the philosopher Jacques Rancière in the 1980s and
referred to the disruption of the established order of things by those less visible, who demand a place
in it, a “part for those who have no part” (Rancière 2001, p.6). The central premise of dissensus for
Rancière is the disagreement and opposition to the “established order of governance with its
distributions of functions, people, and places” (Dikeç 2007, p.3). Rancière’s dissensus, despite being a
rupture that disturbs the socio-spatial hegemonic order(Rancière 2001), it is far from being
understood as irrational or violent, is understood as a “micro-political practice” that empowers
people to negotiate and reach their goals, desires and aspirations (Miessen 2010, p.93). Rancière
asserts that the political is related to the principle of equality, and arises when the police order is
questioned, disrupted or transgressed by those who are not constitutive of that order, that otherness
outside cultural, economic and political mainstreams, what Rancière call the ochlos (Rancière 1999).
The ‘police’ is related to the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, and it refers to the existing order
of things and constitutes a given ‘partition of the sensible’ as “a certain cutting out of space and time
that binds together practices, forms of visibility, and patterns of intelligibility”(Rancière 2009b, p.31).
The ‘police’ refers to “all the activities (of the state) which create order by distributing places, names,
factions” (Rancière 1996, p.173), as well as to the ordering of social relations and “… sees that
those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task” (Rancière 1999, p.29). This assumes
a consensual and universalist whole with institutionalised norms, where tasks and places are pre-
assigned and agreed upon. The space of the political has indeed become sutured by the police and
policing (Rancière 1999; 2007). As Fezer (2010) writes in his article Design for a Post-Neoliberal City,
“Every contradiction…is thereby expelled from this arena and categorically excluded”. Politics is
reduced to merely governing and policing, where places and functions are consciously distributed through consensual participatory manoeuvres, excluding those who manifest dissent and represent conflict out of the police order (Baeten 2007; Swyngedouw 2008)

However, Rancière’s explicit focus on the excluded, the ones that do not fit within that whole, reveals the emancipatory potential the ochlos have to disrupt that given police order as the only alternative possible. The ochlos are “not the disordered sum of appetites but the passion of the excluding One […] The demos might well be nothing but the movement whereby the multitude tears itself […] into the safety of incorporation into the image of the whole” (Rancière 2007, p.32). Proper political events performed by the ochlos are those acts that can initiate a disruption of the established hegemonic socio-spatial order by exposing a ‘wrong’ and staging ‘equality’ (Swyngedouw 2011b, p.375).

This disruption of the hegemonic order by the ochlos is inherently theatrical, a works of ‘art’ that stages a play whereby they de-identify with pre-assigned roles and identities in the existing ‘police order’ and they enact as a new political subject on the premises of equality, making “visible that which cannot be seen, which makes audible that which cannot be heard, which counts that which cannot be counted” (Rancière 1996, p.373). Subsequently, they initiate a rupture in the hegemonic order of things (Rancière 2000; Swyngedouw 2011b; 2014b; Ploger 2017). This process, Swyngedouw writes, is a disruption of the existing hegemonic order, is the arena “where the ochlos (‘the part of no part’) stage their conversion into demos” and, in doing so, “inaugurate a new ordering of the sensible”. It is the process by which “those who do not count, who do not exist as part of the polis become visible and audible, stage the count and assert their egalitarian existence.” (Rancière in Swyngedouw 2017, p.47). Political action disrupts or subverts the existing ‘order of the sensible’ (Dikeç 2007), opening up the possibility for new political subjects to appear, and “…it is a part as it is a concrete group of people, while it is a whole to the extent that it renders visible what underlies all social relations, namely equality” (Decreus et al. 2014, p.142). Žižek also speaks in these terms of proper political acts as transformative, claiming that a properly political act does not fit “well within the framework of existing relations, but […] changes the very framework that determines how things work” (Žižek 1999, p.199) and he wonders if we will be capable of “reinvent[ing] the political space in today’s conditions of globalisation?” (1999, p.222).

Following this, the “end of politics” (Rancière 2001, p.32) is the abnegation of dissensus, the main feature defining consensus. As Rancière explains, “consensus means that whatever your personal commitments, interests and values may be, you perceive the same things, you give them the same name. But there is no contest on what appears, on what is given” (Rancière 2003, p.4). In the post-
political order, freedom and choice are only permitted if they are within the consensual order. Hence, those outside that order, the ochlos, do not form part of the demos and are seen as outside the democratic play, and “democracy only exists in a society to the degree that the demos exist as the power to divide the ochlos” (Rancière 2001, p.32). For those who are left outside the law is suspended (Agamben 2005 quoted in Swyngedouw 2009, p.610); they are literally put outside the law and treated as extremists and “[t]he only way to deal with them is by sheer violence, by suspending their ‘humanitarian’ and ‘democratic’ rights.”(ibid 2009, p.610).

Rancière’s concept of dissensus is based on the disruptive potential of political subjectification processes to challenge the existing distribution of the sensible and disrupt established power dynamics, and to reconfigure what is visible, sayable, and thinkable within the political realm and challenge the existing distribution of the sensible and disrupts established power dynamics (Ploger 2004, Purcell, 2014). On the other hand, Mouffe's understanding of dissensus lies in a different conceptualization of the ‘political’ and the role of conflict in our democratic societies that share the same “the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality” (Mouffe 2005a). For Mouffe dissensus revolves around acknowledging of conflict as a form of constructive engagement, of negotiations between adversaries, rather than enemies. She further sees conflict as inherent to democratic politics (Decreus et al. 2014), and calls to transform antagonism into agonism (Mouffe 2005a; 2013; 2016). Mouffe's radical democracy emphasizes the role of antagonism in rupturing post-political consensus and creating spaces for dissent, thereby enabling robust and rigorous debate in decision-making processes. This contrasts with Rancière's focus on the disruptive nature of dissensus, which seeks to challenge and subvert existing power structures through the assertion of equality and the reconfiguration of the sensible (Fougère and Bond 2018). Mouffe's concept of agonistic pluralism posits that democratic politics should embrace and channel conflict through the creation of spaces for contestation and the recognition of diverse political identities. This approach contrasts with Rancière's emphasis on the disruptive potential of dissensus, and breaking away from established organisational structures and hierarchies of power (Ploger, 2004). Rancière's perspective highlights the emancipatory potential of dissensus where individuals resist existing identity positions and speak on their own terms through dissensual responses (Ranciere 1992; 2010; Puggioni 2023).

2.2.3 The agonistic turn

Mouffe argues that there is a political need for an ‘agonistic pluralism’ (Mouffe 1993; 2000a; 2005a; 2005b) as a democratic response to a context of diversity and conflict, transforming “enemies” into “adversaries”(Mouffe 2005a, p.22). However, Mouffe acknowledges that democracy cannot survive without certain forms of consensus based on the ethico-political values of “liberty and equality for
all” that legitimise it and the need for institutions to inscribe these (2013, p.7). Nevertheless, she insists it must also enable the agonistic expression of conflict, which requires that citizens have the possibility of freedom to choose between real alternatives (Mouffe 2000a; 2013; 2016). Significantly “dissensus is not the opposite of consensus but, rather, a process concerned with the potential emergence of new political formations” (Keshavarz and Mazé 2013, p.11). Conflict is not understood as a “form of protest or contrary provocation; rather, as micro-political practice through which the participant becomes an active agent who insists on being an actor in the force field they are facing” (Miessen 2010, p.93). Dissensus is understood as a form of critical engagement of social and spatial concerns that empowers the ochlos to negotiate and reach their goals and aspirations.

According to Ploger (2004, p.270), politics to Mouffe is “the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions, which seek to establish a certain order and organise human coexistence in conditions that are always conflictual” (2000b, p.101). She further states that “consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilisation of power” (Mouffe 2000b, p.104) and that an “agonistic pluralism always includes consensus with an exclusion of interests” and that is “why democracy [has to] make room for dissent” (p. 105). Mouffe, as Rancière, distinguishes between the political and politics, which for her, “aims at establishing an order and organising human coexistence under conditions that are marked by the political and thus always conflictual” (Mouffe 2014, p.150). She defines the political “as a site of conflict and antagonism” (Mouffe 2005a, p.9; 2007; 2013; 2014) because “only when the ineradicable character of division and antagonism is recognised […] it is possible to think in a properly political manner” (Mouffe 2014, p.150). Partaking this agonistic approach to the political implies recognising the fact that some conflicts can simply not achieve a rational solution and the:

“absence of a final ground and the un-decidability that pervades every order. t is precisely to this dimension that the category of hegemony refers, as it indicates that every society is the product of practices that seek to institute an order in a context of contingency” (Mouffe 2014, p.151).

One of the key challenges of spatial practices is how to work with dissensus and provide a framework for thinking beyond the post-political consensualist framework that forecloses dissensus. If conflict is immanent to all relations, urban planning and design (Ploger 2004) spatial practices must find a way to navigate competing interests between different actors whose interests, identities and positionalities are not fixed and change at different times and contexts (Ploger 2010; 2021). What has been termed as agonistic planning theory is becoming widely accepted within the discipline (Hillier 2001; 2002; Ploger 2004; Bäcklund and Mäntysalo 2010; Bond 2011; McClymont 2011; Munthe-Kaas...
in the search to understand how planning practices can deal better “with the growing conflict in society and cities” (Gualini 2015; Kühn 2021). Planning theory has been looking at how agonistic theory can help spatial practices embrace dissensus and help us move from theory to the realities of spatial practice (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo 2010; Yamamoto 2017), ensuring that they make “visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate…giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony.” (Mouffe 2007, p.4). However, we must move beyond theory, therefore “for agonistic pluralism to ever feature strongly in planning theory, at least some specificity as to how it is to be achieved is essential’ (McAuliffe and Rogers 2020, p.175).

Dissent is thus a way both to limit and to rupture politics and is a force that cannot be absorbed or eradicated by decisional procedure (Pløger 2021) and is enabled by antagonism, which “has a critical role in neoliberal contexts, rupturing post-politics and creating spaces of dissent so that agonistic contestation can provide for robust and rigorous debate in […] decision-making.” (Fougère and Bond 2018, p.143)

Agonism is based on the dialectical relation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Mouffe 2013), but rather than enemies, people with conflicting views, or antagonism between ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’. Mouffe calls for agonistic ethos that fosters respect for those who dissent with the consensual frameworks of the hegemonic order and are not seen as enemies but are seen as legitimate adversaries (2005a; 2013), as a “critical co-player[…] seen as a person that one can learn from and dispute with, because it is a ‘friendly’ enemy or a not-antagonistic enemy” (Pløger 2004, p.88). This understanding of agonism as ‘adversarial’ practices exemplify Mouffe’s conceptualisation of the political and, to a limited extent and in some specific cases, Rancière’s ‘dissensus.’ (Kaminer 2018, p.43). These adversarial practices can materialise in “counter-hegemonic articulations of differentiated but equivalent popular struggles, a formation I call “networks of equivalence” (Purcell 2009, p.292), and in this process of re-articulation, they develop “new relational collective identities of an “us and them” through these constructed chains of equivalence (Bond 2011). Mouffe is very critical of the idea of agonism as contestation since “every decision is only a temporary hegemony to be challenged”. While she also acknowledges that agonism and antagonism are shifting positionalities and co-constitute each other, “Not all kinds of antagonism or agonism are legitimate, particularly not those questioning or threatening democracy.” (Mouffe 2013 in Pløger 2017, p.268) The constant indistinction and redefinition of agonism into antagonism is what Pløger terms as the unfinished, a “mode of dissensual praxis, challenges the normal distribution of power” (Pløger 2021, p.1296).
2.3 The dying city

“...there is a shift from the model of the polis founded on a centre, that is, a public centre or agora, to a new metropolitan spatialisation that is certainly invested in a process of depoliticisation, which results in a strange zone where it is impossible to decide what is private and what is public” (Agamben 2006)

2.3.1 Post-political and neoliberal urban governance

The depoliticisation of urban processes and practices, as a result of Neoliberal urban governance “and the debates over the arrangement of the city […] are not only perfect expressions of such a post-political order, […] but one of the key arenas through which this post-political consensus becomes constructed” (Swyngedouw 2009, p.610). The post-political condition has brought “new forms of autocratic governance-beyond-the-state” (Swyngedouw 2005, p.2003) which reduces urban governance to “stakeholder-based arrangement of governance in which the traditional state forms (national, regional or local government) partner together with experts, technocrats and bureaucrats (Crouch 2004 in (Swyngedouw 2009, p.608), and blurs the boundaries of private and public spheres.

These neoliberal urban agendas face no “contestation over the givens of the situation, over the partition of the sensible; there is only debate over the technologies of management, the arrangements of policing and the configuration of those who already have a stake, whose voice is already recognised as legitimate.” (Swyngedouw 2009, p.610).

As Žižek asserts, “the ultimate sign of post-politics in all Western countries is the growth of a technocratic approach to government: government is reconceived as a managerial function, deprived of its proper political dimension” (Žižek 2002 in Swyngedouw 2009, p.609). These new forms of managerial and technocratic ‘governance’, which are articulated at different spatial scales, are an inherent expression of the same post-political condition unfolding through socio-spatial transformations. (Mouffe 2005a, p.103; Swyngedouw 2005; Baeten 2007; Dikeç 2007; Swyngedouw 2009; Allmendinger and Haughton 2010; Allmendinger and Haughton 2012). The managerial approach to urban governance intrinsic to the post-political condition neglects the politicisation of individual people (Žižek 1999; Mouffe 2005a; McDonough 2011) and, in the words of Swyngedouw, “rejects ideological divisions and the explicit universalisation of particular political demands” (Swyngedouw 2009, p.609).
These current forms of governance, based on consensus, are articulated through a sophisticated technocratic and administrative apparatus.\textsuperscript{17} We can see how urban development and renewal plans are purely underpinned by managerial, technocratic, expert-led approaches and procedures that seek consensus in the name of the common good (Tsouvalis and Waterton 2011). In London, citizen participation is reduced to merely public consultations where projects are exposed from a purely urban and architectural approach. In the end, they fill up a form giving feedback, which in case of being negative, will rarely significantly influence the development of that particular project. In Valencia, the proposed plan for El Cabanyal was initially accompanied by a participatory process: three options were publicly exposed, and people could vote and choose one. However, the option that resulted elected was not the one the authorities had their interests on, so they manipulated the results to impose their proposal in a bureaucratic manoeuvre, using their power to undermine the neighbours' will and render them as radicals or subversive citizens against the common good of the neighbourhood.

This extensive transformation of urban politics and its governing bodies (Brenner 1999; Purcell 2002, p.99) results in “institutional configurations articulated around public-private partnerships operating in a frame of generally agreed objectives” (Swyngedouw 2011b, p.371). In the United Kingdom, parallel to the City Deals, the central government encouraged local authorities and private businesses to form Local Enterprise Partnerships and public-private entities to plan for regional development and infrastructure investment.\textsuperscript{18} Public and private sectors are exploring new ways of cooperation, whereby the state sets back through the deregulation of urban and economic policies and the reconfiguring of urban space, in benefit of the private sectors (Tickell and Peck 2002) “whose ethos are driven particularly by the imperative of capitalist accumulation” and are not “accountable to the local electorate and conventional democratic control” (Purcell 2002, p.101).

Increased autonomy and empowerment of local governance institutions have accompanied the withdrawal of central states. This has resulted in a shift of their urban policy orientations towards competition: in the context of post-political reconfiguration, local governance institutions have focused increasing emphasis on boosting their region’s economic competitiveness with cities as sites of capital accumulation (Harvey 1989; Peck 1998; Purcell 2002; Swyngedouw 2005; Purcell

\textsuperscript{17} Here refers to Agamben’s apparatus as a dispositif of power and control. As he highlights, “it would probably not be wrong to define the extreme phase of capitalist development as a massive accumulation and proliferation of apparatuses” (Agamben 2009, p.14 in Boano and Talocci 2014, p.718).

\textsuperscript{18} To impulse these alliances, LEPs can apply to create Enterprise Zones, which are geographic areas with higher business rates can be captured by the LEP and local authorities, and a range of incentives can be offered to attract business investment.
2013) following a supposedly successful ‘Bilbao effect’ (Díaz Orueta 2006, p.267). There is no doubt that decentralisation is key to deepening democracy and essential to scaling up any policy that empowers the community. However, in line with Hickey and Mohan (2005, p.243), I will argue that this is not always the outcome of decentralisation. This ‘roll-back’ of the state has facilitated processes of gentrification, as it leaves the development of neighbourhoods in the hand of the financial interests of the market.

The Localism Act passed in 2011 in the United Kingdom, was supposed to be a tool for local authorities to gain autonomy from the central government and provided for more local decision-making for planning, housing and regeneration. However, the fact that it depends on central grants makes it very difficult to challenge the entrenched centralisation in the United Kingdom.

Decentralisation has not been conceived as a “political project aimed at transforming state legitimacy and forgoing a new contract between citizens and the local state”. At the local level, local governance and urban development are less accountable. In Spain, the technocratic decentralisation of the state has shaped the local government’s power relations with the central state and citizens. In the case of the city of Valencia, with its strategy during the 2000s based on mega events like America’s Cup and F1 races and mega projects like ‘Ciudad de las Artes y las Ciencias’ by star architect Santiago Calatrava, this political enablement has resulted in a “greater control over state resources and use them to consolidate electoral support or new client sectors can be favoured by these policies” (Burgess et al. 1997, p.148), using funds following a political rather than welfare criteria.

This reduction of urban politics to a purely technocratic sphere “mobilises the vast apparatus of experts, social workers, and so on, to reduce the overall demand (complaint) of a particular group to just this demand, with its particular content — no wonder that this suffocating closure gives birth to “irrational” outbursts of violence as the only way to give expression to the dimension beyond particularity” (Žižek 1999, p.204). These changes in urban governance and policing have tended to disenfranchise urban inhabitants concerning the decisions that shape the city. Urban citizens have seen how they have less and less control and ownership over the decisions that shape their city. Therefore, as Purcell argues, there is an urgent need to devise “new strategies for resisting neoliberal globalisation and for enfranchising urban inhabitants” (Purcell 2002, p.99).

2.3.2 The Spectacularisation of Urban Space and Displacement.

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19 Even still, in the aftermath of the huge economic crisis that affected Europe in 2008, we still have of this kind of urban and economic development pattern in cities like Nantes or Helsinki with its new Guggenheim museum.
Post-political urban governance arrangements have been catering for the conditions for the commodification of our cities as sites of capital accumulation favouring “real estate and infrastructure development that will foster economic growth and reshape urban space to cater to elite and business interests” (Harvey 1989 in Shatkin 2011, p.81). This new governance context of neoliberal urban development plans has led to massive gentrification processes. Marcuse defines gentrification as a process that “attracts higher-income households from other areas in the city, reducing demand elsewhere, and increasing tendencies to abandonment. In addition, gentrification displaces lower-income people—increasing pressures on housing and rents. Both abandonment and gentrification are linked directly to changes in the economic polarisation of the population. A vicious circle is created in which the poor are continuously under pressure of displacement and the wealthy continuously seek to wall themselves within gentrified neighbourhoods. Far from a cure for abandonment, gentrification worsens the process” (Marcuse 1985, p.196). Sassen described it as the “physical displacement of low-income households, non-profit uses and low-profit firms, expressed directly in evictions or indirectly through the market” (Sassen, 2006, p18). These processes of gentrification have been legitimised as the natural development and regeneration of our cities. Displacement refers to the dispossession (Harvey) suffered by poor and working-class families during the transformation of the neighbourhoods where they live. As Marcuse explains:

“When a family sees the neighbourhood around it changing dramatically, when their friends are leaving the neighbourhood, when the stores they patronise are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking their places, and when changes in public facilities, in transportation patterns, and in support services all clearly are making the area less and less livable, then the pressure of displacement already is severe. Its actuality is only a matter of time. Families living under these circumstances may move as soon as they can, rather than wait for the inevitable; nonetheless they are displaced” (Marcuse 1985, p.207)

In Lille, Urban Development Projects such as Euralille have provided the area with services, uses and housing only affordable middle- to upper-classes, leading to local price rises. This has displaced lower/middle-class and working-class populations to “cheaper” areas to the south, contributing to a growing spatial polarisation of deprived residents. Even at small scales, we can see these gentrification trends in the stories like the Tompkins Square Park in New York, where “new gentrifiers; older, white working-class Eastern Europeans; self-styled anarchists, artists and other Bohemians; students; and bikers” would complain about the noise and insecurity created by homeless people who were living in the Park, until they were cleared them from the park. (Fainstein 2005, p.13)
“Spectacle is capital accumulated to the point that it becomes images” (Debord 1994, p.24) and in this, urban design and planning are the key spatial dispositifs to recreate such images and illusions (Boano and Talocci 2014). They are tools which are actively used for the spectacularisation of our cities as sites of capital accumulation as wider urban strategies of the city government (2014). Indeed, spatial practices are used in the post-political condition as tools for distributing and allocating people, things, and functions to designated places, used as commodifying machines and, at the same time, objects of commodification (Stickells 2011) that “effectively mirrors its values of reification and facade, the superficial, the surface, in the commodification of the built environment” (Gunder 2011, p.186). Such commodification of our cities as sites of capital accumulation has had a clear expression in most major European cities like London, Madrid, and Athens, where “urban leaders have cut back social expenditures [while] they have approved big outlays for physical transformation. Thus, they have allocated huge sums to develop mega-projects aimed at enhancing their cities’ competitive position” (Fainstein 2014, p.357). Cities continuously compete to celebrate global events like the Olympics, Cultural City or World Cups, and if they win the bidding, investment and overspending on preparing top world facilities and infrastructures for the event starts almost immediately, if not before. These events are justified as economic catalysts that will bring in tourists, boost businesses and improve and regenerate decayed areas, leaving behind a long-term legacy not only to the city but also to the local areas where these events are developed.

However, as we have witnessed in cities like London, the result is arguably far from that for local communities. The spectacularisation of some areas in Newham due to the Olympics Games and the legacy of such an event (Carmona 2012; Davis 2014; 2016) have brought into the local area issues of gentrification. Land prices have been inflated, making access to housing and services “unaffordable to those with average incomes, promoting gentrification, and producing neighbourhoods of exclusivity” (Fainstein 2014, p.357). Consequently, many of its original residents are at risk of being displaced to cheaper and outer areas, and there is as well a physical and symbolical disconnection of the Olympic sites with its surrounding area (Boano and Talocci 2014). Nevertheless, in the post-political arrangement, neoliberalism and consensual-based politics have been extremely powerful at an urban level, “where we can see its impact on the physical development of cities, on spatial segregation, and the lack of affordable housing very clearly” (Fainstein 2014, p.356).

As a consequence of the Post Political urban development, we have witnessed an erosion of citizen’s rights that implied the emergence of political struggles over whose city it is supposed to be, resulting in “waves of anti-gentrification struggles swept across New York, Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, and later Istanbul and Zagreb, and slogans such as ‘Die, yuppie scum!’ became literally global. ‘Reclaim the Streets’ and similar local mobilisations of the anti-globalisation movement popularised the slogan
‘Another world is possible’ and ‘Another city is possible!” (Mayer 2009, p.366) Gentrification and displacement are not the results of the free choices of individual neighbours but rather the undesired contextual and conjectural outcomes of post-political urban development behind any choice.

2.3.3 ‘Photoshopped’ urban life vs local realities of everyday life.

All across Europe, we witness how many urban development projects aim to foster cities as sites of capital accumulation, resulting in the spectacularisation of urban space. To ensure the success of these operations—and the successful accumulation of capital in the areas developed—governments and private investors promote the creation of new urban identities that reflect the new image associated with that spectacularisation of the city and its potential residents. This transformation of existing socio-spatial urban identities into completely newly branded urban identities is even commissioned to special agencies such as ‘Future City’, ‘Placemaking London’, or ‘This Must Be The Place’ who define themselves as place-making agencies or consultants. Identity and the sense of belonging to a place, and ultimately citizenship, are actively threatened by the sprawling new neoliberal redevelopment of local areas (Boano and Kelling 2013). In London, we see examples of how regeneration projects of local areas all across the city, from Portobello Square in the west to Elephant and Castle and Nine Elms on the South, Kings Cross on the North or Silvertown Quays and Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in the East. They are all subject to strategies of place-making politics, dismissing local residents, almost implying there was no previous sense of place, hence the need to brand a new identity for it. There might be a need to brand a new sense of place for newcomers, but residents already have a sense of place, of the place where they live. This is what I would call the mismatch between ‘Photoshopped urban life and actually existing local realities’. These strategies providing new urban identity to regeneration developments, apparently, context-specific to the local area and almost interchangeable, produce standardised glocal urban places and homogeneous spatial arrangements likewise in very diverse sites. Mitchell states that the cities are being refashioned due to transnational globalisation and neoliberal policies, resulting in the “collapse of public space itself through the constant production and reproduction of certain kinds of places”. While favouring the elites in the city, this “Disneyfication” of public space eradicates other marginalised excluded groups from its use and production (Mitchell 2003, p.165).

I will argue that what is clearly at stake is defining which citizens is ‘placemaking’ for. Is it for the existing residents who are supposedly going to garnish new amenities, homes and facilities that most often they cannot afford, or is it for the higher-class newcomers who will be able to afford all those new things? The concept of citizenship has evolved and has been interpreted in very different ways since its origins in the Greek Polis. Only the ones considered as part of the dominant political order
were entitled to this right, and in this sense, who is entitled to citizenship has remained unaltered, as even today, in the post-political condition, marginalised groups, such as homeless, immigrants or squatters are not considered within the political order (Mitchell 2003). In theory, citizens who hold membership within the political order are, given full rights of citizenship, albeit in practice, substantive citizenship - the one that they not only have but also practice - is usually disconnected from it (Holston and Appadurai, 1996). However, the post-political condition has changed how the cities and states are institutionally, spatially and socially organised. This has opened up new and even contradictory reconfigurations of citizenship that allow these “new imaginaries to take place […] as a move towards citizenship practices that revolve around claiming rights to the city” (Sassen 2002, p.6). The contradictions between different ideals of citizenship and who is entitled to what rights are a constant source of struggle and violent outbursts throughout the entire planet. Sassen further states, “movements between membership and exclusion, and between different dimensions of citizenship, legitimacy and illegitimacy, may be as important as redefinitions of citizenship itself.” (Sassen 2002:13). Socio-economic inequalities, together with the diversity and complexity of citizens, “affect citizenship profoundly because they provoke new notions of membership, solidarity, and alienage” (Holston and Appadurai 1996, p.196). These new realities detach the notion of urban citizenship from residents and move it “towards the enactment of a large array of particular interests, from protests against police brutality and globalisation to sexual preference politics and house-squatting by anarchists” (Sassen 2002, p.6). Furthermore, the formal and spatial framing of citizenship fails to entail the city as a political site and neglects the power relations that inherently exist in it (Dikeç and Gilbert 2002; Brown 2010). The question here is to define how urban citizenship is designated in the police order, to whom and how, and what kind of rights it entails. Dikeç, in his book ‘The Badlands of the Republic’ dissects how post-political urban policing in France aims at the spatial distribution and circulation of things and people within a consensually agreed neoliberal framework and claims that spatialised tools (such as planning, architecture, urban policies, etc.) are one of the principal tools of the police in the task of defining who are citizens of full rights (Dikeç 2007).

In other words, how French urban policy is used as a bio-political heterogeneous apparatus comprised of a set of technologies and strategies for ordering, distributing, and allocating people, things, and functions to designated places. In other words, they serve specifically to enable or inhibit political subjectivation (Lahiji, 2011). The mismatch between formal and substantial citizenship

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20 Rancière’s “partition of the sensible”. (Rancière 2000, p.115)
suggests how insurgent citizenship appears in the scene. It appears as a form of demanding rights within and to the city and claiming back new conceptualisations of the city outside the existing post-political framework. Hence “[c]itizenship changes as new members emerge to advance their claims, expanding its realm, and as new forms of segregation and violence counter these advances, eroding it. The sites of insurgent citizenship are found at the intersection of these processes of expansion and erosion” (Holston 1999, p.167). The city is the place where the concept of citizenship can be reformulated, where the figure of the citizen is not bounded to a single, unified, and homogeneous category but is multiple, diverse, and often divided. The city is also the object of citizenship struggles. In doing so, it can be the space where conflict can be staged, as it has always been “a site of violent social and cultural confrontation” (Holston and Appadurai 1996, p.200). When making claims, citizens occupy a space that they appropriate, a space that represents the material manifestation of their citizenship, or Mouffe’s ‘common symbolic space. These political spaces where the post-political condition is questioned—thus unlocking new modes of politics and experimenting with collective practices of radical democratisation—materialise the alignment between conflicting notions of identity and citizenship. They require their “own material and cultural landscapes, their own emblematic geographies” (Swyngedouw 2008, p.34). These spaces are able to contest the photoshopped “givenness of the place”, which designates “either some form of social fixity (for example, an identity imposed upon an individual or group) or material orderings of space, or even established ways of thinking that draw limits between the possible and the impossible” (Dikeç 2012, p.674)

2.4 The subversive city and the spatialisation of practices of dissensus

By its own nature, the post-political condition, where no alternatives to the neoliberal governance and this commodified urban life are rendered, albeit this universalist consensus that annuls dissensus, foreclosing the political, in its inherent contradictorily nature, has a porosity that allows new imaginaries outside itself, opening up for new possibilities. As Swyngedouw points out, the post-

21 “Individuals and groups tend to search for forms of collective identification that exist outside the traditional forms of political association and participation. The reason is that the non-universalizable contingent or particularist characteristics that are often understood by some people to be constitutive of their very identity are not allowed to be associated with conceptions of citizenship.” (Jones 2014b, p.23)

22 “Its geography is too legible, too visible to be missed in the abandoned public spaces of the modern city, in its fortified residential enclaves, its division into corporate luxury zones and quarantined war zones, its forbidden sectors of gangs and “armed response” security, its bunkers of fundamentalists, its illegally constructed shanties, its endless neighbourhoods of unemployed youth” (Holston and Appadurai 1996, p.202)
political consensual police “annuls democracy and must, of necessity, lead to an ultra-politics of violent disavowal, radical closure and, ultimately, to the tyrannies of violence and of foreclosure of any real spaces of engagement. However, the disappearance of the political in a post-political arrangement leaves all manner of traces that allow for the resurfacing of the properly political” (Swyngedouw 2009, p.605). Space is inherently political, but when it assumes a particular position, excluding other different positions and alternatives from it, it vacuums its ‘properly political’ nature:

“Space becomes political in that it...becomes an integral element of the interruption of the ‘natural’ order of domination through the constitution of a place of encounter by those that have no part in that order. The political is signaled by this encounter as a moment of interruption, and not by the mere presence of power relations and competing interests” (Dikeç 2005, p.172).

In other words, this interruption can be achieved by enabling the political space where dissensus can be materialised (Swyngedouw 2010), a “common symbolic space” (Mouffe 2000a; Mouffe 2010) that would also facilitate conflict and confrontation and “to create such a space would be a design task in the widest possible sense of the term” (Fezer 2010, p.2). These spaces are key to formulating new alternatives and visions of the system, introducing new radical imaginaries and reclaiming back the ‘properly political’ by those who are left outside the hegemonic order (Kaika 2010 in (Swyngedouw 2011b), by those who are rendered invisible by the power elites, by those who can now turn their ‘noise into discourse’ (Swyngedouw 2009; Allmendinger and Haughton 2012). Significantly, as Swyngedouw affirms:

“[t]he emergence of politicisation is always specific, concrete, particular, but stands as the metaphorical condensation of the universal. This procedure implies the production of new material and discursive spatialities within and through the existing spatialities of the police” (Swyngedouw 2011b, p.376).

2.4.1 The materialisation of dissensus

These voids within the system are physical spaces where dissensus can be materialised, and new alternatives can be formulated outside the existing framework. These new alternatives can disrupt that same framework that determines the functioning of the system and even challenge the dominant discourses that justify and shape that existing framework (Swyngedouw 2017a). By demanding the active inclusion of the excluded into the political arena, of becoming political subjects, they are unpacking and unveiling mechanisms that result in spatial practices that appropriate and reconfigure “urban public spaces [which] has always been the hallmark of emancipatory geopolitical trajectories.”(Swyngedouw 2017a, p.55)
Since 2001 in Argentina, followed in 2005 in France, and especially since 2011, our cities have been catering to insurgent citizens organising collectively in urban political movements in places as diverse as Spain, The United States, Turkey, Tunisia, Egypt, Greece, the United Kingdom, Chile, Brazil, and so on (Swyngedouw 2014a). The demos are being challenged by “the whole of those who are nothing, who do not have specific properties allowing them to exercise power” (Rancière 2000, p.124). They operate under a common slogan of ‘Democracy now!/ Democracia Real Ya!’ to cry and demand a new hegemonic political system, their legitimate place in the police order and a new way of organising common political life collectively, of taking management of their own affairs (Purcell 2013; Decreus et al. 2014; Stavrakakis 2014; Swyngedouw 2014b). ‘Occupy!’, or the Spanish and Greek Outraged, “represent a dissensus as inadmissible, because the movement questions politics ‘as we know it’” (Pløger 2017, p.270), and when standing up for the invisible other ‘99%’ (us) against the other ‘1%’ (them) to give those who have no legitimate voice within the sensible a legitimacy and voice (Pløger 2017, p.271) have occupied the squares and streets of their main cities requesting “Real democracy now,” not as “something to be granted by the state, but as something they intend to begin building themselves” (Purcell 2013, p.321).

These insurgent citizens have translated their counter-hegemonic claims into a real spatial mobilisation that can disrupt “established formulas of rule and privilege in the most diverse societies worldwide” (Holston 1999). Demanding the active inclusion of the excluded into the political arena, of becoming political subjects, they are unpacking and unveiling mechanisms that result in innovative politico-spatial practices as a result of suppression and oppression. Insurgent citizenship is a manifestation of dissensus and *agonism* as the only way to regain the political in order to reclaim the ‘Right to the City’ (Holston 2009). As Swyngedouw writes:

> “Rarely in history have so many people voiced their discontent with the political and economic blueprints of the elites and signalled a desire for an alternative design for the city and the world. They do not rely on expert knowledge and administration (the partition of the sensible), on re-arranging the choreographies of governance, on organising participatory ‘good governance’, but on a disruption of the field of vision and of the distribution of functions and spaces on the basis of the axiomatic presumption of equality.” (Swyngedouw 2014b, p.131)

However, sometimes, if not effectively organised, many resistance movements and insurgent “expressions of protest [...] are framed fully within the existing practices and police order are, in the current post-political arrangement, already fully acknowledged and accounted for” (Swyngedouw 2009, p.615). If legitimate conflict is suppressed, alternative visions and ideas can be absorbed by the
more powerful (McClymont 2011) into the hegemonic order through managerial participatory apparatuses of urban governance succumbing to the ‘tyranny of participation’ (Cooke and Kothari 2001) or “are radically marginalised and framed as ‘radicals’ or ‘fundamentalist’ and, thereby, relegated to a domain outside the consensual post-democratic arrangement” (Swyngedouw 2009, p.615). They can hamper the power structures but will never subvert hegemonic political orders, so they will not succeed in creating an effective counter-hegemony (Žižek 2002, p.101). Indeed, the Indignados all over Spain, the Brasilian favela dwellers resisting the World Cup in Rio, or the protesters in Taksim Square in Istanbul have been rendered as cast outs, ochlos, not belonging to the demos (Swyngedouw 2014b). Nevertheless, people don’t fight for a utopian image of the city they envision or a utopian political alternative, but for the essential rights that have been wronged, about to become spatialised, “what is already promised by the very principle upon which the political is constituted, i.e. equalitarian emancipation” (Swyngedouw 2014b, p.129)

To be effectively anti-utopian and be able to unfold into a proper counter-hegemonic political project beyond the protest, these sprawling political movements need to have a clear strategic vision so they can challenge the existing hegemony. (Mouffe 2005b; Decreus et al. 2014; Mouffe 2014). First, they need to create a ‘we’, a collective identity with the premise of the recognition of difference, which is not opposite to the collective as it creates a sense of solidarity. At the same time, this might raise questions about whether it is possible to establish general claims for a common ‘whole; beyond individual claims. I will argue that this ‘we’ is grounded not in what ‘we’ have in common but in ‘we’ aspire to in common, stimulating the passions of the ‘we’ (Frediani and Boano 2012). Citizens claim against oppression and injustice; they claim for their rights, reaffirming their marginal condition as someone who has been neglected a basic right. In doing so, the different nature, needs and aspirations trigger their emotions and passion and them to work in coalition rather than in collaboration, in which every actor, with individual aspirations, works together in collective action to obtain their own benefit through achieving common goals. Recognising this difference can deepen the bonds of solidarity between the people and allows for a space for negotiation that can open new processes of political subjectification. Necessarily, they must define the enemy dialectically as a ‘they’ to establish a clear chain of equivalence. (Mouffe, 2005a; 2014). For Mouffe, a chain of equivalence, is the articulation between agonistic adversaries that share the same basic ethico-political and remain respectful of their differences. It is the articulationthrough which movements such as Indignados in Spain or Green or The Chilean Student Movement attempt to re-politicise the current democratic systems and have been able to combine their ‘symbolic effectiveness’ with the ‘institutional effectiveness’ (Decreus et al. 2014, p.139) combining practices of resistance with representative agencies in the political system. “Focusing in particular on the symbolic and performative
constitution of a ‘we’, they were symbolically effective, but at the same time institutionally weak and rather volatile” (ibid p.145). As Stavrakakis (2014) claims, those engaged in independent struggles, when they find a common enemy and articulate their project with a clear chain of equivalence and a common counter-hegemonic strategy have the potential to materialise into alternative spatial uses and meanings. And these have the potential to challenge the consensual givenness of the neoliberal project in the post-political city.

2.4.2 Production of critical spaces: ‘Agonistic Urbanisms.’

Rancière claims that politics is ultimately entirely about how spaces are distributed and what roles are given to people in those spaces. He questions how this distribution is decided and organised, how spaces are allocated to whom, and why and that “[p]olitical action always acts upon the social as the litigious distribution of places and roles. It is always a matter of knowing who is qualified to say what a particular place is and what is done to it” (Rancière 2003, p.201). ‘Agonistic Urbanisms’ is defined here as the series of material and symbolic spatial practices of the ochlos, producing contested alternative spatial uses and meanings that can challenge the consensual frameworks of the inherent porosity of the post-political conditions. Agonistic urbanisms is “an active process of intervention through which (public) space is reconfigured and through which — if successful — a new socio-spatial order is inaugurated” (Swyngedouw 2017, p.55) where “the subject appears in space and transforms both him-/herself and the socio-spatial configuration through performative practices of dissensual spatialization.” (Swyngedouw 2011b, p.375)

In doing so, they challenge the givenness of the place (Dikeç 2012) and use space as a pole of encounter and critical engagement between diverse actors (Boano and Talocci 2014). Agonistic Urbanisms are the result of subversive socio-spatial tactics performed by the ochlos themselves, those subversive citizens that critically engage to participate and negotiate between themselves and with other actors the production of new urban imaginaries that represent an alternative to the planned city. By recognising their marginal condition of being outside the post-political hegemonic order, these citizens form coalitions, or chains of equivalence, to work together towards their common goal: the construction of new urban imaginaries and the existing counter-urbanisms.

To understand how these ‘agonistic urbanisms’ are materialised in specific spatio-temporal sites, it is essential not to detach the spatial dimension from the socio-political claim and dig into the design of the material spaces where these transgressions are manifested. According to Purcell, the spatial approach links together different social categories together and unveils their “motivation for activism comprehensively in terms of a mismatch between conceptual space and material space fused in everyday lived space” (Purcell 2001, p.190). That everyday lived space represents the contestation to a
prescribed use of space, transforming it into the common symbolic space Mouffe claims for (2000b), opening the door for alternative use and conceptualisation of those lived spaces embedded with everyday practices.

2.4.3 The cracks in the post-political arrangement

People do not fight for a utopian image of the city they envision but for the essential rights that have been violated in the urban space, re-appropriating public and private spaces and transforming the city in so doing. These ‘performed’ spaces, as they ‘happen’ in the process of conflict, acquire distinctive characteristics that tend to influence the outcome and the form of the conflict. These “emergent spatialities […] reflect the ways in which collective action attempts to create its own space. The spatialities of urban conflicts are thus both imagined and real” (Stavrides 2009a, p.4). Citizens claim against oppression and injustice, they claim for their rights, reaffirming their marginal condition as someone who has been neglected a basic right, and as Agamben argues, resistance to oppression is a right and a duty of the citizen (Agamben 2005). In doing so, the different desires and aspirations of these people bring them to work in a coalition in which every actor, with individual aspirations, works together in collective action to obtain their own benefit through achieving common goals. The recognition of this difference can deepen the bonds of solidarity between the different actors and groups, allowing for a space for negotiation that can open up those identities to a new reconfiguration. The recognition of difference is not opposite to the collective as it creates a sense of solidarity, grounded not to what they have in common but to what they aspire to in common (Frediani and Boano 2012). However, this recognition must be inclusive, not only entailing the marginalised but the whole of the society (Mitchell 2003) as well as the coordination of different struggles on different scales, from the local to the global. As Mouffe claims, “[a] radical democratic politics calls for the articulation of different levels of struggles so as to create a chain of equivalence among them” (Mouffe 2007, p.5). In fact, through my analysis of the relationship between El Cabanyal and its relation to the wider strategies of urban development in the city of Valencia, I want to investigate how El Cabanyal, as the spatial context where ‘agonistic urbanisms’ materialise, has become both the container of those struggles and the object of the struggles itself (Lacan in Secor et al. 2008). ‘Agonistic urbanisms’ spatialise the struggles and frictions that shape the city, but these conflicts are also rendered by the urban space (Brown and Kristiansen 2009).

For Swyngedouw (Swyngedouw 2014a; Žižek 2002), resistance as an ultimate goal of the ochlos just reinforces the inalteration of the system and forecloses the political space as “[t]he problem with such tactics is not only that they leave the symbolic order intact and at best ‘tickle’ the police; they are an active part of the process of post-democratisation” (Swyngedouw 2011b, p.18). Therefore, rather
than merely a form of resistance, ‘agonistic urbanisms’ represent spaces of subversive contestations through the transgression of the political order and critical engagement. These spaces are defined here as voids where the ochlos can claim their right to be the demos and render a counter-hegemonic urban space. ‘Agonistic urbanisms’ are not spaces for manifesting an opinion or claiming a demand but spaces within the city that go beyond the logics of the consensual political order. These material and symbolic spaces, embedded in an agonistic approach, enact dissensus and reveal what the post-political consensus wants to hide. It is constituted by multiple and distinctive socio-spatial practices “aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony” (Mouffe 2007, p.5). These spaces are the materialising alternatives to the post-political city.

When an ‘agonistic urbanisms’ materialises, citizens move within the thresholds of the post-political mechanisms of order and control, inclusion or exclusion. This provides a platform where new spatial imaginaries can be envisioned, and identities can be reconfigured (Ploger 2004; Ploger 2021). These in-between spaces are what Swyngedouw considers the cracks in the post-political arrangement. They represent an opportunity for citizens to create new spaces of encounter, negotiation and difference, the ‘common symbolic space’ Mouffe calls for, rather than creating spaces for specific identities. The permeability of the post-political city produces what Stavrides calls “[a] city of thresholds, a spatial network that provides opportunities of encounter, exchange and mutual recognition […] that provides the ground for a possible solidarity between different people allowed to regain control over their lives” (Stavrides 2009a, p.7). That urban porosity is the equivalent of Swyngedouw’s spaces in-between in the crevices of the system and is in those places where, both politically and spatially, ‘agonistic urbanisms’ can have the potential to contest, challenge and transform the current hegemonic order. In this vein, I argue that these ‘agonistic urbanisms’ represent what Shatkin calls “actually existing urbanisms, that is rooted in alternative social dynamics and are manifest in a variety of appropriations of space and social behaviours that contravene master planning” (Shatkin 2011, p.8). He further states that the existing urbanisms produced by the ochlos define the dialectical relation between the local agency and globalisation, posing a challenge to the hegemonic powers. These existing urbanisms are the spatial manifestation of the counter-hegemonic political practices of the ochlos, which operate within the cracks of the system. In doing so, these ‘agonistic urbanisms’ can challenge the mainstream development of post-political cities.

2.4.4 Power and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

Power is a fundamental aspect of Mouffe's (Ploger 2010) political philosophy since “consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilisation of power” (Mouffe 2000b,
p.104). At the same time, she sees power as crucial to challenge established hegemonic orders, which are not permanent and fixed for, but constructed, contested and won (Mouffe 2005a; 2005b; Pløger 2017). In this constant establishment and challenging of hegemonic orders, “we cannot escape the moment of decision”, and this creates “a space of inclusion/exclusion” (Mouffe 2014 cited in Pløger 2017, p.268). This tension of challenging and recalibrating hegemonic order results in the “very faculty of non-consensus which both can and can-not instigate the appearance of other worlds and other grammars of being” (Reed 2010, p.88). In other words, it can open up new modes of politics, the ones Mouffe claims for, and new ways of creative thinking that can unfold into a proper counter-hegemonic spatio-temporal site where dissensus has the potentiality to challenge the existing hegemony (Mouffe 2005b; Mouffe 2014) and the ochlos have the potentiality of staging their transformation into demos and thus represent different ways in which the participating citizens tend to imagine the spaces that will house the life they fight for. At the same time, those spatialities “reflect the ways in which collective action attempts to create its own space” (Stavrides 2009a, p.4).

We can see in urban theorists an increasing tendency to examine how social relations, power and politics operate in urban space, and this is at the core of understanding how the emergent spatialities of ‘agonistic urbanisms’ –of the ochlos– can unsettle the apparatus of the established hegemonic order. This procedure implies the production of “new material and discursive spatialities within and through the existing spatialities of the police” (Swyngedouw 2011b, p.376), as it helps us understand the “subjectivity holding the desires, dreams, and passions” (Mouffe 2014, p.157) around urban space and the way these can pose a challenge to existing structures of power, control and order in the planned city.

In this research, ‘agonistic urbanisms’, enacted and staged by the ochlos, materialise in ordinary spaces of our cities. ‘Agonistic urbanisms’, as temporary spaces of exception, are created because, in the post-political order, people are ‘othered’, like squatters, homeless, immigrants, and protesters, and rendered as ‘them’ and cast aside in an “architecture of enmity” (Gregory 2004 in (Secor et al. 2008, p.502). Spatial practices –Architecture, Urban Planning and Design– have been instrumental as dispositifs to plan, design and order our cities. They several apparatuses that filter, connect, disconnect or juxtapose to exclude or include the ochlos (Boano and Talocci 2014), and exclusion and inclusion are immanent in our political systems (Agamben 1995). These relations of inclusion/exclusion disseminated across our urban space are no more than Foucauldian techniques of power used to govern “between an outside and an inside, with the latter inevitably acquiring a character of otherness, albeit in a state of potential connection with what surrounds it” working as “a reminder of how spatial typologies and social tensions contribute to shape” (Boano and Martén 2013, p.3) ‘agonistic urbanisms’.
The challenge is to understand how these ‘agonistic urbanisms’ spatialise. ‘Agonistic urbanisms’ are always in the process of becoming, of “transformation and emergence”, and this “fold[s] the operation of spatialisation into the field of potential” (Secor et al. 2008, p.501). These transformations can produce symbolic and discursive spaces that have the potential to counterpart those established by hegemonic powers. However, for Agamben, what is key, rather than those concrete materials spaces themselves, is their emergent spatialisation, the faculty of being or not being a challenge. The exception “realises itself by simply taking away its own potentiality not to be, letting itself be” (Agamben 1998, p.46), and this confines ‘agonistic urbanisms’ “the potentiality to materialise or not to materialise actual spaces of exception” (Secor et al. 2008, p.501) that are simultaneously capable of becoming and of not becoming.

The exception is the indistinction between hegemonic power and the ochlos, an immanently tensional relationship between the actual materialisation and the potentiality of not materialising (Agamben 1999). This can be exuded when Harker accounts how through their ordinary topologies, Palestinians in Ramallah, despite the dispositifs of exclusion and inclusion placed by Israel (Gregory 2004 cited in Harker 2014), have been able to create their own urban and political change in a context where “intensive relations are often vital to creating possibilities and potentials” (Harker 2014, p.333). These quotidian acts are also “topologies of connection that enable Palestinians to subvert the dictates of the occupying power” (Harker et al. 2012, p.11). ‘Agonistic urbanisms’ materialise urban imaginaries that stage and define equality and expose the dispositifs of exclusion and inclusion of the ochlos and the demos while “refus[ing] to produce subjects that can be captured”(Secor et al. 2008, p.502) by the hegemonic powers and their post-political governance arrangements.

2.4.5 The affective dimension of agonism

However, as much as we need to understand the relations of power and exclusion that shape the spatialisation of counter-hegemonic practices, what is missing are the motivations people have behind these quotidian subversive practices in relation to their lived and perceived spaces. Agonistic urbanisms operate across the “subject and its lived space—for example, the subject and the city”. In other words, the city as an object is deeply intertwined with the subject, its citizens. As Mouffe claims, “[a] counter- hegemonic politics necessitates the creation of a different regime of desires and affects so as to bring about a collective will [be] sustained by common affects able to challenge the existing order” (Mouffe 2014, p.157).

The city is a multi-layered space of different topographies folding into each other that can also be understood as the field within which power and desire are constituted (Pile 1996 in (Secor 2012). In this process of production of affections in our urban space, we need “examine the modes of
transformation of political identities, seeing ‘affections’ as the space where the discursive and the affective are articulated in specific practices” as “those discursive inscriptions [will provide] the affections that will bring about the affects which would spur desire and lead to specific action” (Mouffe 2014, p.156). For Mouffe, passion is the “driving force” (Mouffe 2013, p.6) in “the we/they form of identification” (Mouffe 2014, p.155) that creates collective political subjects (Mouffe 2005b), makes people challenge hegemonic orders, and has an unpredictable, temporal dimension.

Therefore, we need to understand the crucial role of desire and passion in triggering political actions and constituting subjectivities. This subjectivity is affected by how we perceive and understand our place and function in the symbolic order (Stavrakakis 2006), interwoven by a series of signifiers that assign those places. The hegemonic post-political order institutes a mode of living together to the demos, and these collective fantasies of living together are grounded on people’s imaginary within the established political order (Swyngedouw 2011b), leaving little room for any emancipatory actions (Patchineelam and Keshavarz 2011). However, this symbolic order, in its inherent porosity, when there is a mismatch between the given and the subjective symbolisation (Wise 2005; Purcell 2001), allows for crevices of resistance to the given symbolisation. This is “that what cannot be symbolised by the existing interplay of political forces disrupts and destabilises and stands as a guarantee for the return of the political (Swyngedouw 2011b, p.375).

It invites us to understand how these affects can pose a challenge to the established hegemonic orders that design, map, control, and plan the city, offering a provocative view on “the multiplicities and complexities of the city as a planned space and the ways in which humans reconfigure and challenge these constructions through their unpredictable interactions and methods for claiming particular places” (Fluri 2013, p.445). And this unpredictability cannot be grasped in the ordered and mapped city as they are part of the most intimate aspect of people, that which cannot be planned or controlled. What is key is to understand, if ever possible, how “spaces of the city shape people’s lives and, in particular, how those spaces are bound up with the large and small politics that are part of making our way through life...the co-constitution of subjects and the city or perhaps subjects and the politics of living in the city” (Staeheli 2013, p.445). Architecture and urban design have been used as mechanisms to shape people’s lives by planning, designing and ordering our cities (Graham, 2011) “through power relations elucidate attempts to form political and social identities into predictable and controlled social behaviour”, ignoring the affects and desires of urban dwellers. However, they “provide the perfect ground upon which the fantasies and experiences of social and political power operate in various forms of intersecting contention, contestations, collaboration, and coercion” (Fluri 2013, p.449). Where these emotions arise through the porosity of the symbolic order to the realm of the real, ‘agonistic urbanisms’ can offer a source of “creative challenges to structural forms of
authority” (Fluri 2013, p.450). Counter-hegemonic uses of urban space can contest its hegemonic order offering tactical and strategic challenges to hierarchies and geometries of power (Massey 2005 in (Fluri 2013).

2.5 Conclusion

To address the research aims and answer the research questions presented in Chapter 1, it is essential to employ both theoretical and empirical tools. This chapter has primarily focused on developing a theoretical framework that draws on the body of literature on post-politics, dissensus and agonism to explore the spatial dimension of dissensus, an exploration that will be grounded the reality of ‘El Cabanyal’ in Valencia. I have drawn on a Rancièrean concept of dissensus as a disruption to the hegemonic order to consider how post-political neoliberal agendas have shaped the social and urban fabric of El Cabanyal as a result of wider urban transformation processes Valencia has gone through, especially over the last two decades. I have argued that dissensus rather than a moment of rupture is a process that results in a new redistribution of people, space and functions and the subjectification of political identities within the hegemonic order. In this chapter I have reviewed the complex ways in which different needs and aspirations in relation to urban change are spatialised in the micro-political scale of the neighbourhood to understand how ‘dissensus’ amongst legitimate adversaries materialises into ‘agonistic urbanisms’, that can potentially inform urban futures. I have defined Agonistic urbanisms as spatial practices of those groups that have been othered, that can challenge the consensual frameworks of hegemonic order, contesting the distribution of power, spaces, roles and functions in that order. I argue that agonistic urbanisms are spaces of subversive contestation that go beyond the logics of the planned city and are characterized by a sense of solidarity among those who share them. Last, but not least, I highlight the need to unveil mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and emphasise the crucial role desires and passions play a crucial in motivating collective action of political subjects.

Precisely how dissensus unfolds into the affects and desires of its neighbours, and through different the forms of exclusion or displacement different people have encountered in El Cabanyal, and how these fit into the wider narratives on the urban future of El Cabanyal, has been one of the main lines of investigation of my empirical work. Design as an urban and social practice must be “a performativ act that both stages and defines equality, exposes a ‘wrong’, and aspires to a transformation” and must start “framing and staging a diversity of subjects as adversaries to confront and engage” (Keshavarz and Mazé 2013:8) in an agonistic dialect. My empirical work aligns with this and understands that the urban future of El Cabanyal needs to be concerned with the spatial organization of the political as a process where conflict is staged to resurface the ineradicable
agonistic dimension of all kinds of social relations amongst human beings (Keshavarz and Mazé 2013). The following chapter will consider the methodological challenges of researching the spatial dimension of dissensus and its materialisation into agonistic urbanisms that can have the potential to inform alternative urban futures in El Cabanyal, a future that renders visible the invisible and includes those whose voices are never heard.
3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO STUDYING DISSENSUS AND AGONISTIC SPACES IN EL CABANYAL

3.1 Introduction

What might be an appropriate way to research the spatialisation of dissensus and agonistic practices in relation to resistance to urban change bearing in mind the recognised gaps in the literature? This is the question addressed by this thesis. However, before delving into it and detailing the research methods used in my fieldwork, I would like to explain how I came to study urban change and the spatialisation of dissensus in El Cabanyal and the development of the research questions. My interest in the neighbourhood of El Cabanyal derives from my heartfelt affection for Valencia, my home city. For many years, in the collective imaginary of the 1970s and 80s, Valencia was seen as an agrarian and provincial city with little more to offer besides sun, local folklore and paella - the ugly little sister of Barcelona. My impression of my home town was of a Mediterranean city that was often referred to as having no connection with its beachfront, where the coastal neighbourhoods were regarded as deprived and dangerous. I remember being a child and being told not to go to the beach in El Cabanyal or the nearby Malvarrosa, as I could get stung with needles from drug addicts that populated the area.

In the early 1990s, the city of Valencia started rethinking its relationship with the beachfront, and in 1994, the old tramline was reinstated. The tram connected the city centre with the seafront, passing through a university district. The sandy beaches had been cleaned, and there were no more needles, but El Cabanyal and Malvarrosa, despite their proximity and accessibility, would not be your first choices if you wanted to go to the beach, and you definitely would not find middle-higher-class people there. Despite being relatively well-connected and convenient to reach, it was right next to the port, which was and is one of the most important in the western Mediterranean. However, due to its proximity to the main universities, it was common for young students like me to go there during the weekends. And even then, I never quite understood why there was such a stigma to this area. As a young architecture student, I believe it was a fantastic neighbourhood with its charming small houses and literally on the beach. It was an area that, in other places, would be considered a prime location and a sought-after, privileged little enclave near the seaside. For most of my friends, though, it was a run-down area, perceived by many as dangerous, highlighting how people perceive the same places differently.
Some years later, though, while I was still an architecture student, the debate around the future of the
neighbourhood and the new urban development plan of the previous mayor was one of the hot
topics in the region. Needless to say, the debate reached the School of Architecture and Architects’
Council. To my surprise, many of my friends, without really knowing anything about the
neighbourhood, supported the plan. They had only heard what the official discourses about the
deprived nature of the area were saying. These discourses permeated deeply during many years in
Valencia. However, almost immediately, voices against the plan were raised, and the left-wing media
and other associations started supporting the case of the neighbours of El Cabanyal against the \textit{tabula
rasa} plan. They wanted to preserve El Cabanyal and fought to safeguard the houses that were meant
to be demolished.

During that time, left-wing media and other associations started supporting the case of the
neighbours and the reality of the area was shown in a very different way than it was depicted by
official sources from the municipality. Back then, I had a friend who was from El Cabanyal; his
mother had a fruit stall in the local market. We used to talk about the regeneration plan and the issues
around it. He told me how his family felt about the plan and was totally against it. For them, their
neighbourhood was a unique place that felt like a village within a city, where relationships between
inhabitants were of proximity and trust. And like them, many more local neighbours felt that their El
Cabanyal would be destroyed. I, too, had a hard time understanding why they wanted to destroy such
a unique place. After all, how many cities had a historical village of small and colourful houses as their
beach frontline? Why did they want to impose a plan local people were against and would displace
and ruin so many people’s lives?

Years later, while time working as an architect for an important practice in the city, well connected to
the then Mayor Rita Barberà, I had the chance to witness the government’s “long-standing emphasis
on the development of prestige mega-projects of iconic architecture as a means to achieve economic
regeneration and urban revitalisation” (Tarazona Vento 2017a, p.68) and saw how their “effort to
situate Valencia globally contrasted with how day-to-day investment in the neighbourhoods was
neglected” (Tarazona Vento 2013, p.139). El Cabanyal was one of the most affected by this. As an
architect, I started to feel that what I was helping with my work was far from what I thought
architects should do in terms of dealing with the city and its regeneration. In 2010, I participated in
several demonstrations against the plan and witnessed what was happening in El Cabanyal and
especially the Zone Cero, which had become the spatial focus of the conflict between neighbours
and local government. Recognising that spatial dimension made pushed me to explore how El
Cabanyal had become both the object and the subject of those struggles.
The main aim of this research, as explained in the introduction, is to investigate the potential of dissensus as a concept and practice in the different phases of urban regeneration of ‘El Cabanyal’. In order to do so, I take an agonistic approach to dissensus as the key to opening up the possibility of a new urban future for the neighbourhood, one that is open and inclusive. Through this research, I want to understand if the regeneration of El Cabanyal can be geared towards the creation and inclusion of all political subjects, those who otherwise are left outside the current mainstream production of space and knowledge within the city.

The main aims for this research are therefore structured to reflect my interest in ‘dissensus’ in the processes of Urban Regeneration of El Cabanyal. The methodology of this research is designed to allow me to explore how an agonistic approach to dissensus can reveal, on the one hand, issues of power and exclusion, and on the other hand, it wants to explain how collective and individual aspirations and needs of the different collectives of El Cabanyal can develop into political strategies that can determine the urban future of the neighbourhood. Dissensus in El Cabanyal involves social, political, and governmental institutions through neighbours, activists, community leaders, business associations, authorities, and other external people, all with different interests and often-conflicting agendas. In what follows, I discuss the main research design rationale and the issues that arose during the year of fieldwork between 2015 and 2016.

3.2 Research rationale

Based on the research questions and the characteristics of the project, this study adopts a mixed methods approach. In the main, however, it adopts a qualitative approach, with quantitative data used to provide context and a better understanding of the qualitative data. As Berg argues (2011) qualitative methods are fundamental in any search for understanding and uncovering the meaning of a particular situation and a situated context. They include methods related to the collection of data which, following Cresswell, are developed to be ‘sensitive to the people and places under study’ and those related to data analysis “that is inductive and established patterns or themes”.(Creswell 2007, p.37)

3.2.1 Case Study Research

My study of dissensus is based on a single case study. I explained in the previous chapter why El Cabanyal is a fascinating and unique case to study dissensus. Having a short walk in the neighbourhood, you can quickly see the spatial consequences of the struggle held during seventeen years with the previous municipal government in its urban fabric, having strong physical and social contrasts between the areas that were going to be demolished through the PEPRI plan and those
that were not affected. It’s almost fascinating how clear it is that the closer you get to the so-called Zona Cero, the more latent and evident the spatial and social degradation is. Given my interest in the spatial manifestation of *dissensus* as a social and political process that permeates through everyday life experiences, by focusing the collection of the research data on one single but extensive area, I aim to develop an in-depth understanding of *dissensus*, albeit in a particular instance, limited to El Cabanyal at the time of my fieldwork.

Yin argues that the strength of the case study method, compared to other approaches, is how it can do an in-depth examination of a “case” within its “real-life” context over a broad-brush coverage (Stark and Torrance 2005; Creswell 2007). According to him, “the overall idea is that different research methods serve complementary functions” and that our “study might even use multiple methods that include the case study” (Yin, 2011, p. 5). In fact, Yin (1994) and Eisenhardt (1989) suggest how we can tackle the case study method rather as a research strategy and not so much as a research procedure that follows specific guidelines with concrete requirements, leaving most decisions up to us (Meyer, 2001). As Meyer argues, “This is both the strength and the weakness of this approach” (2001, p.329). As researchers, we just need to be cautious about addressing the decisions we make in an informed and principled manner, not to get carried away with the apparent vagueness of the research design.

In fact, the openness of this method “allows tailoring the design and data collection procedures to the research questions”. (Meyer 2001, p.329). The case study can be used as a framework for exploring the thesis’ research questions to decide what data is important, what data should be collected and how, and how we should analyse it (Philliber, Schwaband & Samsloss, in Yin 1994). Here the justification for a case study approach, as Yin argues, is its suitability to explain the how and why of the phenomenon explored and to “illuminate a particular situation”, making “direct observations and collect data in natural settings” (Yin 1993). At the very least, case study research can help elaborate and refine our theoretical understanding of the phenomenon (Yin 2005; Yin 2006). In this context, the case study approach helps to illustrate a particular set of issues (Creswell 1998) about the spatial materialisation of *dissensus* in El Cabanyal.

The main strength of a case study approach is the extent to which it provides the researcher with “a nuanced view of reality, including the view that human behaviour cannot be meaningfully understood as simply the rule” (Flyvbjerg 2011, p.392) in a particular space and context (Ragin and Becker 1992). As far as it is true that the specificity of the context of the case study cannot be generalised to other areas through claims of objective or general representation, this does not mean that the findings and conclusions that emerged from the case study have no wider validity or
theoretical relevance. In fact, the combination of both qualitative and quantitative data within the research methodology allows me to link the findings of the single case study with a wider range of observations about how the spatialisation of *dissensus* unfolds in different places under similar conditions; it permits us to make connections between the particular instance of *dissensus* and its general trends elsewhere. According to Flyvbjerg, if a particular phenomenon happens in a singular way in a specific place, it can also happen in other places when the same structures and conditions are in place (Flyvbjerg 2001, p.76). Therefore, the findings from El Cabanyal can be relevant to other places, which gather the conditions that can foster the same processes to take place.

Ultimately, as Flyvberj argues, case study research is important for the researcher’s “own learning processes in developing the skills needed to do good research” (Flyvbjerg 2011, p.303). There’s no better and more effective way to train and develop our “skills to a high level [than] concrete, context-dependent experience”. He further highlights how case study research provides a platform for an ethnographic approach to the field “via continued proximity to the studied reality and via feedback from those under study” (2011, p.398). The in-depth approach of the case study has its roots in ethnography as it values the immersion of the researcher in the case study and, generally, prioritises qualitative over quantitative data collection.

When starting to design this research and facing the methodological challenges that were emerging, the main question that concerned me was: how can *dissensus* be researched in spatial terms? Can we reveal in spatial terms the political conflicts and social tensions a contested neighbourhood goes through? How do people materialise their needs, aspirations, and desires in their everyday life? How does *dissensus* shape the urban fabric of a city? How can we reveal different processes and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of its dwellers in the urban fabric? Though urban conflicts and contested cities have been widely theorised, less has been done utilising a spatial lens or from the disciplinary perspectives of urban planning and design.

I argue that as much of the extensive theoretical debates on ‘contested cities’ and urban conflicts in our cities is focused on its social, political and economic dimensions, leading to ‘theory testing’ through a deductive approach, they should be complemented with a case study analysis to show how all these issues are spatialised in the urban tissue of our cities, and that the particularities of the El Cabanyal’s process of urban regeneration and discursive and spatial contestations can be understood as an inductive approach, where data collection ‘on the ground’ can provide applicable generalisations (Blaikie 2007). As urban practitioners and researchers, we should better understand how our cities are shaped by conflicts, practices of resistance and the negotiation of different interests together with the subjective understanding of its inhabitants of how they live, perceive,
experience, and negotiate *dissensus*.

This research approaches its theoretical and methodological frames assuming a truly multidimensional and dynamic character of urban design practices, moved by the conviction that nowadays, the disciplines of the built environment relate to a broad set of ‘social’ practices and of actors – who produce, use, imagine and, ‘simply’, inhabit the space – and therefore cannot be seen as a discipline solely related to the physical transformation of the built environment (Boano and Talocci 2014) not only as a force of economic development. Furthermore, through this research, I wish to reflect on the role of architects/planners and urban researchers in these cases, beyond the technocratic, functional, and aesthetic approaches that predominate within professional practice, while not dismissing the chance of giving “quality” and claiming this kind of projects in the “mainstream” architecture as valuable.

### 3.2.2 Understanding the role of dissensus in the urban transformation of El Cabanyal

The methodology used in this research will aim to reveal how *dissensus* has been spatialised in El Cabanyal through two periods of its recent history, how this has resulted in its current socio-spatial entanglement, and how it can shape its urban future. In this vein, it will address the challenges raised by researching a dynamic, ongoing transformation process using a trans-disciplinary mix of research methods which range from social, ethnographic, visual and spatial methods, together with a quantitative approach to data gathering.

In line with Miessen, I understand *dissensus* as “micro-political practices through which the participant becomes an active agent who insists on being an actor in the force field they are facing” (Miessen 2010, p.93). *Dissensus* is seen as a catalyst for the participation of what Rancière terms the ‘ochlos’ in the form of critical engagement of social and spatial concerns, which empowers them to negotiate and reach their goals, desires and aspirations.

The methodology of this research assumes that there is no single universal truth but a multiplicity of truths at one time, constructed through different discourses (Foucault 1979). It acknowledges that conflicts arise around the multiplicity of truth claims and that some of these conflicts do not have a rational solution (Mouffe 2014). At the same time, acknowledging dissensus in its ‘agonistic’ dimension can empower citizens to have the possibility of freedom, of choosing between real alternatives (Miessen 2010). I am interested in how spatial practices could be concerned with the spatial organisation of the political - a process whereby conflict resurfaced in the ineradicable agonistic dimension of all kinds of social relations amongst human beings (Keshavarz and Mazé 2013).
Methodologically, this research will understand that urban planning and design, as social and spatial practices, are “a performative act that both stages and defines equality, exposes a ‘wrong’, and aspires to a transformation of the senses and of the sensible, to render common sense what was non sensible before” (Swyngedouw 2017a, p.47). Hence this methodology will help me explore how spatial practices dealing with the distribution of people and identities in the urban realm can start “framing and staging a diversity of subjects as adversaries to confront and engage” (Keshavarz and Mazé 2013, p.8) in an agonistic dialect. Following Keshavarz’s experience as outlined in “Forms of Resistance”, this research adopts the position that the “critical role of the design researcher is to better understand [other] sensitivities, relativities and limits in situ” and that this demands a “more political, or disruptive and even destructive, form of indisciplinarity […] to facilitate a non-hierarchical design research that leads into the “de-compartmentalisation of each discipline” (2013, p.24) and demand the urgent need for practices of design to foster dissensus.

While not entirely constrained by my theoretical framework, it guides the methods used to investigate the case and the ways in which data is analysed. As many writers argue (Gaber and Gaber 1997; Kelle 2001; Creswell and Plano-Clark 2007; Xerez and Fonseca 2011), the use, in urban planning and design, of a trans-disciplinary approach to research methods and the combination of both qualitative and quantitative data can ground the empirical and theoretical validity of the research in a sounder way that cannot be addressed by either method on its own.

Furthermore, Flyvbjerg argues for social science research that has open and multiple methodologies (Flyvbjerg 2001), as these provide a more open approach to the field of study which can be revealed with different lenses at the same time and from a variety of perspectives, reinforcing the idea of a greater validity of the results in contrast to single view approaches. This trans-disciplinary approach towards a more pluralistic methodology allows me to take into account different types of data, like visual, verbal and written narratives and discourses, as well as the material dimension in which dissensus is manifested and spelt out and the spatio-temporal contexts through and in which this takes place.

### 3.2.3 The importance of discourses

The approach to analysing the different material gathered in the fieldwork of the case study, such as interview transcripts, urban plans and policies, newspaper articles, statements, historical documents, images and social media, I have drawn upon extensive literature on discourse analysis which builds mainly on the work of Foucault mainly his “archaeological” phase where he develops his discourse analysis (Foucault 1972) and Laclau and Mouffe’s work on hegemony and discourse (Laclau and
Discourse is how power and knowledge come into contact, creating political subjects, shaping practices and conditioning social relations. As Foucault himself argues, “It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together [...] Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are [...] Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 1998, p.100). According to him, “we shall call discourse a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation” and it “is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined” (Foucault 1972, p.117).

Discourse in this Foucauldian sense is not an ideal, “timeless form [...] posing its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, and the specific modes of its temporality” (ibid, p.117). In poststructuralist theory, signs acquire meaning in contrast to other signs, but this is bounded to the context in which those signs are given meaning (Laclau 1989); thus, consequently, those meanings are not fixed. For Foucault, knowledge is not mirrored by universal truth but is, on the contrary, a discursive construction of different hegemonic regimes, which determine what is true and false in specific times and contexts. The main aim of Foucault, and the main aim of this research when analysing the different data gathered together is to uncover the hegemonic structures of the different regimes of knowledge, understanding that “power procures the knowledge which supports its purposes while it ignores or suppresses that knowledge which does not serve it” in (Flyvbjerg 1998, in Fainstein, 1999, p. 254). Thus power is responsible both for creating our lived and perceived physical, mental and social space and for the particular ways in which meanings and interpretations are formed and can be talked about, dismissing alternative ways of being and talking. Power is both a liberating and a constraining force.

Laclau and Mouffe understand that power decides which discourses become hegemonic. The social, political and spatial practices they structure can become so culturally embedded in people’s psyche and social practices that society adopts them as natural and doesn’t recognise them as a result of political hegemonic practices. Discourses are then normalised and institutionalised, reaching the level of ‘common sense’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). What is normalised as the “natural order” of practices in society is the result of entrenched hegemonic codes. For Mouffe, “the practices of articulation through which a given order is created and the meaning of social institutions is fixed”, and these are what we call “hegemonic practices” (Mouffe 2012, p.181).

Foucault describes “the discourses of true and false [as] the correlative formation of domains and objects and the verifiable, falsifiable discourses that bear on them, and the effects in the real to which they are linked” (1991, p. 85), Indeed, Foucault maintains that to uncover “the ideological function of
a science in order to reveal and modify it”, we need to “question it as a discursive formation” (Foucault 1972, p.186) This involves uncovering and revealing the structural system by which meanings are given to objects and the subjectification of political identities takes place, as “types of enunciations” embedded in this.

Laclau and Mouffe highlight the role of meaning and interpellation in the subjectification of political identities and in the articulation and establishment of political discourses and hegemonic orders. This research aims to grasp this subjectification “in its material instance as a constitution of subjects” (Foucault 1980, p.97) through the interrogation of discursive practices that objectify and subjugate the individual and permeate through social and spatial practices.

In the context of this research then, discourse analysis is used as a tool to uncover the statements that are normalised and which frame hegemonic discourses involving specific views on certain issues. The research explores how discourses are coded specifically with rhetorical constructions and statements that align with particular positions while dismissing others, preparing the ground for the “practices that derive from them” (Foucault 1972, p.124) Statements are seen as discursive elements that privilege particular ways of seeing and codify certain hegemonic practices above others. Therefore, in this research, I have worked with what has actually been said, written, or drawn, triangulating patterns and codes in and across the statements and identifying the spatial consequences of different discursive representations of reality.

3.3 Researching in the field

My research aims to require a methodological approach that can separate out detailed experiences and reveal the different narratives the same place has, which is lived, conceived and perceived in many different ways by different people. Building on Cohen, I have adopted a methodology that would also allow for “a more sensitive way of eliciting the spatial inscriptions of life experience and mapping the symbolic landscapes of longing and belonging which inform people’s sense of place, origins and identity” (Cohen 1997, p.75)

To achieve this and explore how social and political conflicts have spatialised in the city, the range of qualitative methods during the fieldwork was many and diverse, from in-depth interviews with selected participants, mapping exercises, ethnography, documentary, photographs, attendance to public meetings, focus groups, assemblies, informal conversations with neighbours. This has been complemented with documentation of newspaper articles and social media, the study of archival materials relating to the case study and planning documents related to El Cabanyal and Valencia. The different methods used to address my research questions are described in the following sections.
3.3.1 Entering the field with an ethnographic approach

The first phase of the fieldwork research resulted in the consolidation of different methods that could help me to understand what my object of study was. In line with this, Becker’s work shows the importance that different elements have in how a particular place is represented (2007). Becker highlights how, besides traditional ethnographic methods used in Urban Studies or statistical data based on demographic, environmental or economic models in urban planning, places can also be explored and understood using methods such as photos, maps, literature, documentaries, movies and even theatre or performance.

Following the advice of an academic from the Universitat de Valencia who had done ethnographic research several years before in El Cabanyal, I read the novel by a very famous writer from Valencia called Vicente Blasco Ibañez. The novel, called ‘Flor de Mayo’, was described to me as the first written ethnography about the neighbourhood. Indeed it resulted in a fundamental reading to understand the historical identity of the people from El Cabanyal. Written in 1895, it is a very insightful description of the origins of the neighbourhood as a fisher’s village and vividly depicts the socio-economic environment of the area at the time. The novel vividly described collectively the hard life of fishermen and the women who had to stay home waiting for them and selling their products to earn a living.

This book, together with documents and photos collected from several archives and from social media sources, has been a fundamental part of my initial understanding of the key issues that arose during many of my interviews. These ranged from a sense of place and belonging, attachments, nostalgia for the past ways of living or even pride carved into this part of the city and how this has become the central narrative of certain discourses around key themes that have emerged during my fieldwork. These revolve around questions regarding who has the right to take part in the decisions on the regeneration and who will be excluded or included. I also consider the book an ethnographic work on the life in El Cabanyal back in the late XIX century, as he explained in the prologue of the 1923 edited version: “I longed to see up close, and not just hear about, the things I intended to describe. [...] I sailed in the boats of El Cabañal, living the rough life of its crew members, participating in high sea fishing operations”. (Excerpt from the prologue of Flor de Mayo, page 11, translated by the author)

Indeed, when I started designing this research, I also had the intention of immersing myself in the reality of the neighbourhood and the daily lives of its inhabitant. To do so, I rented an apartment in El Cabanyal that ended up being my home for the following 12 months. This gave me something I had not anticipated, and that proved to be key in my understanding of El Cabanyal. My house was
on the first floor of a small house and had a small balcony that gave me a unique perspective; very close to the street but still at a distance, which allowed me to observe quietly what happened in my street and the ones next to mine every day.

3.3.2 An outsider inside.

One of the main concerns when arriving in the field of study is how to enter. Gaining rapport and understanding the role one wants to play as a researcher is key for the development of the fieldwork. Once I had moved to the neighbourhood, my first strategy was to take advantage of the political momentum the participatory process of VaCabanyal had facilitated. From September 2015 until January 2016, I attended regular public participatory workshops and presentations together with meetings with different focus groups and community groups. These meetings were facilitated by the team of architects in charge of the participatory process, with whom I collaborated in exchange for laying out the final document.

My attendance at these workshops and meetings was fundamental for the development of my fieldwork. The main challenge in the design of this research arose from the results of the local elections back in May 2015, before I had started my fieldwork. The change of government, both at local and regional levels, completely changed the prospects of what the regeneration of El Cabanyal could be and opened up multiple possibilities for its future. I had to adjust all my previous knowledge based on preliminary desktop research and documentation and reconfigure what I had drafted as main actors and what dissensus meant now that there was no common enemy for the different local groups.

Before the elections in May 2015, as explained previously, the situation was very different. Once the government changed, the plan was repealed, and the future preservation and regeneration of the neighbourhood were secure. This attracted increasing interest in El Cabanyal, and people started being a bit sceptical of ‘strangers’ who came to the area. My systematic and consistent attendance allowed me to gain the acceptance of many people and gave me the possibility of getting in touch with different actors that have been key in the development of my fieldwork. However, it also allowed me to understand. In my case, following Keshavarz and Boano (amongst others), I took a position of a non-hierarchical researcher/practitioner whose main aim is to understand the emotions, passions, affects, limitations, and subjectivities holding beneath the subjects I studied, always on a horizontal plane. As a researcher in the field, I tried to find the balance between always being cautious about expressing my own views and ideas while at the same time being explicit and clear about what I was doing and why I was doing it, but without “trying to dictate what is to be done” (Foucault 1991, p.84)
To resurface the subjectivities that embrace personal and collective desires and aspirations of the neighbours in relation to the urban future of El Cabanyal, the main focus of interviews and individual and collective moments of discussion has been on personal narratives and stories. Revealing the psychological and emotional relationship of the Neighbours with ‘El Cabanyal’ and Valencia has been the main priority of the interviews, while at the same time, I have tried to unpack the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion they have been subject to. Through looking at everyday uses of spaces and interviews with the inhabitants that have taken part in the development of the case, the research methodology aims to unpack the process through which alternative urban narratives were being spatialised through time and new uses of space were being invented or ‘rediscovered’ (Agamben 2007).

3.4 Specific data collection and analysis methods

As explained in the section above, more than one method of research was employed to gather the data that I could then review and analyse afterwards. Indeed, the triangulation process of the data collected became vital since it helped me not only obtain a much more nuanced understanding of a very complex case in which I was just immersing myself in but produce more substantial evidence, as suggested by Cochrane (1998), as it is crucial to provide many sources and types of evidence gathered from the same event (Berg 2009). In order to understand how dissensus has shaped El Cabanyal in different periods, this research depended on the discourses and positionalities of the main agents/actors involved in the process of urban regeneration in El Cabanyal at different times. However, further techniques were required, particularly in a situation where hegemonic and counterhegemonic positions may conflict with each other and not all voices are being heard. The methods employed were as follows:

1. In-depth interviews with participants associated with processes or urban change in El Cabanyal;

2. Participant observation both in public events related to processes of urban change in El Cabanyal and private meetings and assemblies to which I was invited.

3. Visual methods, which included photography and mappings.

4. Review of formal urban plans used and proposed for Valencia and El Cabanyal.

5. Archival work of historical documents related to the emergence and development of El Cabanyal in relation to the city of Valencia.
Data was collected mainly from September 2015 to September 2016, it unfolded in two phases as per the different qualitative research methods employed. The first phase lasted three months from mid-September 2015 to end in December 2016, and the second phase lasted nine months from early January to September 2016, with some breaks during that time. During the first stage, I focused on immersing myself in the case. As explained before, I moved to the neighbourhood when the participatory process of Va Cabanyal was launched and started attending as many events and meetings as possible. These allowed me start making new connections and contact some key actors I already knew directly or indirectly. Many of the new connections I made during those months were valuable gatekeepers that provided access to further participants. I had to understand the new scenario in El Cabanyal, since my initial hypothesis had been completely overturned by the electoral results in May 2015. Focusing mainly on participant observation while I was deeply immersed in the field during those first months was very intense exercise. Nonetheless it proved essential as it gave me a much better understanding of the multifaceted complexities and conflicting positionalities of different actors and allowed me to develop a self-reflective approach to my role as researcher/interviewer (Cochrane 1998) and the way I approached and interacted with interviewees. More importantly it allowed me to review the pertinence of my initial research questions linked to the case and to my theoretical framework and draft an initial map of actors and their positions. After Christmas that year, I started the second phase which consisted of in-depth interviews with participants, which were transcribed mainly during the summer of 2016 and 2017, along main photographic work, and review of documents. At the end of the fieldwork, I had over eight months of fieldnotes.

3.4.1 Document review

3.4.1.1 Archival Research

The early stages of this research before embarking on my fieldwork were concerned with collecting and analysing historical documents and development plans, and secondary data relating to El Cabanyal's past and present urban development and plans. This stage helped build my understanding of how dissensus has played out in El Cabanyal through different periods, and how it has shaped the relationship with Valencia and how in turn this has affected local residents. In other words, it outlined the structural aspects of dissensus that have determined the dialectical relationship between
Valencia an El Cabanyal, how this has perpetuated certain discourses, and as a result how neighbours subjectively experienced. These data were presented in mainly in Chapter 4 by way of an introduction to the emergence of El Cabanyal and the different urban development plans that have shaped both the neighbourhood and the city from its origins until 1998. While some historical have been accessed in person during 2018 while I started drafting Chapter 4, most documents and secondary data have been either accessed online or in some cases requested via official channels, making the research process more convenient and efficient.

3.4.1.2 Urban Plans and legal documents

A review of official documents such as planning strategies and policies linked to Valencia’s urban development and El Cabanyal’s urban regeneration was undertaken. Analysing urban plans is key in this research because they provide important not only valuable sources of quantitative data (Bryman, 2004), but they allow us to understand the “language and words of participants” (Creswell, 2009: 180), which in this case where those holding the hegemonic power. City-wide development strategies have been analysed to give a better understanding of the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of El Cabanyal in relation to Valencia’s wider political and economic ambitions (Chapter 4).

However, the documents that have been more extensively analysed has been the PEPRI and related documents. Content and representation of these documents were analysed in a way that was possible to identify dominant hegemonic discourses around the El Cabanyal’s regeneration and in relation to the information obtained from interviewees. The analysis also helped me unveil how urban plans were used as tools of power and exclusion of the neighbours of the Cabanyal. This analysis constitutes a significant section of Chapter 5.

3.4.2 Ethnographic methods

Within my ethnographic approach, I employed multiple data collection strategies embedded in a mainly qualitative framework. As mentioned in the previous sections, these included participant observation, in-depth narrative interviews and attendance to focus groups, alongside extensive document and social media analysis, photography and mapping. I must say that moving to the neighbourhood allowed me to build rapport over time and establish a relationship of mutual trust.

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with different groups and individuals. My key concern was not to be clearly identified with specific positionalities. After all, I did not have a clear strong one myself, nor do I have to this day.

3.4.2.1 Participant observation

A key component of ethnographic research is participant observation, which entails the researcher spending a significant amount of time and effort engaging with and observing the particular social environment or context that is the subject of the study (Angrosino 2005). As a method, participant observation helps researchers get a better understanding of how people interpret and experience their world. It does so because observing participants in the research environment allows researchers to gain insights into processes and events, but also to reflect on the nuanced intricacies, complexity, and interconnectedness of the social world we investigate (Lichterman 2002; Lees 2003; Denscombe 2010). There is no fixed method to be a participant observer, during the first weeks I presented myself and my research interest when approaching participants, but I did not disclose publicly in big public events who I was. However, after a couple of months everyone knew me, and considered me being from El Cabanyal. When I attended assemblies, meetings, and events as an observer and sometimes as a participant myself, I always presented myself first and requested permission to take notes.

The aim of participant observation is to gain insights into processes and events and to reflect the subtleties, complexity and interconnectedness of the social world it investigates and can help researchers get closer to understanding the ways people interpret and experience the world as explained above. The extensive observation I carried out during my fieldwork with different groups and collectives, together with the interviews was the base of my empirical research and was theoretically guided, giving me a deeper understanding of how different discourses and narratives of dissensus were articulated by different agents and how this had a spatial dimension. During many workshops and assemblies, I heard countless times how people were being left out from the future regeneration of El Cabanyal, or how other people were desperate to see the neighbourhood being regenerated and normalised, others complained about urban decline, dereliction, and ghettoisation, while others were concerned about gentrification and elitisation of the neighbourhood and the displacement of vulnerable residents. More importantly it made me realise whose voices I was not hearing, despite being mentioned by many other agents. In other words, being a participant observer over an extended period of time was fundamental to more deeply unpack the power dynamics underpinning different processes and relationships and how these had shifted over time.

The ways in which dissenting views on the urban future of El Cabanyal revealed power dynamics and revealed narratives of exclusion and the emotional impacts of resisting hegemonic views of
urban change, were made more tangible to me through the intensive observation and participation in the different events. Attending workshops and focus group meetings allowed me to grasp how identities were being reconfigured, with different actors shifting identities and positions, transitioning from ‘ochlos’ to ‘demos’. However those public events embedded within the Va Cabanyal process were structured and therefore, not possible to speak with people one-on-one, attending events organised by different collectives provided me with the opportunity to get to know people better and have many informal chats. For one, people were quite tired after attending public events, but the other type of bottom-up events always led to a more intimate and closer rapport with participants.

3.4.2.2 The interviewing process.

If the previous two stages helped place the research questions in the specific context of El Cabanyal and its contested urban regeneration processes in two different periods, the interviews were a means to collect data on how this was felt, interpreted, and negotiated by different agents that were affected or had been affected by them. The majority of the data in Chapters 5 and 6 has been generated through interviews mainly with two samples of residents in El Cabanyal: minoritised or othered groups and mainstream or long-term neighbours. In addition, interviews with relevant local actors and experts were also included. In this section I describe who was interviewed and how they were selected, and how data was analysed to answer my research questions.

The main interviewing phase took place from January 2016 until September 2016. A further three interviews took place in January 2017 due to the conflicting agendas of the interviewees with mine. The phase of my fieldwork gave me a proper understanding of the different actors involved in the regeneration process of El Cabanyal and their positionalities. During this time I started delineating a map of key actors who could be potential interview participants. Attending these events provided me with the opportunity to initially connect with key actors, who, in a snowball effect, facilitated my contact with additional participants. This iterative process allowed me to gather a substantial amount of information, ensuring the robustness of my research. In parallel to this strategy, I contacted local experts and academics to expand my understanding of the context of the case from a political and governance perspective. In the end, a total of 38 interviews were recorded with 43 participants. The number includes only arranged interviewees, but in parallel, I had countless informal conversations at the range of events I attended over the course of my fieldwork. For the most part, interviews were agreed with individuals who had self-identified with specific collectives or positionalities. I aimed to ensure no groups were left outside the interviewing process, although I still failed to do so. None of the neighbours who were in favour of the PEPRI agreed to an interview with me. Despite many interviewees belonging to specific collectives, I and them acknowledged that their views were their
own and that, in many cases, were not in complete agreement with the collectives they had identified with. In fact, some of them were involved with different collectives at the same time or had transitioned to different ones.

I was determined to use interviews to “give voice” (Cloke et al. 2004, p.151) through my research to all those who were or had been affected by dissensus at different times, especially to those who were often not heard. Initially, I was inclined to employ narrative interviews as a technique, but during the first interview that I held, with a participant from a minoritised background, and often othered, I quickly understood that these types of interviewees would not be appropriate with all participants, as not everyone is keen to speak for a long time, or needed more direct questioning or prompting, in addition to language barriers. Indeed, I then decided to employ semi-structured interviews which followed an interview schedule, with a general script and list of themes, but were flexible and open, focused on different elements depending on the informant, and allowing interviewees to discuss and elaborate on the topics that interested them or moved them most (Denscombe 2010). Towards addressing the theoretical inquiry driving this thesis, the semi-structured interviews conducted focused on different elements depending on the informant.

The interviews covered general aspects of their experience in El Cabanyal so far, what changes they had experienced since the new government had been elected, how they saw the future of El Cabanyal, and what their aspirations and desires were. With those mainstream neighbours (16) who had been in El Cabanyal during the period of the PEPRI and the struggle questions revolved around their lived experience of that and why and how they got involved in it and would move to the present. With other non-mainstream neighbours (18), depending on their specific profile the questions would cover different aspects, but would try to cover how they felt living in El Cabanyal, or their articulation with other collectives. These were complemented with interviews with people in government with political responsibility, practitioners, or officers (3) that had been involved in participatory approaches in El Cabanyal (4) and people who had relevant positions locally (2). Interviews took place in several different locations, always chosen by the interviewee, including my home, their own homes, local bars, or their offices. On average most lasted around 45 minutes to 1 hour, though some lasted up to two hours and others lasted 30 minutes. Table 4.1 below gives a detailed overview of the more specific details of each informant, including if they were living in El Cabanyal at the time and where specifically, if they considered themselves from El Cabanyal, and the exact duration and location of each interview.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nº</th>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>LIVES IN EL CABANYAL</th>
<th>WHERE</th>
<th>IS FROM EL CABANYAL</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>Their house</td>
</tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>60 mins</td>
<td>My house</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>Bar in C/Reina</td>
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<tr>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>Their office</td>
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<td>Practitioner</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Bar in El Carmen</td>
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<td>Cabanyal/ El Clot</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>75 mins</td>
<td>Bar in C/Reina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Government/Political</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>60 mins</td>
<td>Their office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Spanish minoritised ethnicity</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>Local school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Mainstream neighbour</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Canyamelar</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60 mins</td>
<td>Bar in C/Reina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Romanian Minoritised ethnicity</td>
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<td>Cabanyal/Zona Cero</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>Their house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Government/Political</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>Their office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Mainstream neighbour</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Canyamelar</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>Bar in C/Just Vilar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Mainstream neighbour</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Llamosi-Cap de França</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>100 mins</td>
<td>Their house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Non-mainstream neighbour</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Cabanyal/Clot</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>60 mins</td>
<td>My house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
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<td>Cabanyal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>75 mins</td>
<td>Their office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Local ties/work</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>Their office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
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<td>Cabanyal/Zona Cero</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>25 mins</td>
<td>Local Worship place</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>25 mins</td>
<td>Local Worship place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>25 mins</td>
<td>Local Worship place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
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<td>Canyamelar</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60 mins</td>
<td>Their office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.1. List of all 43 interviewees with basic information regarding associated collective or role, if they were living in El Cabanyal at the time and where in El Cabanyal, if they consider themselves from the neighbourhood, length, and location of interviews. All interviews were conducted in person, audio-recorded and transcribed by me.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Romanian Minoritised ethnicity</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Cabanyal/Zona Cero</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>45 mins</th>
<th>La Collectiva</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
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<td>Cabanyal/Zona Cero</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>La Collectiva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
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<td>Cabanyal/Zona Cero</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>La Collectiva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Romanian Minoritised ethnicity</td>
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<td>Cabanyal/Zona Cero</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>La Collectiva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Romanian Minoritised ethnicity</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>La Collectiva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Government/Political Role</td>
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<td>Cabanyal/Zona Cero</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>Their office</td>
</tr>
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<td>Non-mainstream neighbour</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Canyamelar</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>Their office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, by me, with the assistance of transcription software, Trint. Each interview was between 6,000-15,000 words long, building up to a considerable document. Extracting the sections that were most relevant to the research aims outlined in the introductory chapter involved numerous readings of the transcripts and several attempts to code the transcripts. To protect the privacy of all interviewees and in relation to ethics, all interviews ensured confidentiality and were done with the informed consent of the interviewees. All data was recorded with their permission, and they have all been anonymised when including their views in the text of this thesis. Anonymity was not granted by those who had a public or institutional role, as their identities would be impossible to conceal. After going through the transcripts manually, and creating an initial coding framework, I used NVivo12 for Mac to refine the thematic coding in 2019. Since all interviews were conducted in Spanish, and some in Valenciano, only the parts that were included in the final text were translated into English. This was done by me, something that proved to be one of the most time-consuming and complex tasks of the research.

As I said, I adopted a thematic analysis approach to increase the consistency and transparency of the data I was analysing and its validity (Guest et al. 2012). The thematic coding strategy I used was based on a mixed inductive-deductive approach. This allowed me to use the theoretical framework of Chapter 2 as the foundation from which to build further thematic analysis and combine it with unexpected themes that emerged during my fieldwork. Once the themes were identified, the next step involved the development of codes. These codes were generated through a thorough and repeated analysis of the data, which included an in-depth examination of interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. Word queries and graphic representations of keyword frequency, as suggested by Boyatzis (1998) and Guest et al. (2012) were also employed to aid in the identification of relevant codes. The coding process followed a deductive approach guided by theory (Boyatzis 1998)
considering the literature review conducted in the previous chapter and the interview themes that emerged. Furthermore, to ensure a comprehensive analysis, an inductive approach was utilised to analyse transcripts that might not have been adequately captured by the initial set of structural codes.

3.4.3 Visual and spatial methods

The image of El Cabanyal has been long associated with representations of a deprived historical district and the possibilities that regeneration can bring to such an area. In this research, a key interest was to explore how discourses and practices of dissensus from different agents, collectives, associations, local government, and local media news affected this image and what were the consequences of this in spatial terms. For example, during my fieldwork, I discovered the crucial role that rumours and stereotypes had in perpetuating some particular representations of El Cabanyal as a deprived area full of squatters and Roma families with different agendas and illegal activities, almost as no-go zone. These representations were instrumentally used by mainstream groups to press the authorities to accelerate the regeneration of El Cabanyal and impose their views and aspirations for El Cabanyal’s future. However, through a visual analysis of the ways in which othered minorities used these ‘no-go spaces’ intensely, I aimed to “reflect the ways in which collective action attempts to create its own space” (Stavrides 2009b, p.4) one the opens up possibilities and potentials (Simone 2004) to subvert the hegemonic discourses that exclude them from El Cabanyal’s future.

The use of photography has been a considerable part of this research, as this has exposed precisely how different discourses of dissensus create particular meanings and representations of El Cabanyal in Chapters 5 and 6, and how agonistic spaces materialised in different instances in the neighbourhood in Chapter 6. The pictures I have taken of these spaces indeed convey meaning hence, visual methodologies can help us think about the relation between socio-spatial practices and embedded power relations. To do this my work has been “less one of mapping difference than assuming a visible landscape of power with relations between positions ones of the distance between distinctly separate agent- and more one of asking how difference is constituted, of tracing its destabilising emergence during the research process itself” (Rose 1997, p.313).

Photographs help others understand how societies are culturally and socially constructed, to critically uncover the meaning people place on certain activities, places, things and rituals and to record and analyse important social events and problems (Cleland and MacLeod 2021, p.231).

Given the interest of this research in the spatial dimension of dissensus and agonism, Photography has been used to capture the complexities that cannot be conveyed through text or speech (Walker 1993). In this sense, methodologically the pictures used in this thesis represent instances of Latour’s
“immutable, combinable mobiles” (Latour 1987), which are tangible artefacts that remain intact, but carry action and meaning across different times and places. The pictures used in Chapters 5 and 6 carry on the memories and relationships inscribed in them in a moment in time and allow us to visually perceive what was taking place during that specific time in El Cabanyal.

It is important to recognise that images are a particular interpretation of the world and are displayed in a specific way for people to see. The visual becomes a critical analytical tool, but also a research strategy on its own, as pictures can be subject to a type of discourse analysis as described by Rose (Rose 2007) and (Ali 2017). This approach acknowledges that specific images of a place articulate various discourses of power and political subjectivities. However, I have also been conscious that I have developed a strategic use of pictures that are suited to my research questions, theoretical lens, and case study context (Pink 2013). In other words, it is I, the researcher, who decides what to photograph and when (Pink 2013; Holm 2014), limiting what I record to my way of processing and organising data, within a specific methodological approach. Not only I chose what I photographed, but also what pictures I selected in this research, and how I analysed them. However, to address these limitations, pictures, were always taken in relation to data obtained from other sources such as interviews, focus group meetings or collective discussions.

In addition to photographs, I created maps to represent the material and urban decline in the Zona Cero as a result of the degradation strategy employed by the local government at the time change (Chapter 5). The idea was given to me by two research participants with whom I quickly established a close relationship and trust. In my first together in December 2015, they came with me to ‘show me around’ the Zona Cero, and while in the area, they mentioned how Calle Escalante used to be the Highstreet of El Cabanyal when they were young and how now, all the business and shops had closed, and the area was semi-abandoned. Although the decline of independent and small businesses was not unique to El Cabanyal, it was definitely nothing compared to the Zona Cero, where only two businesses remained open at the time, a bar, and an off-license. Based on my own observations of the fieldwork area and the use of google maps and officially published data on commercial activities in Valencia, I mapped the disappearance of commercial activities from 1998 to 2015.

3.5 Conclusion

The methodological strategy explained in this chapter endeavours to conceptualise how dissensus has shaped El Cabanyal throughout time, how entangled the spatial, social and political relationship of Valencia and El Cabanyal has been, and how resistance to urban change has spatialised in different ways. The chapter has proved that the methodological approach of this thesis is the most suited to answer the research questions at hand. The case was very complex; the context changed completely a
couple of months before I entered the field, and while I understood the broader context, none of the preliminary research that I had prepared me for what I encountered. While my methods did not change significantly, my strategy had to adapt to the new context. This complexity required an intense ethnographic approach that involved daily fieldwork engagement of different forms while keeping the focus on the spatiality of the things I was analysing.
4. THE MARITIME FRONT OF VALENCIA AND THE EMERGENCE OF EL CABANYAL

4.1 Introduction

“There is a widespread perception that El Cabanyal is only part of Valencia, that it is something else [...] we have kept our own festive, folklore, gastronomic traditions, the use of Valencià has a higher prevalence compared to the rest of the city. We have a strong local market and something often overlooked; we have a group of people who are like local historians who have helped preserve our memory [...] If you compare it to Russafa, you will not find people with this kind of historical knowledge of their neighbourhood. This has allowed us to keep our traditions, popular origins, festivities, and history” (Interview 27).

During my field research, I encountered many neighbours with deep family roots in El Cabanyal. These residents would proudly state that they were “from El Cabanyal,” imbuing a sense of belonging that was undeniably attached to their identity. Conversely, it was referred to as a separate place, highlighting that they had everything they needed in the area and rarely had to venture out into the city. Most of the neighbours I interviewed shared this sentiment. It had been ingrained in the minds of El Cabanyal’s residents for over a century, even though the district had been assimilated into the city. Having lived in other historical neighbourhoods of Valencia and knowing people from different areas, I soon realised that few places in the city had such a strong sense of self. I argue that the neighbourhood’s residents’ perception towards El Cabanyal and the city of Valencia is deeply connected to how Valencia has been utilising development plans to shape the maritime district.

The main aim of the chapter is to understand how these self-organised settlements evolved into an independent and autonomous village with its own governance but still with strong commercial, social and political attachments to the city of Valencia. This chapter feeds from historical documents, drawings and cartography to show how the neighbourhood’s distinctive urban form and architectural typologies initially developed and how these evolved, expanded and were absorbed by the city. Through different planning documents and cartographic material, I will narrate how the self-organised fishermen’s settlement developed into a vibrant independent villa that was finally incorporated into the city of Valencia as a neighbourhood.

This chapter unfolds into four different sections that reflect the main urban transformation processes of El Cabanyal from its emergence until 1998. The first section explores how the first settlements
appeared along the coast north of the existing port circa the XIII century. The second section explores the main strategies underpinning the growth and establishment of a population in what was a peripheral enclave in the city’s margins. The third section analyses how it evolved into a village with its own parish whose spatial form responds to the needs of its residents, from beginning of the XVII century until 1796, when it was affected by a fire. The fourth and last section the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion between Valencia El Cabanyal first as an independent town called Pueblo Nuevo del Mar 1823-1897 until it was annexed to Valencia as a neighbourhood in 1897 until 1997, as a final step to finally materialize Valencia’s aspirations to become a coastal city.

4.2 Maritime Aspirations of Valencia

The origins of Valencia can be traced back to 138 BC when it was founded due to its strategic location along a navigable river and close to the Sea. The urban nucleus was on an elevated plateau, several kilometres from the Sea. In those times, this geographical setting was crucial to combine maritime and land trade. As several archaeological excavations have unveiled, the Romans provided the city with port facilities along the river, designed to effectively connect land and water-borne transport to improve the trade capacity of Valencia (Aguilar, 2011). The findings from the archaeological surveys of different sites in Valencia show that the city kept its relevant role as a port together with the activities of its maritime trade through different periods. During the time from the foundation of the city by the Romans until the Christian conquest of the city back from the Muslims in the Middle Ages, the coastline moved approximately two kilometres inside the Sea, placing it four kilometres away from the city of Valencia. However, this transformation did not hinder Turia’s navigability during the following Visigoth and Islamic historical periods, where the city’s commercial position in the Mediterranean was further sustained and strengthened.

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24 According to Carmona and Ballester’s study on the Geomorphological evolution of the Valencian Gulf, in the period that covers from the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages, modern flood plains were shaped, coastal barriers prograded on the coastline and an accelerated process of infilling took place in wetlands and the lagoon.
Although we can trace maritime activities back to the Roman foundation of the city, the first mention of existing settlements and houses around the port did not appear until the XIII century. The origins of El Cabanyal have been traced back to the XIII century when King James I conquered the city from the Moors. The region was consequently granted the privilege of being an independent Kingdom within the Crown of Aragon, and Valencia was, therefore, the capital city of the newly proclaimed autonomous Kingdom. James I endowed the Kingdom of Valencia with its own *Furs* in 1238 DC, a government and system of laws and customs independent from those of the Crown of Aragon. These resulted in the Kingdom of Valencia having not only its own independent jurisdictional and legislative frameworks but also its own specific political, civil, and administrative institutions. This autonomy from the Crown of Aragon had a decisive impact on the development of the area around the port, as King James had a clear maritime vision for Valencia. Even though the city of Valencia, at that time, lay between three and four km away from the seafront, King James I was aware of the key commercial role Valencia could have as a maritime port in the Mediterranean. His strategic vision was fundamental in establishing the wider hegemony of the Kingdom of Aragon in the western Mediterranean.

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25During his reign he set the foundations for the "Llibre del Consolat de Mar", a policy and maritime law code book, which governed maritime trade during the following four centuries in the Mediterranean.
Having evicted the moors from their territory and dispossessed them from their properties, King James I started the foundations for the city’s new political and administrative organisation. With this in view, he established a new area known as the Particular Contribución, which delineated the city’s new political, administrative, and territorial boundary. Every place and settlement within this area would be subject to the same jurisdictional, legislative, and fiscal frameworks. However, this form of civil land governance was subjugated to the religious division of the territory. Valencia was organised through a feudal system of parishes that conformed to the main urban nucleus.

When the Reconquista of Valencia finished, the existing parishes, together with the Cathedral, were assigned, not only with their religious demarcations and duties but also with the organisation and control of their corresponding area within the Particular Contribución, known as partidos. Though initially funded by King James I to start with their reconversion mission, each parish was responsible for collecting taxes for different products and goods towards its own sustenance from their assigned partidos. The area comprised between where the maritime front later developed into El Cabanyal and the rest of the Poblets Marítims was under the jurisdiction of the Parish church of Santo Tomás Apóstol and was known as partido de Santo Tomás.

Nevertheless, above the administrative and religious organisation of the area, King James I reserved for himself the direct control of certain territories under what was known as the Privilegio Real or ‘Royal Privilege’. In these areas, the King had the sole power to apply a set of laws, establish customs and agreements, and benefit certain people or activities. Amongst these territories were included all woods and barren lands. More importantly for this research, it also had public and private waterways and water bodies, which covered the river and its bed, together with the port and the surrounding marshy areas, including where El Cabanyal originated (Boira i Maíques and Serra Desfilis 1994; Sanchís Pallarés 1997; Herrero García 2016a). This self-attributed right of King James I was granted after the conquest, and it is crucial to understand the development of Valencia as a key maritime port in the Mediterranean. These territories, known as la Bailía, under the direct control of the King, included the port and coastal areas and were incorporated into the Kingdom’s Estate.

The area at the time consisted of a small wooden dock and had been granted the Royal privilege to transport goods. The name given to these docks with Royal Privileges was El Grau or step, a pier consisting of an inlet that connected the river Turia to the Mediterranean Sea. Different documents

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26 Though respecting many of the existing customs, names of places and uses of land that had been long established by the moors.
27 Royal Privileges started with James I were recorded in the later book Aurem Opus (Golden Book) published in 1515 by the notary Luis Alanya.
from the time show that some fishermen had already established to the north of El Grau. The distance from the city centre probably prompted fishermen and people whose work was related to the port to start settling around El Grau. It is not until the siege of Valencia by King James I that we have any evidence of any inhabited settlement in the sea fringe. During his military campaign, King James I compiled a chronicle of his endeavours under a book known as the *Llibre dels Feits*. The book was translated from old Catalan to English as “The Chronicle of James I, king of Aragon, surnamed the Conqueror” circa 1810. Describing the landscape, he devises when he first arrives in El Grau, this written deposition represents the first mention of some houses in what would later become the neighbourhood of El Cabanyal. When narrating his conquest of Valencia (James I et al. 1883), arriving north from El Puig, King James I describes how he can devise several houses near El Grau, a mile away from the city of Valencia:

“I would begin to move and proceed to the Valencia siege. I passed the marsh at a crossing I had made, went along the seashore to El Grau, and there forded the river. When I had got over it, we and the baggage mules (adzembles) went to some houses halfway between Valencia and El Grau, but nearer the Grau than Valencia; there I set up my banners and tents and took my station; it might be a mile from that place to Valencia” (p 370, Paragraph CCLVI Vol 1.)

Throughout the first years of the Christian conquest, the city of Valencia was still surrounded and confined by its walls. The land to the north bank of the Turia River and the Sea was a fertile region dedicated to crops known as *Horta*. This system of orchards typical of Valencia—which still exists nowadays,— was developed during Islamic rule. The *Horta* was provided with an Arabic irrigation infrastructure based on a coordinated system of small ditches and canals known as *acequias*. Within the area contained in the Partido de Santo Tomás, the *acequias* were served by a network of paths that gave access and connected different local farms or country houses known as *alquerías*. This network of rural pathways was an efficient and fast way to link the city with the seafront and later became the baseline grid for the urban fabric of El Cabanyal and the pattern for its transversal streets.

4.3 Emergence

During this time, the river Turia started losing its navigability capacity. Concerned by how this could affect the economy of his Kingdom, King James I devised a plan to offset the impacts this would have on the maritime trade of Valencia. He, therefore, decided to establish a permanent population in El Grau to help consolidate maritime activities.
“The Conqueror well understood that men of the Sea must live next to the waves, and he gave custom privileges to those who built houses in El Grau. This population was formed, and the king gave the name Vilanova de la Mar, walling itself for defense, and laid on the beach, on stakes, a wooden bridge for the loading and unloading of ships.” (Teixidor de Otto 1976, p.29)

The main aim was to develop the seafront area providing it with adequate coastal infrastructures to ensure the continuing mandate of Valencia as a key commercial actor in the Mediterranean region. In 1249 King James I, with this in mind, started the construction of a containing wall to protect the urban nucleus of El Grau. This reflected his aspirations for Valencia as a capital city and his vision of the Kingdom as an enclave of power and influence. The new nucleus El Grau obtained the town category that the same year and was named Vila Nova Maris Valentaiæ (New Sea Village of Valencia), as recorded in the *Aurum Opus*. This key milestone is considered the origin of the actual maritime district, including El Grau and El Cabanyal ((Boira i Maiques 1997; Boira i Maiques 2003a; Pastor Villa 2012; Boira i Maiques 2015; Herrero García 2016b).

It is precisely King James I, I would argue, with his keen interest in capitalising on the potential of the city of Valencia for maritime trade and related commercial activities, who initiated the aspirations for Valencia to be a coastal city. Indeed he established what, according to Boira, is the “dual model city-coastal urban nucleus that has been reciprocally consummated and fed back, a common pattern in the Valencian coastal areas, but also other places in the Western Mediterranean region” (Boira i Maiques 2004, p.147). The definition of the dialectical relationship between Valencia and its seafront, and its identity as a coastal city, as I later explain throughout this chapter, has been a long aspiration for centuries, for different municipal administrations, even until recent years.

As part of his Reconquista campaign in Valencia, King James I had to distribute the confiscated land and properties from the moors amongst his supporters. The recipients of the donations were the military, clergy, knights, noblemen, and men-at-arms, who somehow helped him in his endeavour. Every donation was recorded in a document called *El Llibre del Repartiment*. The document shows the type of bestowals that were made, which consisted of different properties such as houses, parcels, allotments, and neighbourhoods in the city or the surrounding land, including the *horta*. The document consists of several volumes or registers; number 7 gathers all the information on the city of Valencia and starts in 1239. It was only dedicated to the redistribution of houses and is considered

the first proper census of the city’s inhabitants. The document shows the information on the evicted Muslim owners and the new Christian dwellers and includes information on land that was given where El Cabanyal is nowadays.

The surrounding area of El Grau was not the most appealing location within the new municipal boundary. It was surrounded by rather unhealthy marshy lands to the south and suffered from the harsh conditions imposed by its proximity to the Sea and the Turia’s mouth, prone to flooding and storms (Boira i Maiques and Serra Desfilis 1994). Furthermore, the area was the main entry point for opposite armies after the Reconquista, with its consequent security threats. James I resolved to consolidate and attract a permanent population in the newly founded Vila Nova del Maris, and he decided to endow some sailors who had been part of his army during the Conquista of Valencia. They were given approximately 2200 ha of land “from El Grau until Alboraya along the coast” (Teixidor de Otto 1976).

The military population was soon joined by some of the inhabitants from the fishermen’s huts existing on the seaside, the ones described in his chronicles. These fishermen were given land to build their houses within the walls of Vila Nova Maris through a Royal Privilege in 1249. However, to be entitled to a plot of land, these fishermen had to abide by the main condition imposed by James I. Any construction within the walled perimeter had to be adequately built, resulting in safe and grounded buildings. Some authors believe that this responded to a plan to organise and control the urban form of the walled city. The Crown had a strategy to attract and help stabilise El Grau’s population rather than other areas within the Particular Contribucion. To this end, those who built their houses within the walled perimeter were granted a special fiscal agreement which included the exemption from paying certain taxes. The initial population soon had built 60 houses, and legal and civil representatives were elected.

Simultaneously with the development of the new town of Vila Nova, some fishermen, attracted by its flourishing economic activities, started establishing themselves in the area. However, only who could afford to build solid houses inside the walls were allowed to stay. Those who could not afford this could not build within the walled perimeter. As a result, they started building new shacks or barracas next to the existing ones outside the walled fortress. The land was part of the Crown’s Estate, and in these cases, the King would allow building houses without any planning permission. The inhabitants of these houses would secure their tenure and legally own the barracas but not the land. They would have a ground lease agreement, for which they had to pay a low rent. To ensure the area started to have a consolidated population, residents could lose their homes if they did not live permanently in them. This strategy was twofold, allowing the King firstly to collect taxes from an
otherwise unproductive land and secondly to strengthen and establish permanently the population that had started to settle in the coastal area.

4.3.1 The growth of the margins

As we have seen, these documents provide us with initial information on the emergence of El Cabanyal as a settlement of fishermen living in barracas on the northern side of El Grau and the administration’s role in shaping this. However, the first mention of the name El Cabanyal cannot be found until later on, in 1422. It is in a technical document describing the construction of a wooden bridge where we first see the mention “in the path that goes to El Cabanyal” (Boira i Maiques and Serra Desfilis, 1994) (translated by author). Furthermore, it is not until 1563 that we find the first graphic reference of El Cabanyal. The first depiction of El Cabanyal was illustrated by the Flemish painter Antoine Wijngaerde in his painting ‘The Albufera’. King Felipe II commissioned the painting, encompassing an illustration of Valencia and El Grau, connected by the Turia River. Zooming in on the right side of the image, we can observe a group of houses which form the settlement of El Grau. On the working sketch of the painting, we can see the name ‘el Grau de Valencia’ written above the houses of El Grau and its Parish. Next to it, we can devise a wooden dock with small boats. Further to the north, at a certain distance from the walled perimeter of El Grau, we can distinguish some scattered houses and read barracas written above them.
Figure 4.2 Panoramic painting of the Lagoon of Valencia, la Albufera, and adjacent coast and countryside by Antonis Van der Wyngaerde from 1563. It is extracted from (Rosselló i Verger 1990). Original Source: Vienna National Bibliothek, Ms. Min. 41, f

Figure 4.3 Sketch of the Lagoon of Valencia, la Albufera, and adjacent coast and countryside by Antonis Van der Wyngaerde from 1563, where we can see El Grau and, further north, a group of scattered houses with the *barraca* written on top. Source: Oxford, Ashmolean Museum. B.II.443r (Pbr, 31 x 85 I mm.). © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

El Grau, as shown in this painting, was a fortified nucleus with over seventy houses and a bastion at the time. Juan de Acuña, a soldier under King Philip II, was commissioned to compile every key naval and maritime landmark distributed along the coastal line of the Kingdom of Valencia in 1585. These included ports, bays, inlets, forts, cities, villas, towers and any settlements he contained along
the coast. Acuña also describes El Grau as a nucleus of “seventy houses [...] whose residents were military, but also tradesmen and innkeepers” (Boira i Maiques 1997). This description corresponds with Henrique Cock’s account of King Philip’s II journey to Zaragoza, Barcelona and Valencia in 1586. Cock, a notary and archer for the King, provides a detailed description of the King’s journey to Valencia in the early days of 1568 and his arrival to El Grau.

“A population of around a hundred houses, on the sea, with a good bulwark and ammunition. It was called El Grau due to these sandbanks made by the Guadalaviar river, which are like steps under the water; such that, if a storm arises, ships and galleys are compelled to seek port, so as not to be battered by the fury of the winds and torn to pieces. This population used to be right on the shoreline, but now it is more than a crossbow’s shot away from the sea water and its waves.” (Cock 1876, p.238 translated by author)

Van den Wijngaerde’s drawings, together with these texts, allow us to presume that the fishermen who had started to populate the area had become a well-established population by the end of the XVI Century and that the presence of those traditional barracas was sufficiently established to be drawn and mentioned in his previous drawings for the painting.

4.3.2 A vibrant enclave

This theory is sustained further by reading Gaspar Escolano’s descriptions of the City of Valencia. Escolano, commissioned by King Philip III in 1610, wrote the Chronicles of Valencia. He praises the joyful character he perceives in El Grau, noting the following passage in his chronicles:

“it was even nature’s gift, for the better beauty of the city, that little distance put between the two, turning it into a gift: for not being its citizens cloyed by always having it in front of their eyes, like another one beaten by the sea, thirst usually burns in them to go out to see it, spurred by that little deprivation: and getting into an infinity of coaches and carts (which must pass two thousand), they form on land every day in the summers a peaceful fleet, and land navigation.” (Escolano 1611 in Sanchís Pallarés 2005, p.98 translated by author)

Interestingly Escolano argues that this thriving atmosphere is a product of both the location of El Grau near the seaside and of the tax relief to individuals who decided to settle and build their houses in El Grau granted by the Royal Privilege. He suggests that a clear relationship can be established between the expansion and revitalisation of the area and this urban policy promoting the use of land for private self-built housing in El Grau through fiscal incentives. The right to use and access land
at a lower cost triggered not only the building of housing in El Grau but also encouraged existing neighbours to invest in upgrading their houses, and thus El Grau was gradually improved and expanded. In his Chronicles, we can find Escolano’s thoughts along these lines through claims like the following:

“due to a privilege granted by said king, in the year 1249 in Valencia, on the sixth day of the Calendas of June, those who wished to build houses in Villanueva del Grau would not have to pay any service, to their improvemente and their dwellings, making up to sixty inhabited houses.” (Escolano 1879, p.120 translated by author)

Further along in his writings he describes this transformation of El Grau, “In the beginning, it was nothing more than a few fishermen’s huts, but now it is a rather large town, due to the royal privileges that were granted to those who came to settle it.” From several excerpts of Escolano’s text we can see how these development policies and building regulations transformed El Grau into an area described as “one of the most graceful and strong in the kingdom, because it is surrounded and defended by a very spacious and well-armed bulwark; where there are pieces that reach a league into the sea”. Indeed, as this shows, tax-exemption to the construction of property in land that belonged to the Crown can be considered a clear incentive for the strategic development and improvement of El Grau, suiting the Crown’s wider geopolitical agenda.

Escolano’s chronicles allow us to understand further the origins of the dialectical relationship between Valencia and its maritime front. At the time, Valencia had two established walled urban nuclei, separated from each other, with different uses, but connected through a road. Known as the ‘camino del mar’, houses were populated along both sides. However, he considered this distance between Valencia and El Grau a gift:

“The proximity of the sea enriches and beautifies it: because although it is a very short three miles away, it seems as though it is attached to it, through the dense network of alquerias,29 towers, gardens, and orchards, and the town that we call El Grau, which is commonly considered a street of Valencia.” (Escolano 1611 in Sanchís Pallarés 2005, p.98 translated by author)

Escolano’s writings are not the only text that accounts for El Grau and the adjacent barracas. The vibrant nature of El Grau as a consolidated urban centre, and the existence of the isolated barracas

29 Alquerias are traditional farmhouses of the Valencian Huerta (orchards).
that housed local fishermen, are also sustained by Lope de Vega’s play *Las flores de son Juan* (Boira i Mañoues and Serra Desfilis 1994, p.64), written between 1612 and 1615. The play is set in Valencia, a prosperous commercial and cultural centre at the time. There are several mentions of El Grau in different scenes in the play and one in particular, we can read the following dialogue between two of the characters:

¿What do you think of El Grau?
It’s better than its fame.
¡How many ladies and gentlement!
We can have a party….(Lope de Vega, El Grao de Valencia in Sanchís Pallarés 2005, p.95 translated by author)

However, life in El Grau was more agitated and dangerous than in Valencia. Despite having a much lower population, El Grau had significantly higher crime rates. We can also find evidence of clashes between Valencia and El Grau in 1677. Several officials from the City of Valencia visited el Grau, and some considered this an offence (Sanchís Pallarés 2005, p.101). Escolano describes a settlement that would correspond to El Cabanyal’s original location. When describing his impressions of El Grau, he notes that when first conquered by King James I El Grau “it was nothing more than an aggregation of shacks and fishermen’s huts, as we now see planted within artillery range of the town more than forty miles away”. As Herrero (2016) argues, this would correspond at that time with the actual location of El Cabanyal to the north, in the area known currently as Cap de França. According to him, at the time, planning regulations would not allow building less than 1085 metres from El Grau, forcing the local fishermen to build their *barracas* in that location, which was more suitable for their lifestyles and jobs. Furthermore, this distance corresponds to the distance between Cap de França and El Grau nowadays, which proves how accurate Escolano’s descriptions are.

Escolano’s writings of Valencia describe El Cabanyal as a small group of isolated *barracas* inhabited by fishermen, separated from El Grau. However, the published diary of the notary of Pere Porcar proves that the *barracas* held a population significant enough to have its own worship place. In the account of the event that took place on the 29 of August 1624, Porcar describes how the General Vicar of de Dioceses of Valencia went to the parish of the *barracas* next to El Grau and together with the dean of St Thomas Parish and several others, went to the Sea to exorcise two or three types of fish which some fishermen claimed were jeopardising their fishing activities. All these documents allow us to understand the nature of El Grau and the emergence and origins of El Cabanyal at the beginning of the XVII century.
4.4 Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion.

The research of different authors like Boira, Serra, and Rosselló on the History of the Port of Valencia around the end of century XVII gives a detailed picture of the development of the entire maritime front and how this impacted El Cabanyal and its evolution. As we have seen, the wooden dock was the port’s only infrastructure during the first half of the XVII century. However, as a consequence of the different geopolitical events of the time, such as the Thirty Years War (1.618-1.648) and a conflict between The Crown and the Catalonian Aristocracy, the city of Valencia was established as the main port of the Crown (Sanchís Pallarès 1997; 2005) in the Mediterranean.

The precarious wooden structure was then deemed inappropriate for the increasing military and economic interest of the authorities (Martínez Roda 1980, p.80). At the same time, the coastal line was advancing further to the beach, calling for constant minor works on the wooden dock as the coastal progradation was compromising both the navigability of the river’s mouth and the capacity of the port to perpetrate the expected activities. The needs of the city, together with changes in the coastal line and sedimentation of the riverbank in its mouth, called for a more solid and stable dock that could absorb better the influx of maritime trade that the city was expecting to receive(Boira i Maiques 2004; Serra Desfilis 2009; Serra Desfilis 2017b). King Charles II enacted a Royal Prerogative in 1679 granting the port of Valencia trade with other Kingdoms (. This economic policy triggered the need to redevelop the dock to adapt to the new status of de ‘Free port for all Goods in transit’ and the increased trade it would bring.

Several options were considered by the General Council of the City of Valencia to transform the old wooden dock into a solid stone infrastructure that would allow for deeper navigability. Evaristo Barberá, a jurist of the city, was initially chosen by the General Council for his project consisting of a linear stone dock. Local architect Tomás Güelda presented his proposal with drawings by Crisóstomo Martínez. Both proposals were not feasible and were rejected. Surprisingly, the adopted solution was commissioning Tomás Güelda to work on Barberá’s designs. During the following years, Güelda travelled around Europe to examine other ports and adapt Barberá’s designs to the complex needs of the Port of Valencia. In 1685, King Charles II permitted construction works that started in 1686. Güelda’s final design was again drawn by Crisóstomo Martinez, who captured a vibrant scene like the one described by Escolano some decades earlier.
Figure 4.4. Drawing by Crisóstomo Martínez for Tomás Güelda’s final proposal for the new dock (1686). Source: Biblioteca histórica de la Universitat de València. Signature BH Var. 007(17) page 19.
4.4.1 The Informal village

The construction of the new port infrastructure proved to be more complicated than anticipated and entailed numerous technical difficulties. The works had not responded to unforeseen geographical factors, and by 1695 Güelda’s dock had been reduced to ruins (Sanchís Pallarés, A. 2005). Several experts were consulted to retake the works to rebuild the pier, amongst them the Italian naval engineer Marco Corsiglia praised for his work in Genova’s port. Though his solution was not adopted, his layout plan provided information on the spatial development of El Cabanyal by the end of the XVII century.

At this time, we can find the first map that shows the different parishes of Valencia together with their assigned partidos. In 1694, the Jesuit Francisco Antonio Cassaus prepared a map of the Particular Contribution of Valencia that shows El Grau, the port and the Church of Our Lady of the Angels, all under the jurisdiction of the Parish of Santo Tomás Apóstol.
The port and delta of the river Turia were in constant transformation. Thus the border between the beachfront and the Sea was never permanent. The coastal line had been moving offshore as a result of sand accumulation, and we know that “in the past, it was so close to the village that it bathed its walls. Now the backwash of sand, brought in by the river, has pushed it a horse’s race distance away” as Escolano had already described in his chronicles. Güelda’s construction works (Boira i Maiques 2003a) contributed further to this, and the coastal line was displaced around 100 metres (Herrero García 2016b).

The map drawn in 1697 by Corsiglia shows how this beach area transformation was crucial to El Cabanyal’s expansion to the south from its original location in Cap de França to the south, reaching the walls of El Grau. The drawing shows the old wooden dock to the north and the new stone dock to the south. We can see the bulwark, and on the left upper corner of the drawing, we can see how the barracas of El Cabanyal had already reached the walls of El Grau, extending up to what is known as Canyamelar by the end of the XVII century. We could affirm that the urban development of El Cabanyal is a result of both the spatial transformation of the area, but also the job opportunities that El Grau and the port offered.
The origins of El Cabanyal as an urban settlement can be established during the beginning of the XVIII century (Simó Terol 1973; Boira i Maiques and Serra Desfilis 1994; Simó Terol 2013; Herrero García 2016b; Serra Desfilis 2017a). Herrero argues that the expansion towards the south originates along a rural path that connected Cap de França with El Grau. The inhabitants build their barracas along this north-south alignment, and the main façade faces the Sea to the east for better crossed-ventilation. The quality of the maps produced during this period had improved, and they provided more detailed information about the maritime front, El Grau, the port and El Cabanyal.

In the first decades of the XVIII, the development dynamics of the maritime area are again driven by broader geopolitical changes in Spain and Europe. With the death of Charles II, the House of Austria lost the Crown to the Bourbons, and the city of Valencia lost its Furs under the Nueva Planta decrees
issued by King Philip V. After a short period of economic decline, the city entered the Enlightenment period, characterised by the construction of important buildings. The main aim of the Bourbons was to concentrate power by centralisation and modernising institutions and infrastructures, such as the port of Valencia.

The first map that shows the development of the maritime area at that time is a drawing by Llorenç Mansilla in 1722, showing the land corresponding to the specific contribution of St. Thomas Parish. The map was commissioned by The Crown to have a better “Control of the intricate jurisdiction, both in the sacramental and economic aspects” (M. Roselló 2004, p.175) and the political administration of the parish. The map included the surrounding fertile borta, all the farmhouses or alquerías, El Grau and El Cabanyal, and the paths connecting them from the ‘camino del Cabañal’ to the Turia River. The map comes along with an explanatory key containing the name of every element classified. Although lacking precise planimetric data, the drawing by Mansilla clearly shows the alignment of barracas in El Cabanyal, highlighting clear linear north-south disposition parallel to the coastline, adapted to the network of irrigation canals and rural paths that run west-east. The map also shows how the Arabic irrigation infrastructure of acequias that organised Valencia’s borta shaped the urban form of El Cabanyal from its origins and can be traced until nowadays.
Figure 4.7. Mapa de la Parroquia de Santo Tomás Apóstol, drawn by Llorenç Mansilla in 1722. Source: Aguilar Civera, Inmaculada; Serra Desfilis, Amadeo (dirs.), Los Poblados Marítimos. Historia, lugares y escenas, València, Ajuntament de València 2017.
The first *barracas*, shown by Van den Wijngaerde, number 32, would correspond to the Cap de França neighbourhood. It is contained by nº 47 Acequia de los Ángeles and the Acequia de la Caden, nº 48 and nº11 Camino del Cabanyal and nº37. Camino antiguo del Cabanyal. This drawing shows how Camino del Cabanyal would end in the Puente del Real (nº2). The second group, number 33, formed by the *Barracas hasta el lugar del Grau* (Cabanyal y Canyamelar), is subdivided into two sections. The northern section is located where the neighbourhood of El Cabanyal is nowadays. It is limited to the south by nº12 Camino de Algirós o Nuevo that would connect with the city centre finishing in the Alameda (4) and the Acequia de Gas (41). The other section tallies with El Canyamelar and is limited to the south with nº16. Senda de Roca (o de Albors) and the Acequia del Riuet (42). The third group, *Barracas desde el baluarte hasta el río* (34), would be organised by 14. Camino Hondo o del Río and 17. Senda de Carmona. This last group would be a southern expansion of the walled perimeter of El Grau and would not be part

From this map, we can confirm the veracity of Corsiglia’s drawing depicting how the *barracas* had already expanded to the south, reaching El Grau’s walls. Described in this map as Lugar y Parroquia del Grau (34), it appears here as a clearly defined and planned town, housing over 163 families at the time (Sanchís Pallarés 2005). El Cabanyal, in this map, appeared divided and organised into different hamlets and had not yet acquired the status of a village with its own parish.

### 4.4.2 Exclusion: Planning the informal village

The need to transform and improve the port was still an aspiration both for the city and the Crown. The second half of the XVIII century saw an increase in commercial activities and trade. King Charles IV granted the Port of Valencia, amongst several others, the right to trade with America. These two events highlighted the urgent need to upgrade the port to compete with nearby ports like Alicante (Sanchís Pallarés 2005) a new road, the Camino del Grau, was built, later to become the Avenida del Puerto. The last decades of the century saw several proposals for the redevelopment of the port (Boira i Maiques 1997) that were adequately documented with planimetric cartography. Together with different documents of the time, they provide a better understanding of the spatial and social development of El Cabanyal. These proposals show how the *barracas* had expanded and occupied the beach. The drawing made by military Engineers Salomón and Camacho in 1784 shows that the number of *barracas* had grown enough to have its own church (Herrero García 2016b).
In other words, these *barracas* had evolved into an urban settlement important enough to have its chapel of El Rosario upgraded to a church.\(^{30}\) Construction started in 1761, and the Church was finished by 1774. The extensive historical research of Pallarés on El Cabanyal allows us to understand how the social profile of the population of El Cabanyal was starting to change. Together with the main population of fishermen, El Cabanyal started homing people with different professions, such as apothecaries, tradespeople, shopkeepers, bakers, millers, farmers, and carpenters, and all of those who were needed to support economic life in El Cabanyal. At this time, the area starts to attract neighbours of Valencia as a place of leisure as well. These included illustrated citizens with liberal professionals and members of the bourgeoisie and nobility of the city. Many visitors start lodging for several days, and eventually, some of them start building summer houses in El Cabanyal as described by Cavanilles:

“The past years usually went and returned on the same day due to the comfort offered by hundreds of calashes and other carriages available for this purpose at the city’s gates. Many of them, attracted by the freshness and amenity of the area, habitually stay for a few days, usually housed in the *barracas* of the fishermen. Increasing over time, the enthusiasm, and the number of the attendants, several wealthy subjects, not happy with the poor accommodation of the *barracas*, have gradually built spacious houses; a few solidly built; most of them with the name and the external shape of the *barracas*, in which are the comforts, the embellishments, and even the luxuries of the capital: where another large population has come to form along the beach. “(Cavanilles, A.J. 1795, T1, p. 142 translated by author)

He also noted a refreshing and liberal environment, appreciated by these distinguished neighbours from the city centre (Sanchís Pallarés 2009). El Cabanyal would receive during the summer “people of both sexes, who live with freedom, without labels, and in continuous amusement; invitations, dance parties and joy follow each other constantly; but lured by these pleasures, mischievous People come here too, and introduce themselves in the society to corrupt it. It is already known that the most solid virtue is lost and that young people are presented with very harmful examples. Undoubtedly this disorder has been ignored, or its seriousness unbeknown by those who are obliged to put a remedy to it” “(Cavanilles, A.J. 1795, T1, p. 142 translated by author)
El Cabanyal is gradually transforming into an area for seaside leisure for the more enlightened upper class of the city centre, in place of El Grau, as the port gets redeveloped and extended (Esclapés de Guilló 1738). The new visitors spend their weekends and summers in El Cabanyal, living with the existing inhabitants and enjoying a life of freedom and continuous joy. (Sanchís Pallarés 2009). During the summer, new activities and services were provided by the current inhabitants as complementary economic activities to their fishing since bull trawling was forbidden during June, July and August (Viruela Martínez, R. 1993 in Herrero, 2016).

The inhabitants of El Cabanyal had generally low incomes and had to find ways of increasing them. Some activities included lodging their homes to visitors, others went further announcing the opening inns “Next Sunday, Saint John the Baptist’s day, a hostel named La Cruz de Oro will open at the bottom of the Fuente de Gas bridge, by the sea, where people who wish to will be served with all fairness; and in addition, they will cook meals in the houses where they are called, or for special orders outside of said place” (Boira i Maques and Serra Desfilis 1994, p.86). The atmosphere was so vibrant that a small theatre production took place during several years (Herrero García 2016b).

An essential policy on land rights is ruled on the 29 of July 1784, setting new jurisdiction for the right to establish barracas, houses or any other construction in unproductive sites and marshlands from the Quarte Bridge to the Sea. Since the start of the War of the Spanish Succession, the Council of Valencia granted legal establishments in El Cabanyal, taking advantage of the political uncertainty that the long succession war brought. This way, the city kept control of the maritime area. However, after the war, the new regime took over the existing local institutions responsible for the fiscal administration of the Crown’s Estate, as they had not taken proper care of its recollection and conservation, thus leaving all the land under the greater and direct administration of Monarchy (Branchat 1786).

However, the Monarchy, in the same decree, recognised the right of the existing inhabitants of El Cabanyal to use the beach for their maritime activities, build barracas and store their fishing utensils. In the case of new requests for planning permissions to build in the area from anyone who was already a resident, the ruling also granted preference to existing residents over the land requested, who, if interested, had nine days to claim their preferential rights. This right given to the existing neighbours of El Cabanyal over newcomers was granted in the ‘Real Zédula de trece de Abril de mil setecientos ochenta y tres’ (1783) (Sanchís Pallarés 2009). The ruling was further confirmed by the monarch Charles III in 1785, setting the limits of the free area the fishermen needed for their activities on the beach. This area corresponded with the jurisdictional boundaries of the shoreline area, which now
fell within the domain of the Estate, as such lands were now part of the Crown. (Danvila, M. 1861, p.142 in Herrero García 2016b, p.41)

The most significant event took place at the end of the XVIII century. On the 21 of February 1796, a fire engulfed the area with “the fatal misfortune of setting on fire some of these barracas (by carelessness, or intentional as it was said) occurred in the afternoon, at a time where it could be witnessed by everyone, for being Sunday. The distressful spectacle was repeated the second time. Eighty-six barracas were violent victims of the voracity of the flames. The light fire sparks carried by the wind were a sufficient incentive to reach some distant house that had not been engulfed by the flames, spreading destruction to the immediately adjacent ones.” (Esclapés de Guilló 1738, p.XV Translated by Author)

As I will explain in the next section, the authorities used this fire as a pretext to develop a local plan for the entire district. The discourse around the disaster was grounded in the poor construction quality of the barracas, which “vary [...] in their dimensions and interior comforts; most of them belong to poor households but have sufficient space to keep the fishing nets and few furniture of those neighbours” (Cavanilles 1795, p.145) and on the instability of “the barracks of the beach of the sea of this city, called Partida dEl Cabanyal, (which) has shown the serious and continuous danger in which the inhabitants of all that territory find themselves (because) part of the population, (was) made with disorder and confusion at a time when the just and legitimate rights of the Royal Crown in that territory were obscured and litigious” (Luis Zanoni 1796 in Herrero García 2016b, p.37 translated by author).

The combustibility of the materials used to cover the roofs of the barracas made them very vulnerable to fire. The authorities blamed the city of the fire for not having sought a better planning organisation and having allowed the informal construction of barracas and the unplanned development of the area. According to the authorities, this informality was the leading cause of a fire that engulfed the 86 houses in just several hours.
Figure 4.8. Picture of the area from 1858 where we can see some of the barracas that had survived the fire. Biblioteca Nacional Digital Archive.

After this incident, the Crown commissioned the Captain General of Valencia, Luis de Urbina, to develop a detailed map of the population of the beach. The geographical map, produced in 1796 is an exhaustively detailed catalogue of the existing situation of the areas at the time, with a richness of collected data that allows a to have an accurate view of the situation of the El Cabanyal. The colour-coded map contains a key with every type of building that existed, their uses and conditions.
Figure 4.9. Plan Geografico de la poblacion de la playa de la ciudad de Valencia from 1796. Source: Biblioteca Digital Hispanica.

The map covers a similar area to the one drawn by Mansilla in 1722, but with a level of detail that reaches the detailed representation of the parcels and the buildings they house, distinguishing the alquerias in red, the barracas in different colours depending on how their condition after the fire. The map denotes with an orange shade the 78 houses that were engulfed by the fire that took place in February and with yellow the eight that were affected by that same fire. The eight barracks coloured in blue were burned in small fires that took place during March and April of 1796.

The key of the detailed map contains information on all the existing neighbours corresponding to each of the four existing partidas of the Maritime Districts:

- Cap de França had 84 residents, 87 barracas and 5 alquerías, plus the Hermitage of Los Angeles.
- El Cabañal had 205 residents living in 195 barracas and 24 alquerías
- El Cañamelar had 201 residents, 230 barracas, 27 alquerías, and the Ermita del Rosario
- El Grau had 68 residents who lived in 69 barracas.
- The map explains the walled nucleus of El Grau, which housed 636 residents.

All these documents prove that El Cabanyal, towards the end of the XVIII century, was well established vibrant site where the urban fabric had been self-organised informally, developing along the existing irrigation and rural infrastructures, and had grown into an area of 669 barracas that housed 558 families. The inhabitants had self-built their houses into the existing network, taking
advantage of the climate conditions at the time and adapting them to their lifestyles and needs. The *barracas* were close to each other, constantly connected, creating a sense of community and thriving social life. This closeness shaped the area into a vibrant locality, attracting more cultured city centre dwellers as a place of leisure and vacation near the sea. However, this existing demand from outsiders for land and housing in the area was countered by the existing fishermen, who, triggered by their collective solidarity’ *sentiment* (Sanchís Guarner, m. 1999, p. 14) would get organised to protect each other’s needs and aspirations as well as their collective interests.

After the fire, the local interests clashed with the authorities’ aspirations for the area, who argued, “This fatality was the origin of the greatest brightness that is noticed. The voracious element respected the small farms or houses of lime and song that existed between the *barracas*, although destroying them in part: and for that reason, it was commanded that there should not built *barracas* covered with long straw and plough but made of solid wood and materials such as those used in the city, and the line with which they could best align to (Escaplés, 1805, XV. Translated by author). In their Reconstruction plan figure 4.10 below, “El proyecto de reconstrucción y reordenación de toda la partida del Cabanyal” the efforts to control the population are clear. The plan is a rigid grid of superbloks that completely ignores any of the urban traces and the architecture of El Cabanyal. In addition, the plan also tries to organise inhabitants according to class and profession. The plan has three types of housing for three social classes: fishermen and sailors, captains, and residents of the city who can have a house for leisure, bigger than the others, so they can even rent out a room to fishermen.

![Figure 4.10. Plano topográfico de la población que se proyecta en la Playa de la Ciudad de Valencia, y sitio que ocupan las Barracas, demostrado en otro según su estado después de los incendios ocurridos en los días 21 de Febrero, 23 de Marzo, y 2 de Abril del año 1796. Source: Biblioteca Digital Hispanica.](image)

4.5 From independence to appropriation to barrier

4.5.1 *El Pueblo Nuevo del Mar 1823-1897*
After different plans and extension, different political circumstances in Spain, such as the abolition of the feudal system, allowed El Cabanyal to be declared an independent municipality, called ‘Pueblo Nuevo del Mar’ and included El Canyamelar, Cabanyal and Cap de França and the beach (Herrero García 2016b). The beginning of the XIX century saw a new extension of El Cabanyal as shown in figure 4.11 below. As a result of the expansion work of the Port in 1792, the coastline moved further inside the Sea, due to the accumulation of sand to the north. The increase of land and the need to reconstruct El Cabanyal after the fire in 1796, resulted in and extension of the village in 1806.

Further works in the Port in 1821, lead to another retreat inwads of the sealine allowed architect José Serrano to plan the second extension from 1840, which included two rows to the west and east of Calle de la Reina. At the same time, El Cabanyal went through a significant spatial transformation due to the development of railway lines to the Port that went through El Cabanyal. In 1851 the Port was declared of general interest and between 1852 and 1912 four Railway lines reached the Port (Aguilar Civera and Vidal 2002). These railways become spatial barriers and pushed the growth of El Cabanyal towards the east.

In 1865, we see the first significant attempt to connect Valencia with El Cabanyal. Architects Manuel Sorní and José Pedros planned the first extension of Valencia alongside a wide boulevard that connected the centre with the maritime districts. The main goal was to enable a connection to bring the Valencian bourgeoisie closer to the beaches (Boira i Maiques 2000). The connection designed by Sorní was a wide linear boulevard with central lane for horse-drawn trams. Sorní’s idea was never implemented, and in 1883, Engineer Casimiro Meseguer proposed a layout that would give rise to the current Blasco Ibáñez Avenue, ending at the shores of the current Cabanyal neighbourhood, which was still an independent municipality.
Figure 4.11. Llano de Valencia y sus alrededores, de Francisco Ponce de León, 1883. Fuente: Servicio Geográfico del Ejército. Source: Cartografía Histórica de la ciudad De Valencia (1608-1944) (ed 2010) in Herrera 2016
4.5.2 El Cabanyal as a neighbourhood of Valencia 1897-1997

In 1897, upon its incorporation as peripheral neighbourhood of Valencia, Pueblo Nuevo del Mar had a population of 2834 and still preserved its urban structure and distinct growth dynamic, and its informal and autonomous urban growth and governance since the mid-17th century (Boira i Maiques and Serra Desfilis 1994; Sanchís Pallarés 1997; Serra Desfilis 2009; Serra Desfilis 2017b). The addition of El Cabanyal and El Grao to Valencia was seen as the final step to transform Valencia into a coastal city (Herrero García 2016b). This dynamic facilitated the systematic expansion of its historical quarter, although this progression was temporarily interrupted in 1860 due to the establishment of railway facilities in Villanueva del Grau, which primarily served the Port (Herrero García 2016b). These included the presence of railway lines as delineating boundaries and the division of functions between the traditional fishing industry and the burgeoning summer tourism sector, which entailed temporary accommodation requirements, hospitality provisions, and beach-related amenities.

The General Directorate of Public Works, in its assessment in 1928, noted the dangerous arrangement of the fishermen’s temporary installations along the coastline (Sanchís Pallarés 1997; Sanchís Pallarés 2009). Against this backdrop, architect Víctor Gosálvez formulated Plan for Eugenia Viñes Street in 1926. This plan contemplated development to the east of the railway configuration on reclaimed land from the sea. It comprised two rows of blocks and featured a centrally located road spanning 30 meters in width, aligned with the façade of the Marina Auxiliante fish market. Notably, within these designated lands, Gosálvez executed housing projects in accordance with the regulations stipulated in the legislation for Casas Baratas (low-cost housing) to house fishermen’s (Martorell 2001). El Cabanyal once more was shaped and confined to railway infrastructures that served the interests of the port and city dwellers.
Figure 4.13. Plano General de Valencia, anónimo, 1925. Source: Herrero 2016.
At the time, as we can see from Figures 4.11 and 4.13 above, there was still a significant physical distance from the city despite its incorporation. This delayed further developing the planned infrastructure around *Paseo al Mar*. The pathways that traversed the former Partido de Santo Tomas and connected it to Valencia through the orchards had been pruned due to the presence of railway tracks to Castellón. The arrival of the railway tracks for the Central de Aragón line introduced a further interruption to these routes. This contributed further to the spatial and social seclusion of El Cabanyal and its residents, despite being a neighbourhood of Valencia. Together with the distance to the city, exacerbated the sense of belonging, self-reliance and solidarity amongst the neighbours of El Cabanyal while fostering a sentiment of detachment from Valencia, never quite feeling part of it (Sanchís Pallarés 1997; Sanchís Pallarés 2009; Herrero García 2016b). The development of worker’s houses and industries related to the Port was allowed in the land that was not used by railway facilities and activities related to fishing and tourism industries were allocated in public domain land in the beachside. The following years, El Cabanyal expanded informally and autonomously, extending up to the administrative boundaries that defined it as a neighbourhood of Valencia, following still its reticular pattern of streets and building with its unique architectural style.

After the Spanish Civil War, upon entering Franco’s dictatorship, a new narrative that profoundly influenced the city of Valencia was introduced, a narrative that had a significant impact on the El Cabanyal and its future development, as we will see in Chapter 5. Until now, attempts to develop *El Paseo al Mar* attempted to create an infrastructure that would connect both urban nucleus as a dual model city-coastal (section 1.3) allowing and enabling a horizontal relationship (Herrero García 2016b). From then, *Paseo al Mar* became the way to solve the connection of Valencia with the Sea, rather than with El Cabanyal. The City Council under Franco’s regime disseminated this narrative under the slogan ‘Valencia lives with its back to the sea’, thus the extension of *Paseo al Mar* through El Cabanyal was the only possible solution.

The Maritime district has been a damned neighbourhood. It was called ‘Little Russia’. There’s an anecdote I was told about when bombings occurred in Valencia during the Civil War and they would say “don’t worry, they’re bombing in El Grau” – you have to remember that’s five or six kilometres away from Valencia. Valencia has never had the willingness; it has sought to annex [El Cabanyal] rather than coexist. And us here, we haven’t been especially inclined towards Valencia as a result. (Interview 25)

This anecdote illustrates how even during the the Civil War, when bombing the area, they were seen as something distant and separate, physically, politically and emotionally. These tensions have had long lasting impacts on the urban identity of El Cabanyal and its relationship with Valencia.
Following the Civil War, municipal planners, upholding the dominant narrative that Valencia had turned its back to its seafront, and that El Cabanyal was a left-wing republican enclave, undertook multiple plans to extend the Paseo al Mar through El Cabanyal, dismissing the urban grid of the neighbourhood. From then onwards, El Cabanyal's socio-spatial form and value was largely disregarded in the planning efforts of the Municipality under the regime.

The 1946 General Plan of Valencia and its Belt, was signed off, developed by a Madrid-based team consisting of Germán Valentín Gamazo and Manuel Muñoz Monasterio. The plan emulating Abercombie’s plans for the Great London (Gaja i Díaz and Boira i Maíques 1994; Ramón and Royo 2014; Selva Royo and Mardones Fernández de Valderrama 2018) had three key strategic lines of action: replanning at the territorial level, demographic reorganisation, and infrastructure development. The plan played a pivotal role in shaping the Valencia and its metropolitan area and altered the seaside relationship of El Cabanyal and Valencia. The plan projected growth through a series of garden cities to complement consolidated urban centers. Concerning Paseo al Mar, this plan proposed a narrower version, approximately 30 meters in width through El Cabanyal.
Figure 4.14. Zoning Plan from the PGOU46. Source Selva Royo and Mardones Fernández de Valderrama.

The General Plan of Valencia 1966 was developed during a period of deep economic transformations with Spain entering a period of economic boom, intense urban development, and industrial restructuring (Ramón and Royo 2014). The plan’s response to these changes was to link urban space to the development of high-level infrastructures and a road network. El Paseo al Mar became integrated within the road network planned for motor traffic and would connect the
city of Valencia and El Cabanyal through the area between them with had still not been fully
developed and remained mainly Huerta. As a key transport infrastructure within the city, it regained
its 100-meter width. Valencia's aspirations for order, progress, and growth not only disregarded
the urban character of El Cabanyal and its potential to connect Valencia with its seafront, but also
was seen as an obstacle that needed to be overcome.

**Figure 4.15.** Road structure of the PGOU 66 showing Blasco Ibanez as part the road system.
Source: Gimenez Baldres.
During the economic growth experienced by Spain in the 1960s, working class neighbours now able to access housing in apartment buildings that we replacing some of the traditional houses. The combination of houses and apartments accommodated approximately 30,000 Valencians. By 1978, El Cabanyal was a vibrant neighbourhood with a distinctive urban layout and building typology, while the *Paseo al Mar*, remained dormant and was still stuck two kilometres from the neighbourhood. With the end of Franco’s regime and Spain transitioning into a democratic parliamentary government, in March 1978, the General Directorate of Artistic Heritage, Archives and Museums of the Ministry of Culture published a resolution to included six areas of Valencia to be declared Historic Artistic Sites: of Ciutat Vella and the Ensanches, the zone encompassing El Grao, El Cabañal, Cañamelar, and Malvarrosa, Benimaclet, Benicalap, Campanar, and the General Cemetery. This move seemed to put an end to the stigmatization of El Cabanyal and give stability and hope, since these areas became a visible part of Valencia, to be protected and valued.

Following the first democratic municipal elections in 1979, dominated by left-wing parties in all larger cities, authorities took the endeavour to revise the Valencia plan, address its challenges and prepare for a promising future. The plan was guided by European trends of ‘austere urban development’ of the time in the context of economic growth. One of the plan’s structural priorities was to declassify land available for development through the introduction of flexible zoning areas.

The initial studies considered there was no need to allocate areas for potential requalification since there was enough land for development and wanted to protect surrounding *huerta* and its identity (Gaja i Díaz 2002; Burriel de Orueta 2009). The General Plan’s formal revision did not start properly until 1984, within a strict fiscal climate, and its main priorities were public transport, public space, protection of the *huerta* and the connection of city centre with the maritime district. Spain experienced an economic boom from 1986 to 1992. This period, combined with the left-wing party’s PSOE shift towards a more liberal economic strategy, culminated in the 1988 General Plan, the PGOU 88, approved as a half-way document between the initial plan and its ideals, and new liberal ideas prioritising economic development.

The plan also anticipated significant alterations to the urban scene, all tied to the overarching theme of ‘Valencia and the Sea’ the ‘structuring force’ encapsulating the overall spatial strategy is seen in both the draft and final documents of the plan approved in 1988(Gaja i Díaz and Boira i Maiques 1994; Gaja i Díaz 2002). Planners confronted Valencia’s supposed tendency of living ‘with its back to the sea’ by directing growth eastward, building on a century’s worth planning efforts (Giménez Baldrés 1995). Land usage and infrastructure planning began to focus on connecting the old city with its maritime façade and stimulate growth along existing east-west boulevards(Burriel de Orueta 2009),
such as the former port road (now known as Avinguda del Port) and the Paseo al Mar, now changed to Avinguda Blasco-Ibáñez. The city’s relationship with the sea was addressed under the heading ‘central core/maritime front connection: the Paseo al Mar project and other boulevards’ such as Avenida del Puerto and Avenida de Francia. However, the Plan also included a last-text towards the end, asserting the necessity of enabling a smooth sea access via Blasco Ibáñez Avenue, echoing the aspirations during the dictatorship era.

“In the case of the Paseo al Mar, we face a very difficult urbanistic dilemma: whether or not to prioritize the general interests of the city to complete a historically significant project over the local interests of a specific neighborhood, with popular 19th-century architecture, in many cases contemporary with the initial project of the promenade itself, with undeniable historical value but which requires necessary nuances” and “opt to resolve the urban structure under the assumption of maintaining the Paseo without an extension, though they emphatically warn of the advantages that opening it would entail. The idea was to avoid confrontations that would question the planning, leaving the door open for subsequent reconsideration. This would also condition the intervention intended to organise the beach area. The Promenade would have to be projected without prior clarification of the Paseo al Mar” (Excerpt from the PGOU88)
This text shows that still, when the conditions seem favourable for El Cabanyal the issue was not easy to resolve. The planners describe the completion of the Paseo al Mar, facing the consolidated area of El Cabanyal neighbourhood, as an ongoing problem and acknowledge that proposed extension of the Paseo al Mar had also been eliminated, but conclude that it is a very complex issue that is subject to conflicting view and leave the matter unresolved.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has proved that relationship between Valencia and its seafront has always been problematic (Gaja i Diaz and Boira i Maiques 1994; Boira i Maiques 2000; Boira i Maiques 2003b; Santamarina Campos 2009). Indeed, according to many authors, there has always been the widely spread misconception that the physical distance between the city and the seafront was intrinsically intertwined with a political, economic or even historical detachment between them. Through the historical analysis of the urban development of both territories, this chapter has explored how the relationship between the neighbourhood of El Cabanyal and the city of Valencia has shaped the spatial and social forms in El Cabanyal and how this, in turn, has resulted in the current narratives of dissensus in the district.

The analysis of different plans and documents has shown that the spatial and political boundaries of El Cabanyal have been related both to the area’s historical specificity and to broader historical processes of urban transformation in Valencia. In particular, I have shown that the image of El Cabanyal has been associated with a history of poverty and exclusion, and that these concepts that have also been linked to the identity of the entire maritime front of Valencia. By building a detailed description of urban transformation processes that have resulted from different historical events and several development plans, this chapter has demonstrated that urban planning has been consistently used in El Cabanyal as a tool to “elucidate attempts to form political and social identities into predictable and controlled social behaviour”, thus ignoring the aspirations and needs of its inhabitants. At the same time, they “provide the perfect ground upon which the fantasies and experiences of social and political power operate in various forms of intersecting contention, contestations, collaboration, and coercion.” (Fluri 2013, p.449). This historical analysis is key in understanding the current context in which different discourses on regeneration are polarised between claims against the chronic abandonment and gentrification the neighbourhood has been suffering in the past years against concerns about the neighbourhood becoming an opportunity area for speculation and gentrification.

Tracing back the origins of El Cabanyal through a historical urban analysis of different plans and policies, urban planning has been a mechanism have been systematically used as dispositifs of
exclusion and inclusion of El Cabanyal within the city of Valencia, according to the shifting political and economic agendas at different times of the city and the Port. This has been materialised through the planning, design, and development of the seafront fringe in line with the needs and aspirations of the city of Valencia. This approach to the historical urban analysis of El Cabanyal elucidated what set of social and spatial properties that have been preserved under processes of urban transformation and what structures and relationships have allowed these properties to be maintained (Secor et al. 2008; Secor 2012; Martin and Secor 2013; Phillips 2013). I argue that the dialectical relationship between urban transformation and the invariability of space is crucial for understanding the current relationship between El Cabanyal and Valencia. Indeed, many of the people I met during my fieldwork referred to “the city of Valencia” as if it was a different place.
5. CONTESTING REGENERATION: HEGEMONIC DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES OF RESISTANCE IN EL CABANYAL, 1998-2015

5.1 Introduction

“My maternal grandparents are from the neighbourhood, and my grandfather was a local baker. Our lives were here. I was born in Valencia, but when I had the chance, I came to live in my neighbourhood [...] This house came up for sale. It was all in ruin, only the exterior walls were standing, and the entire roof had collapsed, but the area was a normal area. I submit a planning application for the renovation, it goes through the Council. They grant me permission and tell me to go ahead, that everything is fine. They didn’t let me open new windows because the façade was protected. So far, so good. When the renovation was finished, I was so happy that I came to live here immediately. To my surprise, I hadn’t been here for a year, and they told me that my house was going away. They were going to demolish it. I am protected, but there is no protection anymore. All this comes without any kind of information or written documentation. In other words, simply because a person wanted to launder money, and this was the area chosen for that purpose.” (Interviewee 15)

This quote from one of the interviewees perfectly captures what happened in El Cabanyal from 1998 to 2015 and its impact on many residents. Those impacts had several dimensions and multiple facets. In addition to the threat of being forcefully dispossessed of their home and displaced, they feared the disappearance of their neighbourhood as they have lived, perceived, and conceived it, the destruction of a way of living. El Cabanyal was a neighbourhood where many of its residents had been born and felt it was “like a village in the city and next to the seaside” (Interviews 2, 30), the reason others had chosen to live here (Interviews 13, 15, 29). This chapter aims to provide an understanding of the context and evolution of the conflict between the neighbours of El Cabanyal and the conservative administration that governed the city for over two decades. In particular, it will look at the mechanisms through which this conflict shaped the social and urban fabric of El Cabanyal during the period covering from 1998 until 2015. The connection of the city of Valencia with its beachfront through the maritime district became the main object of dispute between the city council, run by conservative mayor Rita Barberà and many of the residents of El Cabanyal.
The first section of this chapter provides an overview of the neoliberal agenda of entrepreneurial urban development pursued by local and regional governments in Valencia, Spain, during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Intending to transform Valencia into a world-class city through mega events and projects, their primary strategy was the spectacularisation of the seafront area with the development of emblematic projects. The aim was to requalify the port area and increase the value of coastal land, which resulted in excessive investment in some areas while neglecting other areas needing redevelopment, including El Cabanyal.

The second section discusses one of these projects, the PEPRI, a special protection and reform plan for El Cabanyal published in 1998 and approved in 2001. It looks at the political motivations behind the extension project and how these were driven by the desire to connect Valencia to the seafront rather than to ‘protect and reform’ El Cabanyal. It goes on to consider the disregard for public opinion and the manipulation of planning documents and drawings to control the plan’s narrative and silence dissenting voices. For example, the plan designated Site Allocations for redevelopment, which concentrated most buildings earmarked for demolition but misrepresented the conservation estate of the buildings in these areas, similar to the conditions of buildings in the rest of the neighbourhood. It also reduced the number of previously listed buildings in these areas and downplayed their significance. The authorities used these arguments to justify the clearance as necessary for the area’s improvement and permeate the discourses around the impossibility of alternatives (Swyngedouw 2010, p.7) to the PEPRI to address El Cabanyal’s problems, prioritising economic interests over the neighbour’s needs.

The third section considers the local government’s strategies to impose the PEPRI and the impact these had on the area and its neighbours. The government’s approach involved the controlled narratives around the PEPRI as the only solution for El Cabanyal. To justify their discourse, they proceeded to enable the dereliction of the neighbourhood and accumulated properties to demolish. These were painted with brown and vanilla stripes, symbolizing their control over the area and contributing to the stigmatisation of El Cabanyal as abandoned and derelict. It also explores the plan’s spatial, social, and emotional effects on the neighbourhood and the response of the residents who opposed it. Many residents expressed a strong sense of belonging to El Cabanyal and felt the PEPRI threatened their culture, identity and way of life.

The last section discusses the resistance against the PEPRI in El Cabanyal, embodied and led by the civic platform ‘Salvem El Cabanyal’. Salvem used various strategies, both at the institutional level and social level, to resist the plan. The section looks at how dissensus materialised in different spaces, with the neighbours reclaiming public spaces and using their balconies to display banners expressing
their struggles to save their neighbourhood from disappearing. It finishes looking at one of their more successful initiatives, the annual art exhibition ‘Portes Obertes,’ which allowed neighbours to open their houses to the public and showcase the heritage and cultural significance of El Cabanyal.

Figure 5.1. Picture of the house Interviewee 15 bought before she renovated it. Source: Author.
5.2 Local Ambitions: Putting Valencia on the map:

As we have seen in the previous chapter, local and regional governments followed a clear neoliberal urban development agenda in the late nineties. Valencia went from being a relatively unknown city on the eastern coast of Spain, once described by the tourist critic Kenneth Tynan as a place where “a noisy and majestic ugliness stands sentinel, ever ready to repel outsiders’ and as the ‘world hub of anti-tourism, is the predestined haven and hiding place’, to a modern city competing in the market of world-class cities in two decades (Prytherch 2003a; Prytherch 2003b; Gaja i Díaz 2006a; Santamarina Campos 2009; Tarazona Vento 2013; Tarazona Vento 2017b). Indeed, it started to get widespread international attention in the early 2000s, with newspapers like The Guardian publishing articles praising it as a tourism hotspot and its stunning architecture.

![Figure 5.2. Newspaper article from The Guardian from 27 April 2002 highlighting the city’s transformation beyond paella and sun. Source: The Guardian.](image)

![Figure 5.3. Newspaper article from The Guardian from 30 April 2004 matching Valencia’s attractiveness as a holiday destination to Barcelona and Madrid. Source: The Guardian.](image)
The conservative party Partido Popular (PP) government took on a new entrepreneurial role to make this transformation possible, becoming an active promoter of urban development. Their primary strategy was to promote structuralist and speculative urban development through land deregulation to attract private investment through a policy of mega events and mega projects rather than focusing on creating jobs and social welfare. (Gaja i Díaz 2002; Gaja i Díaz 2006b; Gaja i Díaz 2013; Tarazona Vento 2013; Tarazona Vento 2017b; Rius-Ulldemolins and Gisbert 2019)

5.2.1 The entrepreneurial turn

During the 1990s and 2000s, Valencia underwent a profound economic restructuring, transitioning from a traditionally agrarian and provincial city towards a competitive capital city and a service-based economy. This restructuring led to the transformation of Valencia into a city of trade and services, oriented towards attracting international tourists and cargo traffic (Prytherch 2003b; Prytherch 2003a; Prytherch and Boira i Maiques 2009). The region became one of Europe’s top beach destinations, and the port of Valencia emerged as Spain’s busiest port in containerised shipping (Prytherch 2003a) and one of Europe’s top five busiest ports in containerised shipping. Not surprisingly, in this context, reorienting the city and its economy towards the sea had been a long-time aspiration of local politicians. To put ‘Valencia on the map’ (Cucó i Giner 2013b), the hegemonic political discourses from both levels of government, the municipal of Rita Barberà and the regional Francisco Camps, were centred on modernity, self-esteem and Europeanism. Rita Barberà was mayor of Valencia for almost twenty-five years, twenty of them ruling under absolute majorities that allowed her to impose

31 Eurostat data showing the Top 20 ports handling containers, 2008-2018 (Thousand TEUs).
her discourses and hegemonic projects. For Valencia, this meant that its development and transformation during this time were under her power and tied to her rise and fall in 2015.

The absolute majority that local government held during that time, and until 2015, instituted them as a hegemonic power with complete legitimacy to push forward their political and economic neoliberal agenda. This agenda was based on a “leisure-oriented urban redevelopment, an emphasis on interurban competition and place marketing, a privileged role for the business community, rapid urban development on the urban fringe, and experiments with private development of public lands” (Prytherch and Boira i Maiques 2015, p.113). They aimed to maintain regional competitiveness in an increasingly global economy. Therefore, the strategy was to ‘reposition’ Valencia in the Mediterranean as a coastal city, a major tourist destination, an economic region, and a cultural reference. This aim is reflected in Rita Barberà’s words when she left the municipal government after losing the 2015 local elections, claiming that they had put Valencia on the map.

“‘We have put Valencia on the map’, she reiterated, ‘I am proud to have made a project of opportunities for all Valencians.’ Regarding the Valencia she leaves behind, she added: ‘It has nothing to do with the grey, apathetic, and pulseless one that I encountered in 1991. I believe I have fulfilled the work that people entrusted to me in all the mandates up to this one. We have believed in Valencia, that is our main legacy, and we have grown in self-esteem’” (Moreno, 2015 in Las Provincias, 13 June 2015)

In the context of such neoliberal entrepreneurial policies, major urban transformation projects and mega events emerged as the primary strategic tool used to refashion both urban space and the city economy (Swyngedouw et al. 2002; Cucó i Giner 2014a; García Pilán 2015; Tarazona Vento 2017b). Striving for economic growth and to increasing its competitiveness, local authorities in Valencia developed an urban redevelopment strategy that aimed to rewrite existing urban landscapes through emblematic cultural and sports projects and mega projects (Gaja i Díaz 2006b; Alcalá-Santaella et al. 2011; Tarazona Vento 2013) Both the regional and local governments used the city as the projected image of the entire region onto the European stage, thus revealing the link between the political and economic restructuring of the region and urban redevelopment in the city of Valencia. The region’s wealth was directly connected with the sea and the city: beach tourism and industrial exports. Spatially this was manifested as most planned urban and economic development was concentrated mainly on the coastal areas of Valencia. The majority of these projects and events were delineated along the coastal line. The main goal behind this entrepreneurial strategy was to re-qualify the port area and its surrounding, thus increasing the value of the coastal land (Boira i Mañes 2003c; Gaja i Díaz 2006a; Santamarina Campos 2008a; Cucó i Giner 2013a; Gaja i Díaz 2013; Cucó i Giner 2014a;
Cucó i Giner 2014b; Santamarina Campos 2014a). Despite its prime location, the site had very little redevelopment value at the time, as it was mainly peripheral land subservient to the port, housing mostly logistical warehouses, surrounded by poorly consolidated and disconnected urban pockets. The main projects developed under the right-wing liberal mandate of Rita Barberà and Francisco Camps were Americas Cup and F1 championship and mega projects like ‘Cuidad de las Artes y las Ciencias,’ or Grao Master Plan.

**Figure 5.5** Map showing the location of events and projects developed under the mandate of at local and regional government of Partido Popular.

Devolution of power in democratic Spain implied a technocratic decentralisation of the state, consequently shaping the power relations of the local government with the central state and the local communities. In the case of Valencia, the outcome of this decentralization did not result in a deeper and more transparent democratic local government (Hickey and Mohan 2005). At the local level, corruption and unfair or despotic practices became less accountable and more difficult to chase. Indeed, this political enablement resulted in local authorities having “greater control over state resources and use[ing] them to consolidate electoral support, or new client sectors can be favoured by these policies” (Burgess et al. 1997, p.143), using funds following political rather than welfare

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32 City of Arts and Sciences https://www.cac.es/es/home.html
criteria. As a result of these “market enablement policies”, socio-economic inequalities in the city were heightened and “seriously disadvantaged the poor and sections of the middle class” (1997, p.113). The outcome of these policies was an excessive investment in these types of projects and events and the creation of new sites of speculation, to the detriment of other areas in much need of redevelopment and investment, like El Cabanyal. As one of the interviewees recalls:

“We are the only district where investment falls to zero, but not in 2011, with the crisis, it is actually in 2001, that is, in the midst of the highest effervesce of all public and private businesses in this city, Poblados Marítimos remains with zero investment. And obviously, I do not count the great events of the America’s Cup because those are not an investment in the neighbourhood.” (Interview 12)

What is emerging from the previous interview is that perhaps these priorities were overlooked for the sake of higher-level ambitions, which at the time were attracting tourism to the city and the beneficial economic impact it would have in the private sector. This neoliberal urban development resulted in the “accumulation of urban projects with a colossal investment that barely brings social benefits, a bottomless pit where public budgets are buried” (Gaja i Díaz 2006a, p.203).

### 5.2.2 Spectacularisation of the seafront and local self-esteem

A climate of euphoria in the city characterised that period, and people were proud of Valencia’s renovated image as a modern European city. Indeed, as we can see on the website of the architecture studio\(^33\) in charge of the master plan for the America’s Cup and the design and construction of several of the team bases, the focus on a new image of Valencia as an international and modern city linked to these projects and events was the dominant discourse that permeated and reshaped public opinion, interestingly, there was a second focus, which was to embed this idea that these projects were for the common good of Valencia and of all the valencianos, highlighting all the unparalleled assets they would bring to the city, to which people could in no way oppose or resist.

“The election of Valencia as host city of the 32nd America’s Cup has been the catalyst for the ultimate transformation of the city’s waterfront. The responsibility of hosting the competition reinforced the collective consciousness about Valencia’s progress and the opportunity that this event represents for its international projection and image. The interventions contemplated in the Balcón al Mar masterplan, incorporating new

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\(^33\) The Architecture practice was then called Areas and has since changed its name to Tomás Llavador Arquitectos + Ingenieros. Tomás Llavador, the leading architect of the practice was known for many years as Rita’s architect.
educational, cultural, recreational and leisure services and facilities into the city, were adapted to respond to the unique situation. Coordinated with the America’s Cup competition requirements, the design has definitively created a waterfront area of urban centrality. At the same time, it had improved port facilities with 1500 new berths, which incorporated floating pontoons for 25-meter boats and a new dock for yachts of over 50 meters in length. Because of the proposal’s magnitude and the intervention area’s natural conditions, the master plan shapes a piece of vast urban equipment within reach of very few cities. (Tomás Llavador Arquitectos + Ingenieros)

This strategy, in turn, would lead to political gains for the governments of Rita Barberà and Paco Camps, proving to be a very effective means for political legitimation. Furthermore, as one of the interviewees explains, the landslide majorities obtained by Barberà during the 2007 campaign in the maritime districts, despite the ongoing tensions between the local government and the neighbourhood, can be in part attributed to these projects and events:

“Then comes the moment of utopia, in this case, not a socialist utopia, but the (neo)liberal utopia. And many people indeed thought that the America’s Cup and Formula 1 would save us. People thought that now with the America’s Cup, many investments would come, and our problems would all be solved. And that was the campaign of PP in 2007. And that campaign is critical because it was the only time PP beat us in the Maritime District [...] but in 2007 PP won alone, with an absolute majority, and this was because of the America’s Cup and Formula 1.” (Interview 12)

This urban policy, based on mega-projects and events such as the America’s Cup and the European Formula 1 Grand Prix, was a strategy that belonged to times of economic bonanza, characteristic of Spain’s boom during that period. Valencia represented a clear example of this, where public expenditure seemed to lack any strict order of priorities, for it appeared there was a limitless budget for everything (Tarazona Vento 2013; Tarazona Vento 2017b). But, more importantly, mega-projects designed by star architects and events provided politicians with a very effective tool for self-promotion and gained the support of many people who believed the city had been profoundly transformed into a world-class city as a result of the efforts of local politicians.

34 This architectural practice, now Tomás Lavador Arquitectos was in charge of several mega projects in the city, such as Balcón al Mar masterplan for the America’s Cup, Grao Master Plan, CAC masterplan amongst others. I must disclose here that I am very familiar with several of these projects as I was employed as an architect in this practice from 2006 until 2010. Though I was never involved in them, I did have access to them.
“People bought in, and people should now know how to do a bit of self-criticism too. I remember when we were twelve people demonstrating, and twelve is a real number, in front of Formula 1 and the thousands of people who passed by started insulting us, and the police were there protecting us. Of course, in the end, people believed this would become Miami Beach. Well, it became Miami Vice in the end. In 2008 the world crisis began, and what they did was, with one of the few things that were still good, which was the port, they left it with a debt of 420 million euros that it has. But in the end, all that did was add a phantasmagorical situation to the port, to which the even more phantasmagorical situation of the abandoned circuit was added later. Because the Copa América was indeed an unpayable debt, it did not have urban aggression. But of course, in Formula 1, it was an urban change.” (Interview 12)

Figure 5.6 Aerial view of the Port Area during the 32nd America’s Cup celebration. Source: Valencia Plaza (11/06/2011)

Without any doubt, Valencia was being refashioned due to transnational globalisation and neoliberal policies delivered and executed by the local government. Valencia displayed a spectacular new image,
but the consequence was a “collapse of public space itself through the constant production and reproduction of certain kinds of places” (Mitchell 2003, p.165) while favouring the elites in the city or high-spending tourists who could afford attending these events, this "Disneyfication" of public space eradicated from its use and production, not only marginalised or excluded groups, but even middle-class residents, who could not dream of buying the tickets at the prices shown in Figure 5.7.

**Figure 5.7** Diagram showing the Formula 1 circuit in Valencia and ticket prices for the event. Source: El País (22/06/2012)

All these Star projects and mega events in the Port Area were unfolding against the backdrop of a neighbourhood that the local government had systematically neglected for more than a decade. One must question the actual impacts of staging these projects in El Cabanyal. Apart from some people visiting the area and seeing the situation in El Cabanyal, what tangible benefit did the neighbours of El Cabanyal receive? Probably some restaurants and shops did receive some visits. Still, most economic and commercial activities occurred on the seafront, in restaurants that had always been
tourist oriented. Speaking about how this contrasted with the derelict state of El Cabanyal, one of the interviewees summarises it very well.

“Of course, when the Formula 1 race took place, we carried out some cool protests because it was such a silly laugh. It was as if they were making fun of and somehow teasing the neighbourhood. Put it this way, they hold there, only 500 meters away, a super-luxury event in El Cabanyal and Nazaret, the two most run-down neighbourhoods in this city. A super-luxury event here? I mean, what on earth are you doing? On top of everything, you are making fun of us? The truth is that this city did not need a Formula 1 Race. Valencia has been on the map since 138 BC, to be precise. They don’t need to put us on the map because we are already here with many other people. We need a decent Official School of Languages, and we need nurseries for children, schools, and facilities for citizens, not a Formula 1. What I would rather like is to be able to decide what my money is spent on so that it will not be spent again on Formula 1, or the like, nor visits from the Pope. But that’s their formula, mainly because it created much buzz here.” (Interview 28)

The discontent that emerged from the ambitious plans for transformation became evident due to the lack of investment in key infrastructures and facilities required by neighbourhoods such as El Cabanyal, as depicted in the above account. More importantly, it challenged the prevailing narrative that associated Mega Events and progress at the time, underscoring the importance of addressing the socio-economic realities faced by peripheral neighbourhoods in the city. While praised by many, events like Formula 1 were also seen as an extravagant spectacle, and the contrasting decay in El Cabanyal prompted questions regarding the true motivations behind these. This disparity further highlights the disconnect between the city's aspirations and the everyday experiences and needs of its residents.
5.3 PEPRI and the impossibility of alternatives

“the local state is typically unaware of sacrilege when it reduces a neighbourhood to rubble to make way for a profitable real estate venture such as an office building or shopping mall. By whatever name, whether it’s slum clearance or gentrification, the results are the same: the erasure of places is a violent act, as established patterns of human relationships are destroyed” (Friedmann 2010, p.157).

One of these major urban development projects was the extension to the sea of Blasco Ibañez Avenue through El Cabanyal.35 As we have seen in Chapter 4, the PGOU 88 had tackled the issue of extending Blasco Ibañez. Still, it did not include detailed planning documents and vaguely showed how the connection between Blasco Ibañez Avenue and El Cabanyal should be resolved. Conversely, PGOU88 did recognise the area of El Cabanyal as a historical site, listing a total of 773 buildings with some degree of protection, shown in Figure 5.5. As such, it should have its own separate Local Plan with its corresponding Supplementary Development Plan.36 Subsequently, the area was declared an Asset of Cultural Interest (BIC)37 by a decree of the Valencian Regional Government on May 3rd, 1993.38 BIC is a legal concept that ensures maximum protection of Spanish heritage assets and ultimately belongs under national heritage legislation. The document expressed that the gridded urban tissue, and its eclectic architecture,39 were the two elements that granted protection to El Cabanyal as a historic area at the same level as other historical ‘ensanches’40 of Valencia.

“The urban development of Cabanyal participates jointly of the same urban conceptions of the expansion districts of the city, being an accurate reflection of this. Nevertheless, it is carried out on a smaller scale and considering the peculiarities of the urban complex.

35 which had been named ‘Paseo al Mar’in previous plans.
36 SDPs are non-statutory documents in the UK, however in Spain’s and Valencia’s legal planning framework they are.
37 A BIC area is designated to a place that requires extra control to protect the historical and architectural values that make a place unique. This would be equivalent to Conservation Area under the UK regulatory planning framework.
39 The vernacular architecture of the time and the livelihoods of the inhabitants shaped the urban tissue in the form of a dense grid, parallel to the coastline, a distinctive urban pattern in the city. In the beginning of the 20th century, the neighbourhood was rebuilt by the neighbours with vernacular materials, conferring a unique value to the neighbourhood. This popular and particular architectural style is the most distinctive feature of ‘El Cabanyal’.
40 Ensanche or eixamples refer to the areas developed beyond the historical city walls, in the late 19th in response to demographics changes. The areas followed a rational gridded pattern, being the most famous the Eixample of Barcelona by Ildefons Cerdà.
As in the expansion, the first urbanization project was drafted at the end of the 18th century, specifically after the fire of 1796, in which, under the auspices of Captain General Luis de Urbina, a reconstruction project was drawn up with regular blocks and a clear desire for social stratification. However, this illustrated plan was finally not implemented, although it served as a guideline for the definitive reconstruction of the Cabanyal, carried out after the fire of 1875, again coinciding with the expansion projects of the city of Valencia, developing a peculiar, gridded pattern derived from the alignments of the old barracks, in which a local architecture of clear eclectic roots developed.” (DECRETO 57/1993, de 3 de mayo, del Gobierno Valenciano, por el que se declara Bien de Interés Cultural el conjunto histórico de Valencia.[93/2858])

The above text extracted from the official BIC document, not only outlines the historical development of El Cabanyal, but also highlights its unique urban evolution and the factors that have shaped its socio-spatial character. In addition, the document recognises that despite this uniqueness, El Cabanyal shared commonalities with the expansion of other districts in the city, and how this was done to ensure that these new expanded districts were integrated into the broader urban landscape of Valencia. The recognition of its unique urban gridded pattern and architecture style sets the stage for understanding the importance of preserving El Cabanyal's distinct socio-spatial in the face of new planning frameworks that were being developed at the time. The declaration of El Cabanyal as a BIC, solidified its importance and mandated the protection of all its assets and emphasised the need for any urban development plan to be sensitive to the historical and cultural layers embedded in the neighborhood.
Figure 5.8 Plan showing listed buildings from the PGOU 88 and scope of the BIC area. Source: Author based on plans from the PEPRI. Area de Urbanismo, Ayuntamiento de Valencia.
Figure 5.9. Several examples of the unique architectural style of several houses in Calle de la Reina (numbers 196, 146 and 43 clockwise all listed in the PGOU88 and within the BIC area, all with level 2 of protection. Source: Author
5.3.1 Staging power through ‘reform and protection.’

Surprisingly, just five years after this declaration, on July 24th, 1998, the government of Rita Baraberà published the draft of the special protection and reform plan “Plan Especial de Protección y Reforma Interior dEl Cabanyal-Canyamelar”\(^{41}\) known hereafter as PEPRI or Plan Cabanyal \(^{42}\). The document’s main aim was to extend Blasco Ibáñez Avenue through the neighbourhood to ‘finally’ connect Valencia to the sea. This had arguably been a long-term aspiration of Rita’s government, embedded within the hegemonic discourse that Valencia had to “open up to the sea” since it had always lived giving its back to the sea (Alberola 2007; Llisterri 2007; Corell 2015). As discussed in the previous chapter, this discourse had already been included in the PGOU88 and resonating since the dictatorship under Franco, when Blasco Ibanez Avenue stopped being conceived as a connection between Valencia and El Cabanyal and started being ambitioned as the connection between Valencia and the sea. (Interview 29). Beyond official narratives and ambitions, the PEPRI locally implied the modification of the urban grid, the street network and the demolition of over 400 buildings.

In 1998 AUMSA\(^ {43}\) elaborated a draft document of the PEPRI, which presented three options. Initially, the PEPRI plan went through a public consultation process with three options exposed for two months to the public, during which time people could vote and choose one of them. Each alternative consisted of different planning options for El Cabanyal, the main difference being the connection between Blasco Ibañez with the seafront. The document describes the three options as follows:

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\(^{41}\) Plan Especial de Protección y Reforma (Interior Protection and Renovation Special Plan).

\(^{42}\) from 2010 the PEPRI is also known as Plan Cabanyal-Canyamelar.

\(^{43}\) AUMSA stands for Sociedad Anónima Municipal Actuaciones Urbanas. Created in 1986, it is the municipally owned corporation in charge of executing and managing urban development and regeneration projects in the city of Valencia.
Option no 1: Extension of Blasco Ibáñez with continuity, following current alignment and keeping current width of 100m.

Option no 2: Extension of Blasco Ibáñez with a slightly tilted alignment towards the north to adapt better to the existing urban grid of El Cabanyal and a width of 48 metres.
Option n° 3: No extension of Blasco Ibañez and allowing for a big square in the junction between Blasco Ibañez and Bulevar de Serrería as a solution to the intersection between Blasco Ibañez and the maritime neighbourhoods.

Figure 5.10. Maps of the three options submitted for consultation in July 1998. Source. Plataforma Salvem El Cabanyal.

The document was exhibited in the Maritime District Board and the Municipal Planning Offices of Valencia. The main reason for having a location aside in Valencia was that authorities regarded the project as critical to the city’s interest. This speaks directly to the fact that Rita’s Government never envisioned the PEPRI as a plan for El Cabanyal but as a plan to connect Valencia with the seafront. Once the consultation period was over, the authorities did not accept the result. They manipulated the validation of votes to impose their proposal in a bureaucratic manoeuvre, using their power to undermine the neighbours’ will (Herrero García and Soldevilla Liano 2010). According to Corell y Monfort, the architects commissioned to work on the PEPRI, the municipal government received 62 letters during the consultation period with comments on the three options. However, this has been confronted by many. During the consultation period, the Neighbourhood Association (AAVV) and Salvem gathered in a single document over 3000 signatures opposing all three options and submitted their response, and this was counted as one single document. Even though Rita Barberà and the head of Urban Planning, Miquel Domínguez, promised they would adopt a solution in agreement with all

44 One location in the neighbourhood and the other in Valencia.
other political parties and general public support, this was not how they proceeded. The more than
3000 objections presented by the AAVV and Salvem were counted as one since these were put
together into one document. Others were discarded because they did not include complete addresses.
However, they had full names and ID numbers, and others were dismissed because they belonged to
people who were not residents of El Cabanyal, which was quite shocking as it contradicted their
discourses of being a project of interest for all ‘Valencianos’.

Without further consideration, option nº2 was declared the most voted, and AUMSA was designated
as the municipal agency responsible for developing the new plan. AUMSA, as mentioned before,
commissioned the project to Corell y Monfort, ex-municipal planning officers, who were highly
regarded local architects and lecturers at the ETSA\textsuperscript{45} of Valencia. This is one of the many examples
“of autocratic governance-beyond-the-state” (Swyngedouw 2005) in which local government
partnered with “the experts, technocrats and bureaucrat” (Swyngedouw 2009, p.308), characteristic
of post-political urban governance. In the Supporting Document for the final draft of PEPRI
adopted on the 2nd of April 2000, Corell y Monfort justify this option as it is the one providing “a
fluid access to the sea, through Blasco Ibañez Avenue, a measure that is of priority interest for the
city of Valencia and considered in the current Planning Framework.” The plan, according to them,
does not contravene the BIC protection as it keeps the main urban form and structure of the
neighbourhood, dismissing that it is the entire urban grid that is protected. They further argue that
PEPRI adheres to the BIC and the Law of Spanish Heritage (29/06/1985), which, on very
exceptional occasions, accepts the modification of the urban structure\textsuperscript{46} unless it responds to a clear
improvement of the built environment of the area and avoids its dereliction, as was this case.
However, the plan contravened not only the Law of Valencian-Cultural Heritage (18/07/1998) but
also the desires and aspirations of the neighbours of El Cabanyal.

\textsuperscript{45} Escuela Técnica Superior de Architecture is the main Architecture School in Valencia
\textsuperscript{46} Point 2, Article 21 BOE-A-1985-12534 https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/1985/06/25/16/con
5.3.2 Plans and drawings as tools of power.

Though the planned avenue was 48 meters wide, it included an affected band at each side of 50 meters, extending the total width of the central area to almost 150 meters. In addition, the so-called Bulevar San Pedro (originally and currently Calle de San Pedro) was also entirely earmarked for demolition. This implied the clearance of the central gridded urban fabric and the destruction of 1651 homes over 400 buildings (García del Moral 1999), many of which were and still are protected heritage by law. Figure 5.11 shows the areas that the PEPRI designated as ámbitos de actuación,47 a planning instrument used to facilitate the regeneration of intensely decayed areas with loss of population in need of comprehensive renewal. In this case it marked the areas that would be demolished to give way to the avenue. All the listed buildings under the PGOU88 that lay inside those areas were stripped of all protection. To compensate for the net loss of listed buildings, others were listed outside the PEPRI area. Authorities and officers used planning instruments to reduce those houses home to so many neighbours, to quotes, percentages, and numbers. This is a clear example of how authorities prioritised their “exchange value” over their “use value.”

Drawings in these documents were “inherently ideologically loaded, vested with the interests of their creators [...] designed to reshape how people think about” (Kitchin et al. 2011, p.441). El Cabanyal. These maps and plans were fundamental to advancing Rita’s neoliberal agenda through a new projected vision for Valencia. What is interesting in these planning documents is how explicitly they were used as a powerful tool to control (2011) the hegemonic narrative. As an example, looking at the area framework plan of the PEPRI, we can see that by deliberately omitting information, they probably hoped to silence as many dissenting voices as possible and impose their order in the planned city (Graham, 2011). The PEPRI shows contradicting ways of presenting information. One must think this could only be intentional. Looking into the details of several drawings (Figure 5.12), we can see how listed houses outside the PEPRI scope appear coloured in orange.

In contrast, those previously listed in the PGOU88 inside the PEPRI are now presented in white in Figure 5.13, empty, and neutral, as if they had never been there nor protected. There is no information on that plan. Additionally, there is no visual indication of any change in their status as listed heritage, showing just black outlines. The message was clear, nothing in the site allocations of the PEPRI had any value worth preserving.

47 ‘Ámbitos de actuación’ are Site Allocations for redevelopment through Compulsory Purchase
Figure 5.11. Scope of BIC area from PEPRI Plan and the ‘ambitos de actuacion’, which are the areas earmarked for demolition. A significant central area of ‘ambitos de actuacion’, with a blue dotted line is contained within the BIC, shaded in purple and Source: Plan Cabanyal-Canyamelar.
Figure 5.12. Another way in which this document was used to control the narrative is how the new intervention is presented graphically/visually. Even though the plan is clearly a tabula-rasa plan, that clearance PEPRI Area Framework Plan. Protected buildings are shown in orange and municipal available land for development in pink. Source: Plan Cabanyal-Canyamelar
Figure 5.13. Plan showing listed buildings in the PEPRI plan. Listed buildings are shown in orange, without any further distinction on the level of protection. Source: Plan Cabanyal-Canyamelar
Another way this document was used to control the narrative is how the new intervention is presented graphically/visually. Even though the plan is a tabula-rasa plan, that clearance is never fully shown in plans and drawings. The new planned avenue and the ground figure map always appear overlayed, giving the impression that proposals offer better urban continuity and adaptation to the existing urban fabric. In a document that is used to show how the authorities are planning the ‘future’ order of El Cabanyal, it can only be intentional that the ground figure map of the present –and soon-to-be past– is always shown together with it. Presenting the plan visually this way disguised the actual impact and scale of the intervention.

There are no detailed drawings in the entire documentation of the PEPRI showing the actual houses for demolition, and one can only think that planners and authorities probably did this, hoping that what cannot be seen cannot be missed. Power is engrained in every line sketched in these drawings, enacting as political acts, reproducing the imbalanced power relations between Rita’s government and the neighbours of El Cabanyal, defining who were citizens of full rights, benefitting from the plan’s ‘protection and reform’ and who was not (Dikeç 2007). Indeed, despite containing the word protection in its title, many of El Cabanyal’s neighbours saw the plan as a threat. Drawing from the words of local activist and long-term neighbour, interviewee 11, they felt anything but protected:

“…when Rita arrives at the municipal government, the social alarm somehow begins in the neighbourhood. It was in the second period that started with the absolute majority of the Partido Popular when they started something which I believe is a direct attack on democracy: a single party can undertake changes to laws and do whatever it wants. And in fact, here we are currently suffering what has been this nonsense of abnormal functioning of the democratic structure of a country….” (Interview 11)

The PEPRI introduced a different system to catalogue the buildings considered worthy of protection to that of the PGOU88. Three levels of protection were introduced, attending to urban, architectural, and socio-cultural values, with a total of 560 buildings listed., a reduction of over 200 listed buildings from the PGOU88. Table 5.1 below shows how this is reduced from 773 total listed buildings in the PGOU88, as seen in Figure 5.14 below. The three levels of the PGOU 88 were now renamed as Ambiental, Partial and Integral, integral being total protection. The document shows that the number of buildings inside the PEPRI site allocations was significantly reduced and compensated for this loss of protected buildings with newly listed buildings outside its scope. Planning documents are often not very accessible and easy to read for those outside the professional realm due to their complex technical language, embroiled numeric calculations, and length, and the PEPRI was no exception. This new way of naming and cataloguing protected heritage complicated access to information about
El Cabanyal’s future, considering most neighbours were not used to this convoluted urban planning document.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of protection</th>
<th>PGOU 1988</th>
<th>PEPRI 1998</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of listed buildings</td>
<td>Number of listed buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP DE FRANÇA</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CABANYAL</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANYAMELAR</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1. Table comparing the number of listed buildings by area and in total in the neighbourhood between PGOU88 and PEPRI 1998. Source: Author based on data from Plataforma Salvem El Cabanyal.

Figure 5.14. Comparison of listed buildings in the BIC area within the PEPRI and Calle de San Pedro between the PGOU 88 and PEPRI plans. Source: Author.

El Cabanyal undeniably needed a reform and protection plan, just like other historical districts in Valencia.\textsuperscript{48} In contrast to the plans of those other areas geared towards renewal and rehabilitation, El Cabanyal was subject to a plan that implied significant demolitions in the district’s central area. This clearance would have undoubtedly separated the district into two separate halves, erasing the area’s past, present and future. The central area earmarked for demolition soon became known as the Zona

\textsuperscript{48} Amongst them, only the historical district had five neighbourhood had their own PEPRIs, and the Ensanches district had two PEPs (Special Protection Plans).
According to the government’s documents, there were no listed buildings in the Zona Cero, meaning nothing in the entire area had any historical, social, or aesthetic relevance. In other words, for them, anything lost in the way was worthless, and the loss was insignificant, as it lacked any value. This was one of the main arguments used to justify the prevailing narrative underpinning official discourses: since preservation of the majority of buildings in the area was not feasible, clearance was the only possible solution to all the ailments the area suffered from.

Amongst all the documents gathered in the PEPRI, the information plan showing the preservation of buildings stands out for explicitly delivering conflicting information. According to the municipality’s surveys, the document shows that most buildings were in a good or acceptable preservation estate. This was in contradiction to what the official discourses wanted to convey. The same document shows that the affected area earmarked for demolition did not concentrate a higher number of buildings in a deficient or unfit state, no more than other areas not directly affected by the PEPRI (Figure 5.15). Regarding the conservation of its buildings, the plans showed that the area was like the rest of El Cabanyal. It is worth asking then if the Zona Cero, at that time, was in more urgent need of ‘protection and reform’ than the rest of El Cabanyal. Nonetheless, Barberà’s government still insisted on its tabula-rasa approach and the need to demolish the affected area.

The lack of coherence between what their information plans showed and the main line of argument defending the need for the PEPRI speaks to the real motives underpinning Rita Barberà’s ambitions for El Cabanyal. As I have argued before and several interviewees claim, the intention behind the PEPRI was no other than to promote real estate speculation. The main objective was to free up land in the affected area, making it available at low prices to private investors. In turn, these could build and sell expensive high-rise developments. Once more, the authorities, with “market enablement policies”, aimed to make economic surpluses and political profits out of the PEPRI, one of their main flagship initiatives. What they claim was a regeneration project was de facto a hidden process of state-led gentrification delivered via local governmental plans.

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49 The Ground Zero or Zona Cero in Spanish, is the name popularly given to the central area affected by the PEPRI plan that was earmarked for demolition. This thesis will use its Spanish name.
Figure 5.15. Conservation conditions of buildings PEPRI Plan. The map shows most buildings in the affected area in a good conservation estate at the time, coloured in yellow. Source: Plan Cabanyal-Canyamelar.
5.4 Erasing El Cabanyal from the map

The purpose of this section is to explore the spatial, social, and emotional impacts of the PEPRI in El Cabanyal in terms of how the existing structures of power tried to impose their hegemonic view of Valencia. The aim is to illustrate how Rita’s government tried to gain control over the area throughout this conflict through “uneven and unequal hierarchies of access to spaces within cities, and banal and blatant forms of violence” (Fluri 2013, p.448). The section will explore how PP’s administration employed a degradation strategy and started acquiring houses that would be demolished to advance their agenda and will unpack how they operated to oppress the resistance they encountered, resistance that I will explore in section 5.4 was staged mainly through the civic association Plataforma Salvem El Cabanyal.

5.4.1 Degradation as strategy

Local authorities insisted that extending Blasco Ibañez through El Cabanyal was the only possible solution to revitalise the neighbourhood and that even though it disserved some citizens, it was done for a common and greater good, as it responded to the general public interest by allowing the connection of Valencia to its seafront (Joan Pons 1998a). This hegemonic discourse around the impossibility of alternatives to the PEPRI allowed local authorities to impose their authoritarian vision for El Cabanyal’s future regeneration over any other options (Mouffe 2005; Baeten 2007; Fezer 2010; Swyngedouw 2010) is inherent to the Post-political condition. However, many neighbours felt quite differently about this, as a local activist, architect and lecturer at the UPV explains. He recalls working on alternatives for Cabanyal with colleagues in the academic field.

We started doing things with lecturers from the School, and you could see that what was always done was off plan, on paper, right? Conversely, I had lived in the neighbourhood. But what is valuable is the neighbourhood itself. Probably an alternative to what needs to be done is to rehabilitate it, to put it in value. It is simply making its value patent and tangible, nothing more. It is good to be able to propose alternatives instead of the avenue, and let’s think before anything else if that avenue is needed. Valencia is connected to the sea. What is disconnected from the sea is El Cabanyal. Is Valencia disconnected from Cabanyal? The solution is not to cross through El Cabanyal to get to

50 As discussed in depth in Chapter 2
51 Universitat Politècnica de València where the main School of Architecture and Urban Planning of Valencia belongs.
the sea from Valencia but rather to connect Cabanyal with Valencia, Cabanyal with the sea. (Interview 29)

Rita’s government had a very different view on how these connections should materialise, a authoritarian view that did not allow dissenting opinions. Hegemonic discourses versed around the twofold objective of the PEPRI. Firstly, it facilitated “the connection of the city centre with the seafront through Blasco Ibañez.” Secondly, it allowed “the city to recover its self-esteem while regenerating El Cabanyal.” The official narrative was that the plan would benefit all affected parts, downplaying their tabula-rasa approach as “a minor sacrifice that the city can and should assume” (Joan Pons 1998b).

Everyone cherished Rita Barberá’s power. So it was an impossible mission, David versus Goliath. But we were not daunted by this at all, because we knew who she was and this is how we started to organise this group and work. The first big fight was precisely over the so-called San Pedro Boulevard. We have seen how people have been bought by PP, with the Holy Week Museum, the renovation of the market… It has been a form of social fracture, and then the way they sold it was saying, ‘And what do you care about this? If it doesn’t affect you, your house will be worth more, and its value will increase. This was something that people understood better because the City Council sold it as a project of progress and modernity. But that progress meant not valuing the memory of a neighbourhood, of our tangible and intangible customs. (Interview 11)

In parallel to this narrative, Rita’s government started unfolding their strategy to ‘implement’ the PEPRI, which would have had three phases. The first phase consisted of government-led disinvestment, intending to enable the rapid decline and devaluation of the neighbourhood. This resulted evident as it was done in a context of economic prosperity, when other parts of the city, not so far from El Cabanyal, were receiving massive investments and overspendings as we have seen in section 5.2. One notable feature of this first stage was the decline of traditional local commercial activities in El Cabanyal, a decline documented on the register of commercial activities in El Cabanyal. The chart below (Figure 5.16) shows the evolution of the total number of commercial activities during the period comprehended between 2002 and 2015. Available data from 2002, 2010 and 2015 show that El Cabanyal was surpassed in the total number of commercial activities in 2010 and 2015 by neighbourhoods with similar numbers of commercial activities in 2002. In fact, in 2002,
El Cabanyal was the 6th neighbourhood with the highest number of commercial activities in Valencia, falling to 9th in 2010 and 11th in 2015. The chart shows that commercial activities in El Cabanyal started performing worse during the periods comprehended between 2002, 2010 and 2015, compared to the other similar neighbourhoods.

![Graph showing the comparison of the evolution of the tax register entries for commercial activities and services in El Cabanyal against similar neighbourhoods, Russafa, Patraix, Benimaclet and Benicalap neighbourhoods. Source: own elaboration based on Municipal Statistics Office of Valencia. Available at: https://www.valencia.es/cas/estadistica/anuario-estadistica?capitulo=6](image)

**Figure 5.16.** Comparison of the evolution of the tax register entries for commercial activities and services in El Cabanyal against similar neighbourhoods, Russafa, Patraix, Benimaclet and Benicalap neighbourhoods. Source: own elaboration based on Municipal Statistics Office of Valencia. Available at: https://www.valencia.es/cas/estadistica/anuario-estadistica?capitulo=6

The declining trend of new commercial activities was more visible in the Zona Cero. Figure 5.17 below shows an analysis of the evolution of commercial and economic activities in C/Escalante through a mapping exercise of its active frontages. We can see how in 1998, just in that small section of Escalante, the number of active frontages was 17. In 2008, based on information from google maps, we can see the number has fallen to 7. In 2015, I mapped the number of active frontages remaining as 3. Shockingly, some buildings dedicated to commercial activities had already been demolished in 2012, as shown in Figures 5.18 and 5.19. This process is explained by a long-term neighbour of the Zona Cero below.

“They started abandoning the neighbourhood, and they wouldn’t let shops open or clean—the smell was terrible! We all know that what they did with local businesses here in the maritime district was to wreck the neighbourhood. The previous municipal government froze all commercial activities. They stopped issuing new business licences.

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52 There are 19 districts in the City of Valencia and a total of 88 neighbourhoods.
They have brought down a street like Escalante. Once full of shops, nowadays it has only one remaining.” (Interview 15)

Figure 5.17. Evolution of the active frontages in C/Escalante between C/Empar Guillem and C/Pescadores. Source: Author based on data from PEPRI information maps, google maps and the author’s collected data.
Figure 5.18. Image showing the closed pharmacy in C/Escalante, the only existing activity remaining in the entire Zona Cero, Bodega Jiménez, and the demolished building between them. Source: Author.
Figure 5.19. Image showing the closed pharmacy in C/Escalante, the only existing activity remaining in the entire Zona Cero, Bodega Jiménez, and the demolished building between them. Source: Author.
Figure 5.20. Map showing the location of walled houses and properties painted with stripes in September 2016. There is a much higher concentration in the Zona Cero. Source: Author
The second phase entailed accumulating properties through Compulsory Purchase Orders—or direct outright purchase in cases where CPO was impossible—well below market prices. Not only were these prices well below market prices, but they were also three times less than what they should have legally been to a discrepancy in the interpretation of the Development potential that should apply to the calculation of the compensations to those affected.

This is when the City Council begins to expropriate houses. It begins to expropriate homes with a compensation value well below market prices. They start expelling people who live in these houses subject to CPOs, and they spend millions of euros. I want to highlight that in the last term, from 2011 to 2015, the City Council of Valencia only in that period, spent at least 4 million euros buying houses and then walling them up. All that information is available, including the reports from AUMSA, a municipal and public company. (Interview 12)

The third phase, which never materialised, would have consisted of the requalification of land to unlock development potential for private with that could be purchased at low prices and sold at much higher values after the PEPRI had been developed.\footnote{Something that the LRAU law allowed and promoted and had been used in other peripheral areas of the city that were redeveloped into entirely new neighbourhoods like Nou Campanar, or Penya Roja near CAC. And according to Santamarina, “La especulación del suelo, la privatización de espacios público s y la frenética actividad inmobiliaria han dado como resultado la revalorización del litoral en la ciudad de Valencia, lo que ha supuesto reclamar un espacio que durante décadas ha sido marginado, olvidado y desintegrado. Ello ha supuesto el desarrollo de un proceso de gentrificación impulsado y amparado por las propias actuaciones políticas.} This had been the government’s modus operandi in the other mega projects and events, generating “substantial capital gains which have been left entirely in private hands” and “those who have been the most important direct beneficiaries of the investments have been the big construction companies which have signed succulent contracts” (Tarazona Vento 2013, p.132). The involvement of developers and construction companies was no exception in the PEPRI, as explained by interviewee 36, who was involved in the neighbourhood’s association:

We once met with Rita and this very well-known developer in Valencia who was also involved in El Cabanyal. We were trying to negotiate with her, and we were against the avenue, and her solution was only to discuss building heights. She offered five hights maximum, but we got nowhere. Some days later, this developer contacted us and asked us to meet him. A group of three or four of us went to his office, and he showed us around a development under construction. Then he invited us to eat paella at La...
Cerradura. He told us his idea was to offer better compensation to neighbours if they agreed to let him build up to 10 heights. We declined his offer. We told him that we would not accept two, five or ten heights and would fight for the neighbourhood, not its demolition. (Interview 36)

Figure 5.21. Map highlighting the BIC area of El Cabanyal and the area earmarked for demolition in the PEPRI. Source: Author

Figure 5.22. Image extracted from PEPRI promotional video from 2011 released by the municipal government. Source: YouTube.
Figure 5.23. Houses within the BIC area. Houses above, clockwise, are in Calle Barraca 157, Barracar 142 and Calle Los Angeles 26. They all have level 2 protection in PGOU88 but were included in the ámbitos de actuación of the PEPRI. Source: Author.
Under Barberà’s government, local authorities pursued a strategy of degradation to implement the PEPRI that had a significant impact in El Cabanyal. This strategy deliberately led to a decline in investment and maintenance, resulting in the degradation and devaluation of El Cabanyal. Despite the hegemonic discourse emphasising the supposed common good and the trickle-down regeneration benefits of the PEPRI, residents of El Cabanyal resisted this authoritarian vision, fully aware of the impacts not only on their cultural heritage but also on their everyday lives.

5.4.2 Demolition through Compulsory Purchase

One of the main strategic tools of Rita’s government was the use of ‘ambitos de actuación’, which allowed them to get hold of the area through the compulsory purchase of privately owned properties.\(^{54}\) As compensation, those affected were offered the option to return to their homes once rehabilitated. Compulsory purchases should include considerable economic incentives or discounts on the new properties developed through the PEPRI to those owners who accept. In turn, the authorities could sell all previously purchased or abandoned properties as new market homes, thus attracting new residents to the area. The reality of what happened turned out to be quite detrimental to many of those affected by the demolitions. They were offered compensation at a time when land value and housing prices were significantly low. However, as many found out later, the prices of the new properties were calculated considering the PEPRI valorisation of the area. The compensation they were offered was calculated on very low land values, thus would not have been able to afford to buy those new houses once the redevelopment and the new built had been finished\(^{55}\) and would have been forced to either indebt themselves or abandon the neighbourhood.

Many of those affected were too old to access mortgages. Others were vulnerable residents of Roma ethnic origin, whose livelihoods depended heavily on informal economic activities, meaning accessing mortgages was complicated. Several interviewees mentioned knowing people who did end up entangled in this situation and had to leave the neighbourhood. This is narrated by my first interviewee from a Roma ethnic origin. She did not abandon the neighbourhood but ended up homeless and squatting in an abandoned house with her young children with no electricity or water. She was unaware of what agreeing to sell her home entailed because she had not been fully informed about the implications of these agreements or how much the new builds offered in exchange would

\(^{54}\) Many of which were in a significant estate of dereliction.

\(^{55}\) This was actually even problematic for publicly owned houses, since the sell prices of these is calculated taking into account updated land and housing values, which after the redevelopment of El Cabanyal were expected to raise significantly.
cost her. As her story unfolds, details of how Rita’s government dealt with affected neighbours in the Zona Cero are exposed.

I bought a flat in El Cabanyal in Luis Despuig. I was paying a mortgage. Then they told me to sell it, they would expropriate it, and I sold it. They gave me another flat in exchange, but I couldn’t pay it, and two or three months later, they kicked me out, and now I find myself here. The truth is that I sold it because they got me excited about the Av/ Los Naranjos in 2010. I sold my house to them because they were sending expropriation letters to my house. I sold it to them. Their office was in Calle de la Reina. They would send you letters. I was the last to leave my building because I didn’t want to sell. My house was facing San Pedro St., but also Luis Despuig. It was facing onto two streets. I didn’t want to sell because I knew what would come next, but they tempted me with Los Naranjos with the new orange block. They told me they would exchange mine for one there. Finally, I said, ok, I'll leave this house and move there, but then they told me it was too late and allocated me a rented one in San Pedro. There I was, for eight months, paying rent, but then I couldn’t pay rent for two months, and we were evicted. The money we were given ran out because it went through Hacienda, and I owed them 12,000€ from a fine. I was given 24,000€ and told there were no more houses available.

(Interview 1)

**Figure 5.24.** Image of the house where Interviewee 1 resorted to squatting with her young children after being evicted from her derelict social rent home. The house is in the middle of a plot that is not developed, without electricity, water, or gas connections. Source: Author.
Figure 5.25. Image of the building where interviewee 1 lived before, which ended up being one of few buildings not demolished in C/San Pedro in the Zona Cero and was still standing in 2015 when I arrived. The building was not occupied and boarded. Source: Author.

In April 2010, the legal battle between Salvem and the Municipal Government resulted in Constitutional Court of Spain (Spain’s highest instance) halting the compulsory purchase orders and the demolitions. PP said they would abide by the mandate and would stop the demolitions while the Court decided on their appeal. However, Rita Barberà announced that, since the Court had halted the PEPRI, nothing could be done at all in El Cabanyal, and she would use the entire budget allocated to it, 60 million Euros, to buy houses that she would then demolish once they had won the appeal, something she was convinced would happen. In her own words, she accused the central Government of PSOE of stopping “the PEPRI and what is not the PEPRI, facilities, gardens, car parks... everything” and said that "If I can’t do anything, I will buy everything I can" (Ferri 2010). Barberà equated stopping the demolitions to paralising the entire PEPRI, and as such it affected all projects in it, including those outside the scope area, such as schools, gardens, socio-cultural facilities, or the rehabilitation of symbolic buildings, and they would not give planning permission to for renovations either. The money that was going to be invested in the entire district would be used instead to buy properties inside the Zona Cero. By early May, they had already invested 16 million on outright purchases of properties (Vázquez 2010). Being direct owners and the planning authority, they did not even request the pertinent planning permissions to demolish their properties. The
demolitions took a more violent turn when during several occasions, Salvem and other collectives tried to stop them and were repressed by the police as shown in figures 5.26 and 5.27 below.

Figure 5.26. Pictures of a demolition taking place and a demonstration of neighbours against it, controlled by local police. Source: (Las Provincias, 2010)

Figure 5.27. Pictures of a police repressing those trying to stop the demolitions in April 2010. Source: RTVE1, 2010.
The purchase and demolition of properties became the most visible aspect of the struggle between Rita and the neighbours. The empty lots that resulted from the demolitions were painted with brown stripes, and purchased properties were walled. Painting all the houses that belonged to them as they acquired them was the most effective strategy to deepen the stigmatisation of El Cabanyal, while making visible how they were ‘conquering’ the neighbourhood. This was spatial tactic was spread through the entire neighbourhood but was concentrated around the Zona Cero where most purchases and demolitions took place. Houses and open lots resulting from the demolitions, anything that belonged to Rita, was painted with a specific striped pattern. It was a way of making clear that “El Cabanyal was a village being invaded by a metropolis” (Interviewee 30). Some properties were also walled if it was in their interest to keep them empty. As many neighbours complained in interviews, meetings, and events I attended, this was one of the worst psychological pressures they had lived with during all these years. Seeing those stripes every day, spreading across their neighbourhood as a “death sentence” (Interviewee 8), inflicted significant pain on them. One of my informants described seeing the stripes as something deeply disturbing, comparing them to the swastika and how the stripes made them feel powerless. Indeed, the stripes became the symbolic way Rita was making visible how she was taking control and ownership of the neighbourhood, house by house. Some neighbours spoke of the Zona Cero, where there was a higher number of demolitions resulting in empty lots and painted stripes as a conflict city, comparing it to the image of the walled houses in a post-conflict Beirut and how the painting of the stripes contribute to the further stigmatisation of the area as abandoned, marginal and derelict.

“Rita invested herself in destroying the neighbourhood. She was determined to make who had the power visible. She did so by leaving those empty lots and painting them with the three tones of brown, the colour of poo. And all you see around is all the dents in the neighbourhood, all the sinkholes.” (Interview 13)

“The previous municipal government would paint with the brown stripes the houses they bought and the empty lots left after they demolished them. The famous stripes symbolised a ghetto. It was such a horrible feeling, and I didn’t want those walls. I hate those stripes.” (Interview 10)
Figure 5.28. Pictures of the brown stripes that were spread all across El Cabanyal, albeit with a higher concentration in the Zona Cero. Source: Author.
However, not only traditional houses were enlisted for demolition. Historical buildings, symbol of the district’s local identity as a fisherman’s village were also earmarked to disappear and their walls painted too. Particularly the old ‘Lonja de Pescadores’ and the ‘Casa dels Bous’ would have disappeared with the PEPRI. Local people had occupied both buildings in the 1960s, and reconverted them into housing as interviewee 44, another Cabanyal-born long-term neighbour, recalls when giving an account of her feeling of belonging to the neighbourhood:

“I was born in number 63, in ‘La Casa dels Bous, in Calle Astilleros’. It was two streets away from the seafront, and my father, a construction labourer, opened a door in it and built us our house there, with a marble staircase, it had two stories, and it was beautiful.”
(Interview 44)

Figure 5.29. Image of the Casa dels Bous (above) and the old Lonja de where the interviewee lived before, which ended up one of few buildings not demolished in San Pedro Street in the Zona Cero and was still standing in 2015 when I arrived. The building was not occupied and boarded. Source: Author.
Numerous informants claimed that the authorities acquired a significant number of houses in the neighbourhood, which were then abandoned to a derelict state, subsequently leaving them to deteriorate and become derelict. They would paint them or walled them up and allowed squatters to occupy these houses, despite the complaints of the locals, and their final goal was to demolish them. Nevertheless, the most significant problem was the permissiveness of the police regarding drugs and criminal activity, a phenomenon that sociologist Miguel Ángel Martínez refers to as "surveyed marginality" in the district. This exacerbated the degradation and stigmatisation experienced by the residents of 'El Cabanyal'.

“There were many empty houses, empty houses with owners, and empty houses whose owner was the municipality. It is important to remember that it is a mistake made by many people who are misinformed or do not have complete information. There has never been an expropriation per se by the municipality. The City Council has been privately buying houses, mostly from individuals who have been deceived. The City Council boarded up many of these houses, and that’s it” (Interview 13)

According to these accounts, it is evident that the local government implemented a strategy referred to as ‘real estate mobbing’ within El Cabanyal. Rather than addressing the actual socio-economic issues in El Cabanyal, these problems were exacerbated by the authorities' complete neglect of the district and the lack of public investment in preservation, basic infrastructure, and social services. The worsening of these issues became a key argument in support of the PEPRI. Rita's government had a deliberate agenda to accelerate the process of decay in El Cabanyal in order to justify the need of the urban plan, as the only solution to regenerate and revitalise the neighbourhood. Consequently, numerous property owners vacated the area, resulting in a decline in prices, a characteristic feature of the initial stages of gentrification.

5.4.3 A different place altogether

Although the authorities attempted to permeate this notion around the lack of connection to the sea and the absence of a dignified seafront on their discourses, many neighbours did not experience isolation or disconnection from Valencia. Nevertheless, they felt distinct and unique and claimed that El Cabanyal was a place on its own. This place had successfully conserved its distinct socio-spatial dynamics. The neighbourhood had retained many of its own festive, gastronomic, and cultural traditions and had a very robust local market, second only to the main Central Market of Valencia, where the use of Valenciano was higher than in other areas of the city. Described as a small microcosm within Valencia, many contended that El Cabanyal possessed features that could not be
found in the rest of the city. Neighbours still lived, perceived, and conceived El Cabanyal as a place different from the city of Valencia.

Rita’s government was determined to instil through their discourses the idea that Valencia was disconnected from the sea and that El Cabanyal was the primary obstacle for Valencia to have a dignified seafront. Unsurprisingly many neighbours did not feel this way. They would argue that Valencia’s connection with the seafront was El Cabanyal. Nevertheless, they did express feeling unique and distinct. According to their accounts, El Cabanyal was a special place that preserved its unique socio-spatial dynamics and distinct identity. Many residents described it as a small microcosmos within Valencia, with features and traditions that could not be found in the rest of the city.

“I disagree with the expression that Valencia has always given its back to the sea. I always think that it is a myth. It’s not true. The city of Valencia cannot be understood without the sea. The completely different thing is that maybe it’s been Cabanyal giving its back to Valencia. Often time this happened because Cabanyal-Canyamelar had its particular dynamic. This different dynamic was represented by a social difference with the urban nucleus of the city, by the geographical distance between both, and by the barrier that the railway represented. This meant that, in some way, the Cabanyal was in itself a kind of microcosm, an alpha and omega, a kind of place where life arose with its own characteristics, in such a way that the expression that everyone uses there when we come to the city centre it is to go to Valencia, it is not to go to the city centre, and this is still the case today” (Interviewee 27)

Many neighbours had a strong sense of belonging and claimed they “were from El Cabanyal” as different from Valencia. They had a strong sense of belonging, and their strong attachment was based on relations of proximity with their families and neighbours. For them, the social, economic, and affective implications of demolishing the central area of the neighbourhood were far more complex and profound than the physical disappearance of part of the protected urban tissue and houses, as serious as that was on its own. More importantly, as shown in Figure 5.9 above, the plan would have partitioned the neighbourhood into two disconnected halves from a spatial, social, economic, and symbolic view. Long-term neighbour born in El Cabanyal and local historian interviewee 28 explains how the PEPRI would have transformed the neighbourhood into a completely different place altogether.
“I do not have any properties in the Zona Cero. What happened is just that it broke my soul. I keep saying that I am going to Valencia, but I say it with full knowledge of the facts. I love my people, and this is my village. I am then any subject that you see that they split it, well they split it. I have always thought that a culture, a way of being, is complicated to import in a fragmented way, and afterwards, everything has severe repercussions. Well then, splitting the Maritime district into two halves, with an avenue of such significant dimensions, meant destroying not only what was the physical part but also destroying the personality, the essence of what the Maritime district is” (Interview 28)

As his narrative shows, neighbours like him, despite not owning any property affected by the plan, were worried about the consequences of the plan, and they all felt affected by it even though their properties were not directly affected by it. It was not their houses that would be demolished, but it was their neighbourhood that would disappear. The materialisation of the plan would have destroyed the neighbourhood’s proximity networks that existed in the tightly knit streets that Mayor Barber’a aimed to erase. As he remarks, many neighbours still felt a strong sense of belonging, of being in a distinct place, independent from the city of Valencia,

And besides, there was also a big lie there: if you want to make that big avenue of great proportions until reaching the sea, the logical thing is to build high-rise buildings on both sides of this avenue. As tall buildings are developed, the traditional houses from here will disappear to the benefit of these tall buildings. With this, not only would part of these 1600 affected houses have disappeared, but more importantly, our way of life, enriched by our proximity to the sea, would have disappeared. What I mean is one realizes the number of foreigners who come to buy houses around here. Why? Because going out in shorts or a swimsuit from your house to go to the beach is priceless. And you know it, especially if you’ve been abroad. (Interview 28)

As we can see from the words of interviewee 28, there were concerns regarding how the extension of Blasco Ibañez would have materialised the disappearance of the existing socio-economic ties and the destruction of the livelihoods of many of its neighbours. Furthermore, as corroborated by interviewee 36, many neighbours reflected on how these concerns linked the spatial impact of the new developments associated with the avenue, of a completely different architectural form and urban scale (see Figure 5.27 below), to the way of life in El Cabanyal, and how it was its unique spatial dimension that gave of El Cabanyal its idiosyncrasy.
It would have meant breaking us, the social fabric of the neighbourhood. There is a social issue on one side and on the other of what the neighbourhood is, which would have been completely broken apart. And we would not have gained anything more than to reduce the amount of light, taking off the air, take off everything and an avenue. (Interview 36)

These concerns were also related to the fact that many interviewees had been living in El Cabanyal since they were born, had long-standing family roots across the district that traversed several generations, and consequently, as another neighbour explains, had a strong feeling of belonging. (Gaja i Díaz, 2002; Santamarina Campos, 2008; López Nicolás and Bodí Ramiro, 2009; Martínez, 2010). This strong sense of belonging was drawn from the narratives of most interviewees, and that same feeling, that emotional attachment to El Cabanyal, was behind their opposition to the PEPRI. This point is well-captured in the following excerpt from an interview with Interviewee 36, a long-term resident.

Yes, I am born and bred here, pure ‘Cabanyalera’, and my family too... My father’s family all live in Cabanyal. All my cousins are from Cabanyal. The only ones who do not live here are my sister and me, who live in this part (in el Grau, closer to the Port), but they all live in Cabanyal. My father came here because he was a port worker, and this area was closer to work for him. But we are all from Cabanyal, totally entangled in the ‘Semana Santa’, and all my family, cousins, and nephews are involved in this tradition in the neighbourhood. How am I going to want them to demolish it? That’s impossible! (Interview 36)
El Cabanyal, like in many places in Spain, traditional “fiestas” is also key in creating a collective identity, with people taking ownership of their streets. Traditional “Fiestas” still have a strong sense of belonging and place attachment in local people. As the interviewee mentions, in El Cabanyal, this is the ‘Semana Santa Marinera’, distinctive of the maritime district, as it does not take place elsewhere in Valencia. This Easter Parade celebrates Holy Week, which takes over the entire neighbourhood.
during this time. The plan would have completely transformed this celebration. As several interviewees recall, it was used by the municipal government as a tool to advance their agenda during their battle against the neighbours.

The main festivity of the Maritim district has always been the Semana Santa, which is the time-honoured festivity. The celebration crosses the three areas of the neighbourhood. A priori, this seems to have little relevance. But festivals bring people together, and concepts unite. If you go ahead with the plan, you also separate this, and it would result in two different neighbourhoods (Interview 28)

Figure 5.31. Images of the Parades of the Semana Santa Marinera 2016. Source: Author.
Recalling Friedmann, “There are only two occasions when people take to the street and claim it as their own: when they arise in protest against the authority of an oppressive state, and when they celebrate. Protest and celebration are not very far apart.” (Friedmann 1992, p.138). And to control people, and disown them from their streets, one of the tactics Barberà’s government used was the processions of the Semana Santa Marinera. The routes of the big festivity of El Cabanyal were modified without any apparent reason. Still, as interviewee 12 argues, they were used to control the narrative around the neighbourhood and to further their ‘regeneration’ agenda.

“Another change I observed — I have been part of Easter Week since 1989— is that the processions used to be longer. I march with a Brotherhood that belongs to the Parish of Our Lady of the Angels. The parade starts from the church and goes from Avenida Tarongers to the Plaza de la Cruz. However, since 2002 the processions no longer reached the Plaza de la Cruz. As the degradation progressed, these were shortened. So much so that the processions have been cut by an hour and a half because you have fewer streets to parade through. Furthermore, until 1996, the Burial of Jesus procession went through Calle la Barraca. Surprisingly from 97, it starts going through Calle de la Reina […] They did it because the area’s degradation was already in PP’s plans. And if they managed to move out the Festivities of Semana Santa, the big celebration of the neighbourhood, they would have one problem less. When you move all acts to Calle de la Reina, and everything is open, you only allow la Reina to stay active, with people and businesses open. Little by little, they were changing the image of the neighbourhood. (Interview 12)

The processions were used as a spatial tool to impose the PEPRI by modifying their itineraries. As interviewee 12 underlines, the itineraries of the parades were shortened to avoid entering the Zona Cero. Furthermore, the main procession was moved from Calle Barraca to Calle de la Reina, the High Street of El Cabanyal, that did not traverse the Zona Cero. Moving main acts away meant that with time, local businesses and people would leave Barraca, which was all part of a plan devised to devaluate and empty the Zona Cero to make the advancement of the PEPRI easier. This is also mentioned by interviewee 19, who recalls how the official discourse was that the views of C/Barraca or C/San Pedro were not good enough for the main parades to go through them and how this was used as an excuse to reroute them. Not only he complains about it, but he also complains about how people from the “Semana Santa” were complicit with this and that no one did anything to prevent it.

“…the Holy Week had its main route through ‘x’ streets, and they changed it, and nothing happened. (they said) that the view was bad. Ok, yes, the view was bad, but it is
what it is. The Via Crucis went through San Pedro, and now on San Pedro Street, they don’t even go to see it. That was so wrong! We should have claimed against it.”

(Interview 19)

The ways in which the government of Rita Barberá tried to impose their hegemonic project and the pressure tactics employed to advance their regeneration agenda cannot be dissociated from the ways in which neighbours organised themselves and claimed against the PEPRI, but also the different ways in which they resisted against the oppression and injustices they felt and suffered. In doing so, they reaffirmed their marginal condition as someone who has been neglected a basic right, and as Agamben argues, resistance to oppression is a right and a duty of the citizen (Agamben, 2005). However, different voices, both in favour and against the project and the role of Salvem, would trigger an increasingly long, complex, and tense process in which the formation of coalitions played an essential role in contesting and resisting the PEPRI.

5.5 Resisting the hegemonic order

Despite having strong support from adepts who adhered to the mandates established by Mayor Rita Barberá and her government, the plan soon started raising many voices against it. The concerns came not only from directly affected neighbours of El Cabanyal but from many residents who, after the manipulation of the participation process, started to organise themselves and mobilise against the plan creating the civic platform Salvem El Cabanyal. A significant group of Neighbours, alarmed by the PEPRI, got organised, and on the 22 of April de 1998, several people founded the Plataforma Salvem El Cabanyal – Canyamelar – Cap De França. The main aim of Salvem was to stop the PEPRI and the extensión of Blasco Ibañez, to avoid the destruction of 1651 homes and the urban grid of the historic district of El Cabanyal, and to prevent the neighbourhood from being split into two isolated halves.

“This is our heritage, and we value and cherish it immensely. That is why we said: ‘This is it’! In a democracy, a politician cannot do what they. This was social injustice for us, and we could not tolerate it. This had to be brought to light and raise awareness here in the city, nationally and internationally and wherever necessary” (Interview 11s)

5.5.1 Staging Dissensus

Neighbours from El Cabanyal, as explained in detail by many interviewees and as I heard in countless meetings, conversations and events, were not all against the PEPRI. But for many, this became a central aspect of their lives. By the time I started my fieldwork, they had devoted over 17 years of their life trying to resist the PEPRI in a struggle that became one of Spain’s most notorious and long
urban conflicts. When Rita Barberà won her second election with an overwhelming majority, the idea of extending Blasco Ibañez through El Cabanyal started resonating, as many informants mentioned. Feeling that local authorities would never consider their needs, desires and aspirations, neighbours started organizing themselves, initially channelling their concerns on an individual and word-to-mouth basis through the AAVV. Always collaborating with them, their concerns transcended the scope of the AAVV and the soon after the manipulation of the results of the public consultation.

“In 1997 the idea of the Plan and extending Blasco Ibañez across El Cabanyal started circulating. The PEPRI was always a top-down imposition from Rita’s government, and we, neighbours, did not matter. We were invisible, and only making money mattered to them. When the three options were consulted, we all went, well, lots of us. The AAVV was always open to explaining and informing about the threats of the PEPRI…but there was a significant public concern. This was when we started quite a big grassroots campaign in the neighbourhood because we did not fit in the AAVV. We had to go to the meetings with our own chairs, we were really worried, and the PEPRI soon became quite monothematic. The AAVV had also to act as a neighbourhood association and respond to all neighbours. And that’s also how we started functioning as an assembly organisation. (Interview 36)

Soon after the PEPRI was announced, Salvem organised their first public meeting. The expectation was such that the meeting had to be moved to the nearby Dr Lluch parc because the assembly hall of the Ateneo Marítim did not have enough capacity to host them. Later that year, during an expert panel discussion, with Corell, Miguel Domínguez (Urban planning councillor) and Boira (Urban Geography Professor and neighbour), over 200 people protested the PEPRI. The motives for joining the Plataforma were personal and varied, but all had a common goal, stopping the PEPRI. Some were not directly affected by the demolitions, but their family, friends and neighbours were. Others did not want their neighbourhood to change and wanted to preserve El Cabanyal and others because they opposed ideologically and politically to the top-down neoliberal development underpinning Rita’s plans. Joining Salvem and becoming active against the PEPRI also affected the neighbourhood.

In my interviews and numerous conversations, people conveyed a strong sense of belonging to El Cabanyal. Many of them spoke about El Cabanyal with pride and described it as a unique place in Valencia. This can be attributed to both the spatial and social characteristics of the neighbourhood. They would talk about close relationships, helping one another as neighbours. However, interpreting this as indicative of a tightly knit, cohesive community would not be entirely accurate. Before I
arrived in the neighbourhood, the social fracture was evident, and people spoke about it quite often during the interviews and other events I attended. I was always reminded that not everyone was against Rita and the Avenue. Some were neighbours whose homes were not affected by the plan and did not care much about the plan or their neighbour’s homes being demolished. Others were expecting the plan would increase market values in the area and benefit from this. After years of seeing their neighbourhood decay, others simply fell into the narrative that the only way to solve the estate of dereliction and marginality El Cabanyal had fallen into was through the PEPRI. As a result, the neighbourhood was clearly fractured between those who opposed the PEPRI actively through Salvem and others who supported the PEPRI and bought into the idea it would bring progress and modernity to the rest of the city. Others were desperate and just saw the PEPRI as the solution to the area’s dereliction and abandonment for 17 years.

“People had no solidarity with each other, they didn’t care. There was a house of Si Volem here, so your property was on the avenue and mine wasn’t. So you were Si Volem and this was Rehabilitation without Destruction. And we had been neighbours all our lives and now we didn’t speak to each other anymore. Lifelong friends living on the same street, neighbours on the same street all their lives. How can you be on a street and not support your neighbours? If the avenue goes here, do you think the avenue will go straight ahead, your house will also be gone! People were very naive, very ignorant. But people didn’t care that Maria was gone, my lifelong neighbours, that in the Agustina was being displaced, they didn’t care. […] My mother told me look, I will have a nice fountain here in front and I say yes, and Maria, where is she going to live? Agustina? It’s that they didn’t care.” (Interview 2)

“It was difficult not to get involved in something that affected you so much. Investing yourself almost full-time in this is linked to your personal beliefs on social justice. Many people came, but others did not have that sensitivity. ‘It doesn’t affect me, so I will just look away. I don’t care about my lifelong neighbour, with whom we’ve always had dinner together outside in the street because my house’s value will increase. This petty side of people initiated the social fracture of the neighbourhood. A fracture that was real because this happened even within the same families, they broke apart.” (Interview 11)
Salvem was open and free to everyone who wanted to attend their weekly meetings, whatever their backgrounds or situation. As a result, it was formed by a very varied spectrum of neighbours from Cabanyal. Amongst members, and those who attended their Wednesday meetings, were neighbours from different classes, ages or gender, political parties, ethnicity, and cultural and educational backgrounds. In 17 years of struggle, as one interviewee explains, people from all walks of life mixed in at different times, with people coming and going and coming back sometimes. Each actor had their own motivations for action and personal aspirations, but they all worked together through collective action to achieve their common goals and for their own benefit. Its members’ different needs and aspirations brought them together to work in coalition rather than in collaboration.

“Salvem, from its origins, was never formed only by people affected by the extension, it was mainly people who lived in the neighbourhood, but we also had people from other areas, people who were not directly affected by the PEPRI but considered themselves as such. The transformation of your neighbourhood would affect every single one of us. That is why our composition was always very open. Everyone who wanted to attend the assemblies was welcome. They were open, and we never had any closed spaces. People would come and go. There were no memberships, and we functioned like an assembly.” (Interview 8)

The members of Salvem met weekly in their space in C/Pescadores, every Wednesday evening at 8 pm, from 1998 until 2015. Those weekly meetings, with fluctuating numbers, were not cancelled even once, which illustrates the strong commitment of those who were more actively involved in Salvem to fight for their neighbourhood. Open to anyone, the meetings helped getting people engaged but were also key to gaining further traction and support from neighbours and served as a safe space where people could go if they wanted to be informed or had any concerns. They represented consistency and reassurance in a moment of great uncertainty and despair.

“I decided to join one of their assemblies held every Wednesday at 8 pm. I honestly can’t believe that after 18 years, they are still there. Well, we all are there.” (Interview 11)

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56 No fee or money was asked to join the platform.
57 I myself attended a couple of them, and despite not knowing anyone and not being from El Cabanyal, I managed to get access very easily. Needless to say, those who actively supported the PEPRI were never involved in the assemblies.
“Every single Wednesday, there’s been an assembly, and people have always attended. Some days there were 10, other days 50, but it has never been cancelled in 18 years.” (Interview 8)

This openness enabled its diverse and heterogenous composition, and this difference among its members strengthened the bonds between them. Focusing on what united them, they put their differences aside to work together for a common goal. The recognition of this difference amongst members was not opposite to a sense of collectivity. Conversely, it created a sense of solidarity among its members, grounded not on what they had in common but on what they aspired to in common (Frediani and Boano 2012). As one of the interviewees recalls, feeling mistreated and outcasted enabled the conditions to create strategic coalitions between Salvem and the Squatter movement, an alliance that was key in confronting the same causes that originated a shared positions of exclusion and marginality between such groups.

“At the first assembly I attended, I was so shocked because there was Lola, an old lady who passed several years ago but who was an icon for the struggle for El Cabanyal. And seeing her, looking like a nun, dressed in black, very old-school, sitting next to a 25-year old guy, looking quite punky, even a bit dodgy, with green spiked hair, they were both talking and laughing. That image made me fall in love with what was happening because they were worlds apart but found something in common. Here we all fit in. We all belong here, me too.” (Interview 13)

Members of Salvem understood, soon into the conflict, that to fight against Rita’s hegemonic project, they had to organise themselves in different ways. They devised a twofold strategy against the PEPRI, as several members I interviewed explained. The core action group within Salvem realised that if they were to maximise their options to resist and win the conflict, their resistance strategy should have two planes of action, one at the institutional level and the other at the socio-spatial level. The institutional plane consisted of the legal dispute with the authorities. While the profile of Salvem was quite diverse, mainly middle and working class, there were lawyers, left-wing politicians, architects, planners, artists, and university lecturers among the core group. Through their expertise and networks, they started researching, gathering and preparing all sorts of historical, legal, and

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Boano and Frediani argue that when people share a common position of exclusion, this can create and deepen bonds of solidarity between them through the recognition of their own social complexities and differences. It goes beyond individual aspirations and interests and focuses on the common struggle and goals that they share. This enables conditions of possibility to create strategic coalitions between critically engaged citizens that are key to confront the same causes that have originated that shared position of exclusion and marginality.

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planning reports to support their case against the PEPRI. This led to two different legal disputes in parallel: one would follow the heritage pathway, and the other the planning pathway.

The socio-spatial plane consisted of the mobilisation and engagement of neighbours and the wider society to raise awareness and gain support in their struggle. Salvem had a complex and holistic modus operandi articulated around various social mobilisation and spatial resistance tactics. Salvem’s social mobilisation strategy unfolded in coordination with the development of its legal strategy. They combined more ‘traditional’ forms of protest with alternative and more symbolic claims. In May 2005, with the PEPRI on hold, members of Salvem gathered and managed to stop demolitions scheduled within the BIC area. During the following years, the spatial and social dereliction of the neighbourhood kept worsening.

Salvem focused on strengthening their resistance when the legal dispute favoured the municipal government. They set up a mutual aid group with those affected by the demolitions in C/San Pedro and tried to resist them physically. Most actions or events initially took place in the streets of El Cabanyal. Still, they soon expanded beyond the neighbourhood to occupy other spaces within Valencia, with demonstrations sometimes organised outside the Town Hall. The idea was to show the conflict with Rita’s government and its impacts outside the neighbourhood to the rest of the city. In parallel, they engaged in other forms of activism through practices like knowledge dissemination, publicity in the media, international workshops, academic research, heritage and cultural conservation and education, horizontal national and international networks of knowledge exchange and solidarity like the workshop and alliance organised with Mukojima neighbourhood in Tokio and Ottensen in Altona in Hamburg that at the time were facing similar struggles. In addition, they turned to more alternative forms of art.

We realised that art was a powerful tool because news is burnt daily, but creative work stays longer and has a wider reach. Within creative and artistic environments, at the national level, what we did was immediately welcome and had a lot of repercussions. Both Universities were also involved, which has been key in our resistance and helped us get international attention and support. (Interview 11)

59 The development of the legal dispute is not an object of this study as it would entail a complex investigation and a different type of chapter.
60 such as Portes Obertes which we will discuss in section 5.5, Cabanyal Archiu Viu, Cabanyal Craft amongst others.
61 Several members were university lecturers in the Fines Arts School, Architecture School of Valencia, or the Sociology Faculty, amongst HE institutions.
Salvem’s efforts, while rejected by the local authorities, were rewarded at the international level when El Cabanyal was included in the World Monuments Fund as a heritage “place in need of protection and galvanizing action and support for their preservation”, and further support was highlighted when the neighbours were awarded in the 2013 Europa Nostra Awards, the EU Prize for Cultural Heritage, under the category Education, training and awareness-raising for one of their initiatives, for El Cabanyal Archiu Viu. According to the jury, the project was awarded for representing an exemplary initiative of the engaged neighbours of El Cabanyal, who were aware of their responsibility towards their cultural heritage both at urban and social scales, and who had shown an array of different ways of raising awareness of the importance of their neighbourhood by promoting inclusive town planning through cultural identity and active participation.

Through their protests, actions, organisation, and agonistic alliances, Salvem claimed their right to their neighbourhood, which they wanted to live in. They demanded their right to produce, use and decide the future of El Cabanyal. They organised themselves and performed multiple critical activities to engage all neighbours in their struggle against the PEPRI. Concentrations, protests, workshops, debates, etc., brought together different associations in the neighbourhood, collectives, and social movements to work for a common goal: their right to their neighbourhood. Their main through their actions was to make visible a wrong “by tying the presentation of equality, as the part of those who have no part, to the conflict between parts of society” (Rancière, 1999, p. 39). The wrong here was a hegemonic urban regeneration plan that completely ignored what the neighbours wanted or needed and would completely eraser El Cabanyal from the map. The wrong was made visible by those who were directly affected by them plan, “the part of those who have no part” who “interrupt the police order (ibid.)”. This process of disidentification, of the ochlos, could not be allowed. Rita’s government could not allow Salvem to question their role in deciding the future of El Cabanyal. As a result, they were othered and treated as radicals and violent people (Secor et al. 2008; Swyngedouw 2009), as Rita claims, “I have said it a thousand times, I do not sit with violent people, and people who have abused me verbally, physically, and on paper” (Las Provincias 2012). This was confirmed by Interviewee 15 who claimed that they were treated like “terrorists, violent and unwelcome people, and we didn’t deserve any explanations”. Such narratives show how, in the PP’s eyes and discourse (Europa Press 2010; La Vanguardia 2010), Salvem clearly did not “belong to the demos” but were the Rancièrian “part of no-part” (Swyngedouw 2014b, p.127).

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According to the WMF “Heritage sites can be nominated by any individual or organization, ensuring that the Watch remains a powerful platform for amplifying voices of local community members and residents”
The personal toll that 18 years of struggle took upon all neighbours was significant, describing resistance and activism as a way of life. Many of the people I interviewed discussed the profound personal impacts of being immersed in this conflict and the emotional stress they experience. As a result, it often affects their families and children as well. One of the neighbours involved in Salvem explained what it felt to see the neighbourhood she chose to live in subjected to a plan that would not just transform it, but erase it and how that sparked her desire to get involved and fight for her desires “it was very, very hard for me, I had chosen this place in the entire world to settle. I could have chosen anywhere else, but I chose El Cabanyal to build my life in peace, and I told myself I couldn’t ignore this. Someone wants to steal my desires. It is my dream!.” When discussing their motivations for getting involved, many neighbours speak about feeling wronged and ignored and felt victims of social injustice.

“What we have done has been tremendously hard. To many of us, this was 24/7. An entire generation has been born into this struggle, the struggle of Salvem. They have lived it in their homes, in their neighbours. Let’s buy a 20-metre chain and chain ourselves to the Townhall doors, let’s start a hunger strike. How do you grow up your children to see this? It is really hard, and those children are now 17. Portes Obertes, 16 years, in which children had to eat or sleep at different times because the houses were open, 16 years in which old people have died, and their last pain has been not knowing during the last ten years of their lives if they were going to die in their homes, or where on earth they were going to die!” (Interview 11)

A member of Salvem who lived in the Ground Zero area spoke about feeling that her essential rights had been violated and felt that, after many years, that wrong should be compensated. Separated from her husband, she explained that she had to give up full custody of her young daughters and share it with her ex-husband because the Zona Cero became too hostile for them when they became teenagers, and they didn’t feel safe.

“My life has changed completely. Half of my life has been taken away from me. I have not been able to enjoy it. The municipal government turned my life into a nightmare. My basic rights have been robbed. No one ever acknowledges that!” This woman treated El Cabanyal like a manor, and she was the lord, and her Droit du seigneur was my home. I have stayed all these years because I had nowhere else to go but mainly because the law was on my side. Why should I leave? But the price I had to pay was not being able to grow up my daughters, and there’s no money in the entire world that can compensate for this. (Interview 15)
Members of Salvem wanted to stop the PEPRI, preserve their neighbourhood, keep their homes, and ultimately fight for the renewal of the El Cabanyal. Still, as another member of Salvem explains, the struggle had a huge impact on all of them:

“What we have done is huge. There are not enough hours for us to tell. It’s been 18 years, and so many things have happened during this time. And yes, our legal and social struggles have stopped the plan that wanted to demolish 1651 homes. But of course, these 18 years have taken their toll on the neighbourhood.” (Interview 13)

Over the span of 18 years, Salvem, as the main association leading the resistance against the PEPRI, not only confronted the challenges posed by the top-down tabula rasa plan, but also managed to navigate diverse positions and interest amongst different collectives. The division between those opposing the PEPRI and those in support of it reflected wider societal disparities, with Salvem emerging as a diverse and inclusive coalition. Their commitment, evident through regular weekly meetings and a complex strategy encompassing legal dispute, socio-spatial mobilisation, and activism. Salvem not only garnered international recognition for their efforts to preserve El Cabanyal, but also revealed the personal sacrifices made by its members, who dedicated their time, emotional well-being, and sacrificed time with their family to the cause of keeping El Cabanyal on the map of Valencia.

5.5.2 Spatialising dissensus

The Zona Cero was the spatial manifestation of the struggles and frictions that shaped Valencia and El Cabanyal. Still, this conflict was also shaped by the city’s planning (Brown 2010). The spatial dimension was one of the key components of any visibility strategy: the conflict was all about space. And nothing is more visible than public space in a neighbourhood where public space was critical to their tight relations of proximity and their culture and way of life. Through quotidian activities, such as cleaning the empty lots or collective dinners in the street, neighbours reclaimed the space they perceived as neglected and lacking dignity. They created a symbolic and discursive space that contested both the existing marginalised condition of the space and the planned square by hegemonic powers.
In the same way that Rita Barberá showed how she was trying to conquer the neighbourhood in spatial terms, Salvem spatialised its resistance through the balconies of the houses (Santamarina 2014). The colourful display of banners in balconies over the street above eye level visualising dissensus in the public space of El Cabanyal. During my fieldwork, I identified up to three different banners and two main mottos. The first one originated before 2010. Was ‘Regeneration without destruction and the other, that emerged after the violent demolitions of 2010, was ‘Cabanyal, I love you intact and alive. One of the neighbours I interviewed gave me this one in case I wanted to display the banner on my balcony, a banner I still keep (Figure 5.30 below). The dialect of banners got complemented by those of the neighbours who supported the avenue extension, Si Volem, and there were streets where both banners were displayed at times, symbolizing the fracture and polarization mentioned by many interviewees.
Figure 5.33. Banner against the PEPRI. Source: Author.
Figure 5.34. Banners against the PEPRI. Source: Author.

Figure 5.35. Banner against the PEPRI. Source: Author.
5.5.3 Portes Obertes

As discussed previously, Salvem had a twofold strategy. Within the visibility activities, one of the most intriguing initiatives that Salvem organised was the annual art exhibition ‘Portes Obertes’. The name means ‘Open doors’ and was a symbolic way of recalling the neighbourhood’s way of life, where neighbours would sit outside their houses with their doors opened. Several members of Salvem were artists and lecturers at the School of Fine Arts of Valencia and took the lead in raising awareness through art, a powerful tool that would leave a lasting memory. The exhibition started gathering local, national and international attention at a time when social media flourished. Salvem envisioned art as a powerful tool to reinforce their claim against the PEPRI that would help them protect El Cabanyal. From 1998 until 2014, every year, during several weekends in December, the neighbourhood turned into a large-scale live museum. Private houses were opened to the public as if they were exhibition halls, and artists who supported the cause could show their works of art for free.

Portes Obertes had two main important goals: on the one hand, it reinforced the neighbours’ identity promoting their participation and engagement in the initiative exposing their own houses and inviting neighbours to see them, thus enhancing the sentiment of collectiveness and cohesion amongst the
neighbours in their struggle against the PEPRI. On the other hand, as explained by Interviewee 11, it had a key role in raising awareness of the conflict and getting people to come to the area and see the two things the Rita’s government was keen to manipulate and hide: the actual conditions of neglect and dereliction of the neighbourhood, and the heritage values that were worth fighting for.

We started doing guided tours in 98 and realised people didn’t know El Cabanyal Canyamelar or Cap de Franca. People didn’t know what the maritime villages were. They would go to the beach and leave and never wander around the neighbourhood. This was also partly because there was a stigmatising campaign from the city council. This neighbourhood is worth nothing, so we are running it down. They never spoke about being a BIC of its architectural and cultural heritage. So we decided to contest that through Portes Obertas. We will not get out of our neighbourhood to talk about it. We will make people come and see it with their own eyes. We wanted people to understand the struggle but within its own context. (Interview 8)
Figure 5.37. Map of the art installations and public space interventions of the first edition Portes Obertes 1998. Source: http://www.upv.es/laboluz/proyectos/web/po98/98/98.htm
Figure 5.38. Programme and Map of the art installations and public space interventions of the XV edition Portes Obertes 2013. Source: http://www.cabanyalarchivovivo.es

Figure 5.40. Art installation inside a private home during the last edition of Portes Obertes in November 2014 ‘The art of resisting’. Source: http://www.cabanyalarchivovivo.es
The initiative was quite successful and had even international reach, but it was always tied to the resistance against the PEPRI. From the beginning, Salvem would celebrate *Portes Obertas* until the struggle was over. The key aspect of *Portes Obertas* was that it promoted the dialogue between the intimacy of the individual houses’ private spaces and the streets’ public sphere, in the same way that the struggle to preserve the neighbourhood was intertwined to each of them individually. The domestic space was transformed into public space and perceived as such by visitors. In this transformation, they staged part of their cultural identity and memory, claiming the uniqueness of their homes and the use of public space as they used to do in their every life before it was left to dereliction by the authorities. During Portes Obertes, El Cabanyal became both symbolically and materially the neighbourhood they longed for and were fighting to preserve. In this way, Salvem contested the actual marginalised condition of public space and derelict houses in El Cabanyal, and the new urban spaces and housing developments planned to replace them by the hegemonic powers. In other words, Portes Obertes materialised an alternative to the PEPRI, however it was not a new alternative of what El Cabanyal could potentially be, but of what it actually was.

It was no longer possible to stop it. Everyone was waiting for Portes Obertes. We began to glimpse that this was a project in which art, politics, and society were involved and that it had a purpose. It had a beginning and an end. And in those first five years, the entire ideology of Portes Obertes was developed, in which when it ended, when we won the process or the process ended, Portes Obertes would end. How does that encapsulated project feel to you in a citizen struggle, which is what we have always desired? We didn’t want it to last 17 years, but as long as necessary, until now. What has led us is to reinvent ourselves, never to repeat formulas. There has been a lot of diversity, and ideas have come from everywhere. Immediately, from one year to another, it was very challenging to organize. It requires a lot of time and energy. Everyone wanted to collaborate with us, but we didn’t accept donations. Hence, the catalogue served to self-finance all these projects, and that’s when we started selling T-shirts or finding ways to channel this economic exchange for objects. (Interview 11)

The neighbours, the houses and the different public spaces became the main actors in these art events. The traditional socialising spaces of the El Cabanyal were recovered, deepening the neighbours sense of identity and pride. This was the traditional way of living of the people of El Cabanyal, as it used to be in the village back in time: mutual trust and closeness of neighbours whose houses always had their doors open and who occupied the streets and squares of their neighbourhood. This effect was further reinforced by the works of art shown inside the houses. The houses, neglected by Rita Barberà, not only became museums but also became works of art.
themselves. The owners of the houses explained their interpretations of contemporary pieces of art, at the same time as these are merged with traditional and even sacred private objects of the house. This exchange of roles and the dialogue between artists, visitors, place, and homeowners opened spaces for reconfiguring the existing relationships and coalitions amongst the neighbours of El Cabanyal. It is process of political subjectification in which Salvem reconfigured the relation between the visible and the sayable, the relation between words and bodies (Ranciere 2000, p.115) through Portes Obertes. They used art to strengthen the cohesion and the identity of the neighbours while engaging other citizens exposing the actual state and current problems of the neighbourhood and highlighting its architectural and cultural heritage.

The actions discussed in this section represent spatial strategies of dissensus. These strategies involved a theatrical appropriation of El Cabanyal's public spaces to assert and stage a claim, enact equality, become visible, disrupt the perceptible, and break through the 'partition' of the sensible. By doing so, they opened up the possibility for the return of the political. Through their actions, the members of Salvem and other allied collectives showcased their pride and ownership of El Cabanyal's self-organised spaces using them a platform for activism, campaigning, and protest. Some of these actions may seem small, such as the banners hanging from the balconies or the collective dinners that were organised in the streets. Others, like Portes Obertes, were obviously bigger. However, all these actions had a clear spatial purpose - to occupy and transform El Cabanyal, through time-place events and actions, from a derelict area into a neighbourhood that is alive, unique, and valuable. Through their actions, they brought their struggle against the PEPRI to the realm of the sensible and made it visible in an exposed space. However, this was only one aspect of their process of political subjectification. On its own, it did not guarantee that Rita's government would listen to them and back down. In fact, they were dismissed and even cast aside as radicals. It was through a combination of strategies, both legal and spatial, that they managed to resist for over 18 years. Nevertheless, the spatial approach was a key part of their overall strategy, highlighting the need to create spaces that enact a redistribution of the sensible and challenges the police-order. The realm of the sensible, their everyday experiences in their houses and streets, was integral to staging and making visible their process of political subjectification.

5.6 Conclusion: The price of resisting

The first part of this chapter has discussed how mega-projects and events in Valencia were used as tools for political legitimation and self-promotion, with politicians claiming that they were transforming the city into a world-class city. However, the benefits of these projects were mainly enjoyed by elites and high-spending tourists, while middle- and lower-class residents were excluded.
from their benefits. While Valencia underwent a spectacular transformation, it came at the cost of neglecting other areas and exacerbating inequalities. The abandonment and dereliction of El Cabanyal stood in contrast to the luxurious events taking place nearby. The PEPRI has been analysed within the context of this entrepreneurial urban agenda, as another tool to enable the spectacularisation of the seafront area. The clearance and redevelopment of the historical district extend the Blasco Ibanez Avenue through the neighbourhood would allow the connection of the Valencia with the beachfront. Although the aspirations of Valencia’s authorities to ‘put Valencia on the map’ would have been materialised, the cost would have been the disappearance of El Cabanyal from it.

In then focusing on the ways that Rita’s government tried to impose the PEPRI undermining the neighbours needs and aspirations, I argue that the lengths to which they went, and the tactics employed to silence dissenting voices reveal the true motives behind the project: to transform Valencia into a world-class city. This suggests that economic interests were clearly prioritised over the preservation of the neighbourhood’s heritage for political gains. Plans and documents were manipulated to control the narrative around the PEPRI not just as the best, but the only possible solution for El Cabanyal’s problems. As such, no alternative was possible. The deliberate omission of information in these drawing was intended to silence as many dissenting voices as possible and impose a particular vision of Valencia with a plan that put El Cabanyal’s interests last. It would have destroyed an important part of the neighbourhood, the socio-spatial relations linked to it and the urban memories that have been knitted through time into the people of El Cabanyal.

The struggle between the government and the community had significant spatial, social, and emotional impacts, threatening the uniqueness of El Cabanyal and the well-being of its residents. Beyond a dispute over the morphological or procedural aspects of this plan, underlying the conflict were two antagonistic visions of the city and El Cabanyal. For Rita Barberá, El Cabanyal’s use value was completely undermined and overcome by its exchange value. For the neighbours, its use value, as a place for social encounter and exchange, where relations of proximity prevailed, was something worth defending for over 17 years. Salvem was persistent in carrying out a combination of traditional forms of resistance, whether legal or more radical, in the form of protest, together with very innovative and symbolic claims. The dynamic combination of all these different actions and the empowerment of its members and supporters managed to pause the project and resist the oppression of the Rita’s government. Their members’ active and critical engagement through participation, solidarity and coalitions reconfigured the identities of all the actors involved in the conflict.
Salvem and those other collectives that joined their struggle like the Squatters tried to find spaces where dissensus could be materialised in practices that could foster conditions of subordination against the hegemonic forces of Rita’s government. The spatiality of their resistance tactics was the key element in their struggle against the PEPRI. The neighbours of El Cabanyal reclaimed public spaces as a means of expressing their dissent. They engaged in daily activities such as cleaning empty lots and organizing collective dinners in the streets, symbolically contesting the marginalisation and neglect of their neighbourhood. They also used their balconies as a platform to render visible their dissent. And doing so, they were also claiming their right to decide on El Cabanyal. They didn’t have an idealised vision of their neighbourhood. Independently from their individual needs and aspirations, neighbours of El Cabanyal claimed collectively against the oppression they were suffering from the local authorities who, by imposing their authoritarian view, would alter their lives in a significant way. However, their final goal was different as discussed by Interviewee 3:

“Our goals were very different from those of Salvem. We joined Salvem to foster a community of resistance—a group of people collectively defending common interests. These interests are not individualistic but are collective interests. This is largely related to the struggle for public space, for the city, from here, beyond the intentions of stopping the extension and the PEPRI. […] For instance, now it could be the extension. Later, it could be gentrification. The leadership of Salvem had completely different objectives than ours, they were even contradictory at times, and we clashed.” (Interview 3)

The struggle between the Salvem and Rita’s government unfolded in multiple dimensions, including spatial, social, and political realms. Salvem’s resistance strategy, blending traditional and innovative forms of mobilisation, successfully resisted the PEPRI. In addition to their legal strategy, Salvem employed a resistance strategy that involved forging alliances and engaging in spatial practices at different scales and levels of struggle. This articulation was built upon alliances with the other collectives such as the Squatters and aimed to confront dominant discourses that portrayed the neighbourhood as a derelict area not worth preserving. While their common goal was to stop the PEPRI from erasing El Cabanyal from the map, each collective still kept their own individual identities and aspirations. Salvem aimed to resist (Swyngedouw 2011a) and preserve El Cabanyal like they thought it should be, in other words, for the neighbourhood they cared for and felt they deserved. The Squatters, however, had a different vision about what El Cabanyal should be, and did not fight just to resist the PEPRI. For them, the struggle was bigger, it was not only against Rita’s government and the plan, it against the current hegemonic urban agendas and the implications in El Cabanyal. These tensions, as I will discuss in Chapter 6 were evident once the common enemy was gone.
6. AGONISTIC SPACES: INVESTIGATING NARRATIVES AND PRACTICES OF DISSENSUS IN EL CABANYAL 2015-2017

“If these conflicts were understood as agonistic strifes, as disagreements between ‘adversaries’ and not enemies (Mouffe, 2000), planners as well as public authorities and policymakers would have to treat conflicts in another way. There is one obvious political reason for seeing conflicts and disagreements as antagonism instead of as agonism, because antagonism as ‘unsolvable’ has to be dealt with by power (legal means), whereas agonism demands time-consuming or ‘endless’ communicative processes. On the other hand, agonism could be said to be the ethos of a democracy respecting the legitimacy of difference and interests through public participation. Public planning should ideally be a place for strife about legitimate opinions and meanings on the road towards reasonable and commonly agreed solutions or consensus-building among mutual adversaries”.

(Ploger 2004, p.72)

6.1 Introduction

The local mayoral and regional elections of the 24th of May 2015 brought in a new municipal and regional government in the political antipodes of the previous administration. The so-called ‘left-wing block’, a progressive coalition between Compromís, PSPV and València en Comú, formed the newly elected council. Although PP was the party that overall obtained more votes, it was followed closely by the local party Compromís with Joan Ribó, a long-standing opposition bench, as its candidate. Joan Ribó, who managed to gain nine councillors, supported by the five elected councillors of PSPV and the three of València en Comú, was elected Mayor of Valencia, securing a majority of 17 out of 33 seats. After twenty-four years of Rita Barberà as a Mayor, the change was of historical significance. Valencia and the new municipal government, together with several other governments elected in other capital cities, was considered part of the new wave of local governments known as ‘Municipalities of change’(Barbieri 2018; Mérida and Tellería 2021). The election of a new Mayor for Valencia, a new regional government, and the suspension of the PEPRI without a clear plan of action to frame the renewal of the El Cabanyal, occurred within this timeframe and against the unfolding backcloth of the threat of gentrification and displacement that we have seen so many times before.
This chapter focuses on the period from 2015 to 2017, during which my primary fieldwork occurred, and the depth and significance of this political change and its implications for El Cabanyal’s future regeneration. The ethnographic approach to the field of this thesis, as explained in Chapter 3, started with me renting a small, detached house in El Cabanyal, a few meters away from the so-called Zona Cero\textsuperscript{63}, in September 2015, where I lived until October 2016. My approach consisted of immersing myself in El Cabanyal in a way that would allow me to attend and participate in the numerous events and the density of activities that took place almost daily during those months. As an outsider, I soon realised the importance of ‘being around’ in different assemblies, actions, events, and other activities to build trust and rapport with neighbours, associations, and collectives. I quickly recognised that if I wanted to fully grasp the complex scenario that had emerged in El Cabanyal after the elections of 2015, I needed to adopt an engaged ethnographic approach during my fieldwork, as I have detailed in Chapter 3. This approach, in turn, allowed me to unpack how the conflicting needs and aspirations different actors had for El Cabanyal’s present and future resulted in different spatialisations and, more importantly, how agonistic urbanisms unfolded during this period in its richness and complexity.

The first section of the chapter discusses the significance of the political change brought by the results of local elections of May 2015 and its impact of El Cabanyal. The new municipal government inaugurated a new political hegemony in Valencia marked by its departure from the previous neoliberal agenda. The new mayor and its government prioritised El Cabanyal, suspended the PEPRI

\textsuperscript{63} As explained in Chapter 5, the Zona Cero refers to ‘Ground Zero’ area in English. In this research I will use the Spanish name.
and went for a more horizontal form of urban governance, focused on dialogue and direct engagement with all main actors involved in the neighbourhood's future regeneration. However, alternative collectives and minoritised groups felt excluded and expressed mistrust toward the new administration, questioning their priorities. With the inauguration of a new hegemonic order, identities were reconfigured, and new dynamics of inclusion and exclusion emerged, revealing the complexities of navigating diverse interests and identities in urban governance.

The second section explores the different desires and aspirations of the neighbours of El Cabanyal concerning the future regeneration of neighbourhood after the change in government in 2015. With a renewed focus on restoring the neighbourhood’s dignity after almost two decades of neglect, the municipal government implemented measures to increase cleaning and security which were deemed as the most urgent needs. After the initial hope with the change in government, impatience and frustration started to emerge amongst long-term residents who felt that not enough action was being taken to improve their living conditions. This contrasted with how the Squatters and Roma minoritised groups felt, concerned about the impacts of gentrification that was starting to unfold with new businesses opening and an increase in real estate activities.

The third section traverses the precarious balance of conflicting narratives around the future renewal of the neighbourhood amongst different collectives in El Cabanyal. It analyses Va Cabanyal a participatory process to obtain EU funds to address the urgent regeneration needs of the neighbourhood and the challenges it faced in balancing participation and the urgency of delivering tangible transformation. Despite its participatory and open nature, Va Cabanyal failed to achieve inclusivity and representation within the participatory process. Diverse collectives engaged in fierce debates regarding the legitimacy of participating in the decision-making process and the risks of gentrification versus the need for urban regeneration. Mainstream groups felt that the participation delayed the regeneration process and gave voice to certain groups over others while minoritised groups felt excluded from a process that felt staged.

The fourth and last section analyses at how dissensus has spatialised into potential agonistic urbanisms in El Clot and the Zona Cero in El Cabanyal. It unpacks how streets and open spaces have been transformed into spaces of dissensus, with different groups using, appropriating, and contesting their prescribed uses and meanings in two spaces through different instances. In the Zona Cero, the first instance analysed is the painting of stripes on properties slated for demolition in the PEPRI and the subsequent painting over those stripes in two events: one organised by the municipal government and another organised by the squatters. The second instance is the use and appropriation of public space in the Zona Cero by squatters and Roma families. In El Clot, the first
instance I unpack how minority Roma people use the space around the building of El Block where they live. The second instance is the occupation of this unregulated space by the Cabanyal Horta collective, who have turned it into a self-managed urban gardening project and alternative public space. I conclude demonstrating that spaces of dissensus can become more than of spaces for contestation and resistance. In other words, the potential of agonistic urbanisms to challenge dominant narratives and reimagine alternative urban futures inclusive of those who are left outside processes of urban change.

6.2 The inauguration of a new political hegemony

Valencia’s newly elected municipal government represented a radically different way of understanding and exercising local politics. The electoral campaigns of these candidacies were based on “a new way of doing politics”, which revolved around three main lines of action: valuing and prioritising public services, being fully transparent and accountable, and putting citizens at the centre by including them in decision-making processes at the local level (Janoschka and Mota 2018). Soon it became clear this was the beginning of a new era of municipalism (Blanco and Gomà 2019; Janoschka and Mota 2021) based on political coalitions, agreements, and compromises. This new model of urban governance in Valencia ultimately departed from the previous neoliberal entrepreneurial model imposed during Partido Popular’s hegemony since the 90s. During his time on the opposition bench, Ribó had been highly critical of Rita’s entrepreneurial urban policies based on significant events and projects in Valencia, and specifically, he opposed the PEPRI. Being a staunch advocate for the regeneration of El Cabanyal, he was often seen in El Cabanyal, which was critical in winning the elections.

Of particular significance for this new municipalism was Ribó’s gestures when he was invested Mayor on the 13th of June. His renouncement of the mayoral sceptre was a symbolic representation of a new way of doing politics from a “cyclist Mayor, ecologist, who looks at Copenhagen as an example”, as even conservative newspaper El Mundo in its local edition describes (Collado 2015). In a clear departure from the authoritarianism that characterised Rita Barberà’s government, Ribó declared that the sceptre did not represent his understanding of local politics. This scenario starkly contrasted what had been happening for the last two decades both in the city and district and, as explained later in this chapter, marked a 180º degree shift in local politics and urban governance in Valencia.

64 The candidacies of the coalition parties, Compromís, PSPV and València en Comú.
To better understand this change's depth and significance, Table 6.1 below compares municipal election results from 2011 and 2015 at city and district levels. In the 2011 elections, despite the ongoing conflict, Rita Barberá had a landslide victory in the El Cabanyal, obtaining a majority of 52.9% of votes. PSOE came second with 24% of votes, and Compromís only had a 9% vote share. However, only four years later, the scenario was completely different. Although still obtaining a 23.2% share, and being the second party in terms of votes, in 2015, Rita’s power halved. Conversely, Ribó triplicated the number of votes for Compromís, obtaining a 27.2% vote share.

Table 6.1. Table showing a comparative of electoral results of candidacies in the Local Elections de 2015 and 2011 at city, district and neighbourhood level, the latter including percentages. Source: Oficina d'Estadística Ayuntamiento de Valencia. 2017
Even though PP still had the most votes in the city, this was not the case in the entire Maritim district, as in most peripheral districts. As we can see from Figure 6.2 below and Table 6.1 above, Ribó and Compromís obtained more votes than Rita in the Poblats Marítims district, specifically in El Cabanyal. The fact that Compromís was the party that obtained more votes speaks to people’s desires for change and their aspiration for a different urban future for El Cabanyal. Indeed, through their votes, El Cabanyal’s neighbours made a clear statement against Rita’s hegemony and, more precisely, against the PEPRI. Her defeat in the 2011 elections symbolised what many called the victory of “David against Goliath” as a parallelism of El Cabanyal’s neighbours and the power Rita had had for decades. More importantly, it meant the inauguration of a new era of municipalism and a new hegemonic order.

Figure 6.2. Map showing winning party by district in the local elections 2015 in Valencia. Source: El País (https://resultados.elpais.com/elecciones/2015/municipales/17/46/250.html)
6.2.1 Shifting positions: from ochlos to demos

As explained in the previous section, El Cabanyal was key in Ribó’s victory. Unsurprisingly, the renewal of the Cabanyal quickly became one of Ribó’s flagship initiatives in those initial weeks after the elections. Days before the elections, members of Salvem and the AAVV met with candidates from main political parties concurring to the elections. They all signed a document agreeing to a plan of action for El Cabanyal after the elections. The memorandum of understanding was signed between the main associations of El Cabanyal and political parties, except PP settled the framework for the rehabilitation of El Cabanyal. The significance of El Cabanyal in Ribó’s victory and thus his commitment towards its regeneration is described in the words of AAVV member interviewee 36, when she recalls this meeting held in May 2015(Figure 6.3) and what happened in the first meeting they had once he was in power.

“We signed the memorandum in the Octubre Contemporánea. We put together a letter with a commitment from the left-wing forces. There we were, the AAVV, the Plataforma, Juan from the Market [...] and we took a photograph that is there. That was in May, we signed it, and we had the unconditional support of the left wing. So, when they win the elections, we need to write a manifesto defining four specific points. These are the rehabilitation of the neighbourhood, urban, social, and so, and this commitment is signed, but the promises are all at the newspaper level. And Ribó’s words, in the first assembly we had after having won when Va Cabanyal was signed, in El Musical, he told us that if the money the EU should contribute through Va Cabanyal did not arrive (that was 18 million), the Municipality would find them, from wherever they were”.

(Interview 36)

Figure 6.3. Newspaper article showing the picture of the meeting that Interview 26 referred to above. Source: El Pais (05/15/2015).

Seis partidos se conjuran para salvar El Cabanyal

ADOLF BELTRAN | Valencia | 05 MAY 2015 - 20:10 GMT+1

Abogan por la recuperación urbana frente a la degradación causada por el plan de Barberá de prolongar la avenida

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65 The meeting took place with the political parties that were supposed to get represented councillors after the elections. These were Compromís, PSPV, Ciutadans, Valencia, Esquerra Unida and UPyD
The document gathered a series of short and mid-term measures, covering four main areas: earmark investment to reactivate economic activities, urban renewal beyond the area of the PEPRI, respect for the existing urban grid and its architecture, and participation and transparency in decision-making. All parties signed the document and agreed to “re-establish a two-way dialogue, to restore social life of this unique neighbourhood and return its dignity” (Beltran 2015). The symbolic meaning of this meeting relied not only on the content but also on form, in the fact that it took place in the city centre, signifying the inclusion and relevance of El Cabanyal as a neighbourhood of Valencia.

During his initial weeks as mayor, Ribó’s central discourse versed around restoring dialogue with all neighbours and entities to discuss the future regeneration of the neighbourhood and that this would be a distinctive sign of his term. 66 For the first time in many years, the local government seemed keen to level the playing field with all actors involved. This was symbolised with the al fresco collective dinner organised by Salvem to celebrate moving from resistance to regeneration. Referred to as “The Celebration that El Cabanyal dreamt”, and according to local media, it was attended by hundreds of neighbours and they were joined by several councillors from Compromis and PSPV-PSOE (Bartual Roig 2015). I will argue that a new order was inaugurated with the new government, opening the door to new possibilities for El Cabanyal’s future. As Mouffe claims, “There are always other possibilities that have been repressed, and that can be reactivated” (2008, p.9). In doing so, identities opened to a new reconfiguration, and consequently, positions and positionalities were also changing. Seeing that “every order is therefore political and based on some form of exclusion” (Mouffe 2007, p.3), this immediately raised questions regarding which entities, which neighbours, who would be included not only in those conversations and celebrations, but more importantly, in El Cabanyal’s future.

The previous chapter showed how El Cabanyal’s neighbours who opposed the PEPRI had been systematically treated like extremists by Rita’s government. They were cast outside the democratic arena, the law somehow had been suspended for them 67 (Agamben, 2005), and their fundamental rights as citizens of Valencia had been stripped away. After years of being treated as others, as antagonist enemies that had to be eradicated, they were starting to feel as if they were being treated as actors worthy of engagement. 68 This new reconfiguration of identities was materialised through the relationship between the leading civic associations of El Cabanyal, Salvem, AAVV and ACIPMAR and the new government. It was corroborated by the president of ACIPMAR, interviewee 43, who

66 As he had agreed in the joint document signed in May.
67 No planning applications were granted to renovate houses, cleaning and maintenance services were not delivered and houses were demolished without complying with urban planning laws.
68 This engagement is understood in an agonistic fashion through a Mouffian reading.
explains how the association had become an essential actor invited to the decision-making spaces the new municipal government had opened.  

“Emergency commissions were set up, and we had at least two weekly meetings. Then they started Va Cabanyal, and we also had our management meetings. They would call you for everything! We are still in constant communication, and I can tell you that I still have more than two weekly meetings more than two years later. I have discussions with the Local Police, with the National Police and with the head of Public Works to monitor the works. You can see that we are fundamental actors in the neighbourhood. Everyone counts on us, and they consult us a lot. We also have a lot of direct communication and can participate in many things. It’s great, but it requires a tremendous amount of work.” (Interview 43)

He explains that ACIPMAR had also worked for many years to have a ‘normal’ neighbourhood with appropriate services, and he mentions explicitly cleaning as a critical element that the neighbourhood lacked. Interestingly, he justifies that the association never expressed a clear position regarding the extension of Blasco Ibañez Avenue because many of its members supported the PEPRI. Thus it was not discussed between them. Still, they barely had a couple of meetings with Rita’s government despite their non-confrontational position towards the PEPRI, and these were just for playing to the gallery. In turn, he complains that El Cabanyal had been excluded from all the mega events and projects and was left secluded within the ongoing conflict. In other words, he implied that the neighbourhood could have benefitted from Rita’s entrepreneurial urban strategies but was excluded. However, this institutional relation changed 180º with Ribó’s administration becoming more direct and horizontal.

“the neighbourhood was not embracing tourism, embracing events, embracing anything. It was enclosed within its struggle and had not moved forward. ACIPMAR was not officially positioned regarding the extension either. Why? Because within the same association, there were people in favour and people who were against it. So, it has been a bit of a taboo subject within the association [...] and when there was a change of government, it was possible to start working more directly with the administration. They paid more attention to us, even too much attention! I can tell you that the first year, when I was with Emiliano, the meetings with the City Council were sporadic, one every

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69 He also remarks how demanding it was, requiring a lot of time and work on their side.  
70 Cleaning as we will see later was repeated often by many interviewees and will be used as means to control the Zona Cero.
three months, with the Department of Commerce, were non-existent, and when you went there. They didn't offer you anything, and they didn't get to anything, just politicking. And then, the first year of them being in office, I had more than 89 meetings. This was because they carried citizen participation as their flag.” (Interview 43)

The importance of El Cabanyal for the new municipal government became apparent when one of the first measures announced under Ribó’s mandate was the immediate suspension of the PEPRI. A couple of weeks after being elected, Ribó’s councillors and the leading associations of El Cabanyal, Salvem and the AAVV had a meeting. Other collectives and associations were not in that meeting, and whether they were not invited or declined the invitation was never clear to me. In this meeting, Jordi Peris, then city council spokesperson and Councillor for Citizen Participation, proudly announced that a new form of local governance had begun. One that “involves opening a new political time and a way of relating the City Council with the neighbourhood and starting the process of planning, rehabilitation and work along two lines, one comprehensive so that the initiatives have an impact on the reality of Cabanyal and the other of a participatory nature with the neighbours” (Serra 2015).

Ribó officially repealed the PEPRI during an extraordinary Executive Council meeting on the 27th of July, with the support of all parties except the PP (Vázquez 2015). The Regional Government approved a temporary planning document. At the same time, the municipality worked on developing a new local plan that responded to the urban, distinctive economic, and architectural needs of El Cabanyal as a traditional seaside neighbourhood and historic district. To signify how important Salvem and the AAVV were for the new government and their new position of power in the future regeneration of El Cabanyal, anti-PEPRI activist and former AAVV spokesperson, local architect Vicent Gallard was appointed new manager of Cabanyal 2010 (La Vanguardia 2015c).

“We wanted the management not to be aseptic, pure and merely urban, but to be fully connected with the neighbourhood and with the demands of its neighbours, and there’s no one else better to be in charge than someone who comes from the struggle for the urban regeneration of Cabanyal” (La Vanguardia, 2015)

71 Jordi Peris belonged to València en Comú and was part of Ribó’s government as executive member for Participation.
72 The Generalitat Valenciana as regional government is the ultimate responsible for urban plans and their approval in Valencia.
73 Later renamed Plan Cabanyal.
Another symbol of the new hegemonic status of these collectives was the opening of spaces of power in El Cabanyal that relevant members of Salvem and the AAVV occupied. In the words of the then Councilor for Urban Planning, Vicent Sarriá from PSPV, Gallard was “one of the people who has worked and fought the most to usher in this new stage” (La Vanguardia 2015c) in El Cabanyal and added that his professional experience was the most suitable for the “urbanizing and rehabilitating mission” in El Cabanyal and the engagement with its neighbours. Gallard’s appointment was a reward to those collectives who had fought and saved the neighbourhood from its destruction and consequently had the right to decide its future. This move laid out a new hegemonic vision of El Cabanyal’s future that was starting to be unfolded by the dominant narratives of the coalition government and the leading collectives of El Cabanyal. However, the change of government was not experienced in the same way by neighbours belonging to other collectives. In several events I attended, it was clear that members of alternative collectives, such as Espai Veïnal, did not see Gallart as someone who would look after everyone’s interest and that in the short time, he had been in charge, his announcements in the press targeted other minority collectives who were occupying properties belonging to Plan Cabanyal.

6.2.2 The new others

Conversely to how members of these mainstream associations felt about Ribó’s new government and how they welcomed their initiatives, the messages and the narratives associated with them were interpreted in a very different way by other neighbours, mainly those related to alternative movements within Espai Veïnal such as Ateneu Llibertari or the Squatter movement, the okupas movement. Given my interest in understanding the different narratives around the future of El Cabanyal as the impacts of the change of local government began to unfold, I was determined to understand the aspirations, desires and needs of these alternative and minoritised collectives and how their perceived and lived identities shifted. An interesting process that I was able to observe was how Salvem transitioned from being outcasted by the previous government, treated as radical others, and forming alliances with the squatters, to now being in opposite position to non-mainstream and minoritised groups regarding what type of regeneration should be who had the right to be part of the future of El Cabanyal. It was clear that mainstream groups were no longer contesting the establish order and were quite active in deciding on the ‘partition of the sensible’. At the same time, the squatters not only would keep the same position they had during the struggle against the PEPRI, but they expanded their claims, multiplied their actions, and formed alliances with other minoritised

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74 Squatters are called Okupas in Spanish. They have been in the neighbourhood since the early 2000s, and are aligned with Anarchism and Libertarianism.
groups such as the Romanian and Spanish Roma. During the new government post Rita, a multitude of groups and collectives flourished, with different interests and purposes, but all with a more social interest. Again, none of these collectives were homogeneous and some people would actually be involved in more than one at a time. This reflects how positions and identities are fluid, malleable and are contingent to their alignment with the established order.

Mainstream movements were formed by Salvem, the AAVV and those of Si Volem. Alternative movements shared a common goal of show divided into two types. On one side there were autonomous or self-managed groups with a political agenda, under the umbrella of Espai Veïnal, and then there were socially driven collectives that shared a common space called La Co.lectiva.

Nonmainstream movements have been categorised in two

- Self Managed and autonomous movements with a political motivation, formed by Espai Veïnal, CSOA Escoleta, Samaruc, CSOA La Fusteria, Radio Malva, Cabanyal Horta and Cabanyal Z

- Self Managed collectives with a social purpose, all within La Co.lectiva
  Brufol, Cabanyal Reviu, Millorem, Espai Disat, Ambit, Cos
One of the main issues identified in the previous chapter was the exclusion of dissenting voices and the negation of their fundamental rights as citizens of Valencia. Espai Veinal and Millorem were the Alternative collectives more vocal against the gentrification process and new dynamics of exclusion taking place in El Cabanya. They claimed that the voices of those who had become the new ochlos were now being excluded from the neighbourhood that El Cabanyal would become. Once Salvem moved from ‘resistance to regeneration’ (Levante-EMV, 03/09/2015) as the new hegemony, they did not question what type of regeneration would come and who would be left out. While some of their members would be more open to other minority groups, Salvem, as a collective organisation, did not take a stance against the exclusion the new ochlos from the regeneration process nor were concerned about its impacts. In line with this, a member of Espai Veinal (who was also part of

**Figure 6.4.** Location map of social movements in the building of La Col.lectiva. Source: Author.
another collective within La Col·lectiva), mentions how their priorities were opposite to those of Salvem because in their words:

I would actually like to attend people’s needs first, and then the facades. Of course, I would like to rehabilitate the neighbourhood, but first we have to been all served. When we have all the services we need, when we all have suitable homes where we feel comfortable and safe […] I am aware of all the sensitivities, but we need to make sure we ensure quality of life here for everyone to live better. (Interview 9)

On the contrary, along the immediate physical regeneration of the neighbourhood and its revalorization, they demanded measures that would eventually lead to the displacement of these people, including police intervention to address the occupation of houses, the illegal plugging into the electric networks, or the metal scrapping activities. Their demands resulted in stigmatising and racism towards the Spanish Roma ‘Gitanos’, the Romanian Roma ‘Rumanos’ or the Squatters, as we see from the following quotes.

“Well, it’s about permissiveness. Let's see, the scrap is being worked in the middle of the street as if it were the most legal thing in the world. That drugs are still being sold in the middle of the street calmly. That cannot be allowed. No neighbourhood in Valencia would allow that. And here, the police pass by and look the other way.” (Interview 18)

“Everyone has the right to decent housing. Is it necessary for everyone to be here? Because they are here and have no roots here. It can be resolved here and in other places.” (Interview 8)

“We call them squatters with a K. One thing is the squatters, who need housing, and another is the people occupying just to have a place to have their parties. And that, for me, is the first thing they had to get rid of in the neighbourhood because they do not need housing, and that house can be rehabilitated for families in need […]they are using it, initially to do social work, but that social work has turned into parties from Thursday to Sunday.” (Interview 10)

“Don’t you realize that these gentlemen are squatters, but they do not live here? Some do not live here. Of course, they live in Campolivar but come here to party. Some

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75 Emphasising they are ocupas with K is the way of distinguishing squatting as a political statement from squatting as a need.
76 Campolivar is high-class suburban neighbourhood in the metropolitan area of Valencia.
others do live here. That is, the house may be occupied by two or three, who live there, but 25 others who live outside come.” (Interview 32)

“Now there are the illegal squatters, the daddy's boys, who have entered the flats and set up a ruckus from Friday night to Sunday, so the neighbours can't rest”. (Interview 36)

“Another crucial issue in terms of coexistence, of course, is the issue of squatters. You must take a stand, and we distinguish between what would be an occupation associated with the day-to-day life of families who would not have a housing alternative, and we separate it from ideological squatters. We are aware that we cannot stop acting. The police cannot stop responding every time a door is knocked down.” (Interview 23)

This narrative against the occupation of houses and the Squatters and Romanian Roma families was dominant narrative also of local media outlets – both progressive and conservative – and elected councillors, defining El Cabanyal as an occupied neighbourhood (Figure 6.8), highlighting how squatters, Roma families and even university students were squatting in over 100 houses, publicly owned by the municipality (Figures. 6.5, 6.6 and 6.9). These numbers were confirmed to me by public officers who had precise information of the public properties occupied and the type of occupation, distinguishing between Okupas, Roma families with children, Roma people. They also had information on private owned occupied houses (Figure 6.7). Hegemonic discourse by those who had dominant positions linked the Okupas and Roma minorities to not only to the dereliction of the neighbourhood, but blamed for the lack of renovation, identified them and labelled them as obstacles for the regeneration of El Cabanyal.

Figure 6.5. Newspaper article linking delay in regeneration to an increase in occupations (above)
Source: Levante EMV (05/09/2017).
Figure 6.6. Newspaper article reflecting local councillor wants to end squatting but still give Roma families alternatives. Source: Levante (16/12/2015).

Figure 6.7. Map showing information of occupied houses. Source: Plan Cabanyal 2016.
Figure 6.8. Newspaper article defining El Cabanyal as a “squatted” neighbourhood. Source: Levante EMV (06/03/2016).

Las denuncias de casas con okupas se duplican este año en el Cabanyal

La Policía Local refuerza las diligencias para pedir los desalojos a los juzgados mientras crece este fenómeno en las propiedades privadas

Figure 6.9. Newspaper article claiming that reports to police on squatters has doubled, while showing a picture of Romanian Roma people. Source: Las Provincias (20/05/2016).
While they had articulated strategic coalitions with Salvem to defend El Cabanyal from the PEPRI, the Squatter movement felt that Salvem and the AAVV were now persecuting the occupation of empty houses and criminalising poverty. Along the same line, Millorem also complained about implicit racism in the new political stances of these associations.

The new political order changed the rules of the game and the demands of different actors and opened spaces where their identities and priorities could be reconfigured. The priorities of other groups of residents were diverging into different and almost opposite paths. The needs of a squatter from Espai Veïnal differed from a Rumanian Roma neighbour, a Spanish Roma neighbour, someone from Salvem, the AAVV, or long-term neighbours of the Zona Cero. More mainstream groups of residents felt that firstly, the urgent needs of the neighbourhood versed around increasing security and cleaning services. Secondly that priority actions should be directed towards setting the basis for the material renovation of houses and the economic reactivation of El Cabanyal by enabling the flourishing of local business and economic activities.

Espai Veïnal and aligned groups disagreed. Many dissented not only on what those urgent measures were but, more importantly, they questioned who would be mainly directly affected by them, how they proposed to be implemented and the motives behind their implementation. During individual interviews and publicly in events and assemblies I attended, or through their manifests, these groups generally expressed a lack of trust in the newly elected government. Nonetheless, their mistrust was not directed particularly against them but emerged from their ideological standpoint towards all existing institutions within the post-political arrangement. During an interview with a local activist adhered to Espai Veïnal, he spoke about how their relationship with the administration how he felt after one of Ribó’s first declarations to a left-wing progressive local media outlet when elected.

I see it with scepticism because, in some way, our relationship or my relationship with the administration is always a bit distant. So first, it is true that I do have many prejudices. But on the other hand, because of the discourses that affect the neighbourhood, I am not going to discuss different things but those that affect the neighbourhood precisely. I saw them. It is also true that now there is a window of opportunity. We cannot deny this administration is closer to us in some ways. But on the other hand, the first thing Joan Ribó said in an interview with La veu del País Valencià clearly states that they cannot let El Cabanyal turn into a ghetto and that many people

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77 These certainly would change depending on the individual circumstances of different people and their individual trajectories.
living here will have to leave. They should be redistributed and so on. Of course, that makes you face it with a lot of scepticism (Interview 3)

Another member of Espai Veïnal, despite being closer to Ribó’s administration than Rita’s, described feeling similar mistrust towards the new local government. However, he recognised that some of them would consider even sitting together with them to discuss what they thought were the priority needs of the neighbourhood and what the main strategic lines the regeneration should follow. Nonetheless, within the democratic arena, institutions are necessary, and they need to engage with them at some level if, as a movement, they want to move from the realm of claims and protests to real alternatives that can materialise in the new order (Mouffe 2005; 2014). He admits they are open to discussing their ideas and proposals with the new government. Still, they must allow for an agonistic expression of conflict, which would enable all neighbours to have the freedom of choosing between alternatives that are real.

“I see the change of government with scepticism. Relationships have indeed changed a lot, and things that I did not consider before, such as sitting down and discussing our proposals with the municipal government, I think now could be a good opportunity. Because it represents a good opportunity to show ourselves as dialogue partners, ready to listen, I don't want to be against everything always, I'd rather prefer to be productive and positive as well, and with PP that was impossible. But on the other hand, you see that they are all yes, yes, all good words, but in practice[...]Then you witness some pretty dodgy discourses. For example, in El Mundo, Ribó also came out saying that living for free in Cabanyal was over, and I think it is a threat.” (Interview 17)

The reality for the Roma minority groups was, however, very different. For one, the structural poverty and exclusion they were subject to was not something they had chosen and not a political stance. Occupying houses for them was not a way of fighting gentrification or ensuring houses were not abandoned or empty, but a basic need. On the other hand, their relationship with authorities differed, as they did not want to be ‘outside’ the normal democratic channels and their institutions. From the words, oh, interviewee 22 below, we can see how they were clear about their need to partner with the new administration. Their situation doesn’t allow them not to have that relationship because they need the administration if they want to address their problems. While he respects the position of Espai Veïnal, for him, the reality of the Roma people implies the need to operate within a larger institutional system to improve that reality and achieve better outcomes.

“You can have your own thoughts and way of seeing life, but you'll only reach four ‘hobos’ because, in a meeting where four old folks gather [...] that doesn't work for me.
I need someone who can solve problems in the administration, the people I don't want to meet, and maybe I'm not compatible with them either, but I have no choice but to meet with them. Indeed, we won't have the same point of view on administration. We'll be at odds, but that's what negotiations are about, sitting down with those kinds of people. Who can solve the problems? Who holds the power? So, you want your own government? You don't rule over the city of Valencia. You're in their hands, and it's with them that you must negotiate. You have to fight […] but at least sit down with them, and be aware of their intentions because maybe you can achieve much more by sitting at a negotiating table…I'm not compatible with their [squatters] way of acting.” (Interview 22)

The complexity of the situation and the varying perspectives and needs within the new order highlight the challenges of agonistic engagement and inclusion of all those involved and affected by the process of urban change that El Cabanyal was going through.

6.3 El Cabanyal, a normal neighbourhood of Valencia.

During my time in El Cabanyal, one thing that arose more often was a desire to be in a normal neighbourhood. Conversely, everyone proudly highlighted how unique and different El Cabanyal was from the rest of Valencia. It had unique architecture, its traditions, cuisine, and a different lifestyle that resulted in a way of life described as ‘a village’. They would describe the strong proximity relations amongst neighbours in a place where everyone knew each other. But after 20 years, they aspired to be like any other neighbourhood. For most neighbours, that normalcy depended not only on having back the essential services that Rita’s government denied them of for years but on increased cleaning, surveillance and security. For this, they demanded regulations to be enforced and laws to be followed, because according to them, they were not being applied as they were in other neighbourhoods.

“A very simple thing is that municipal regulations are enforced. It makes no sense that municipal ordinances are complied with in all other neighbourhoods in Valencia and not here. [El Cabanyal] is cleaned less, and you have to clean the same. Just ensure ordinances are applied equally”. (Interview 12)

In reaction to what was discussed during the meeting held in July 2015 with Jordi Peris, Salvem and the AAVV stated there was an urgent need to “restore the neighbourhood’s dignity and to attend to the situation of insalubrity of a significant number of houses and dire dirtiness of many streets” (Serra 2015). They raised their perceived lack of security as the second most urgent matter to be
addressed and the need to resolve the issues caused by drug trafficking in the Zona Cero. To address the palpable decay of the neighbourhood, discourses addressing the renewal had a twofold narrative. On the one hand, the main narrative revolved around the physical rehabilitation of the derelict urban fabric and its buildings as the main strategy. The other narrative focused on increasing public services in the area, specifically cleaning and security which many considered the most urgent. In response to claims made by Salvem, the AAVV or ACIPMAR, the first urgent measures agreed upon and implemented earlier on July 2015 were focused on increasing both cleaning and security in the Zona Cero, which had suffered almost two decades of absolute abandonment from Rita Barberà’s government.

6.3.1 New priorities: from resistance and activism to cleaning and police control.

El Cabanyal was the top priority and that cleaning and security were deemed amongst the most urgent issues by the government of Ribó was corroborated by his advisor, Interviewee 23. From July this was also constantly in the media with headlines such us “The Emergency Commission for Cabanyal sets security, coexistence, and social care as priorities” (La Vanguardia 2015a), “Valencia strengthens the night patrol and Neighbourhood Police in Cabanyal” (La Vanguardia 2015b) or “Police and cleaning staff will conduct an emergency sweep of Cabanyal from Tuesday” (Garsán Carlos 2015). What becomes interesting, considering the words of Ribó’s Advisor and looking at these headlines, is that despite mentioning three main areas of urgent need, the main focus is on security and the first one that is addressed is the one that requires police presence.

“When the new government enters City Council [...] the issue of Cabanyal is the priority issue. For many reasons and because of all the background information, the first step is to set up a commission. The delegations and the councillors involved start from a structure of three components, one of which is the issue of social coexistence. Another is the issue of urban recovery in terms of urban planning and heritage. And the third component is the social and economic recovery of the neighbourhood. That commission is set, and all the delegations are involved. In the first one, there’s the Police involved, Social Services and Environmental Services taking care of street cleaning. That is the one that first starts to work in an emergency. The one for Urban Planning has all the procedures a little more deferred. Still, it begins immediately by repealing the previous planning framework and issuing transitional planning regulations to be able to function.” (Interview 23)

Security and cleanliness came up in more than half of the interviews as an issue to be addressed.
While it is true that many interviewees discuss the lack of cleanliness as an ongoing issue or expressed their desire for a clean(er) Cabanyal (Interviewees 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 19, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 36 and 43) and also discuss both existing and perceived security issues that required an increase of police presence (Interviewees 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 18, 19, 23, 25, 27, 28, 31, 36, 43), security and cleanliness were used to increase police presence in the area, thus becoming effective techniques of urban governance to control El Cabanyal. For them, those tools would help neighbours live in El Cabanyal in a normal neighbourhood, like in any other of Valencia and return to the normality they had long been aspiring for.

Figure 6.10. Rubbish bin in Calle Padre Luis Navarro with Empar Guillem, where the Zona Cero starts. This dirtiness was a constant during the months I lived there. Source: Author.
In the same line, the former president of ACIPMAR, Emiliano García, also claimed the political changes that had recently unfolded, together with the first measures announced, were the prelude of “exciting times because at last, there is an institutional willingness to normalise the neighbourhood” (Vázquez 2015). Similarly, another interviewee from a Roma ethnic background (Interviewee 24) highlighted how he felt the new government cared for El Cabanyal and its residents. He goes on to discuss how the new municipal government considers El Cabanyal as part of Valencia, which was not the case with Rita. As a result, he feels its residents are also considered to be Valencianos.

[...] With the old government, no one ever came here to the Zona Cero. No one ever came here to try to talk to us, to find out about the problems in the neighbourhood, or what type of problems families had here. And since the change of government, there is someone from the government who is concerned about us, that understands that El Cabanyal is also Valencia, that people from El Cabanyal are Valencianos, that people who were born in this neighbourhood are Valencianos [...] It seems City Hall has found
out that we actually exist. Well, we can already see the fruits of the change of
government. It seems that they are really interested [...] there is someone who, in this
short time, seems to be taking an interest in us. Before, nobody ever appeared around
here. It was the opposite, saying Rita and Cabanyal were like darkness and light. There
was conflict, and there was confrontation.” (Interview 24)

This reveals the aspirations that many people I spoke to of just being another Valencia
neighbourhood. As such, they just wanted to be treated like any other ‘normal’ neighbourhood. The
desire for a "normal" neighborhood, as expressed by various interviewees, reflected a hope for equal
treatment and consideration in relation to the other neighbourhoods of Valencia and their
residents transition from resistance and activism to a pursuit of a normalized, everyday existence for
the residents of El Cabanyal. In turn, it can be argued that this raised questions of what constitutes a
normal neighbourhood and what it means to different people.

6.3.2  Hope and relief

After nearly two decades of neglect and abandonment, upon repealing the PEPRI, many
interviewees spoke about feeling relief and joy when describing what they experienced with the
change of government. They no longer felt threatened and cast aside by the government but hopeful
and empowered, and many residents shared this. What becomes interesting is that they spoke not
only about feeling relief and hope but also about how important it was for them just to have the
chance to be heard after so many years of being ignored, neglected, and oppressed. The narratives of
these interviewees elucidate how many neighbours of El Cabanyal were experiencing their identity
shifting from being the *ochlos* to being part of the *demos*. And in doing so, the previous taken-for-
granted configuration of the democratic play (Rancière 2001, p.32), established during Rita’s
mandate, where they were not seen, accounted for, or perceived, was being recalibrated.
(Swyngedouw and Wilson 2014, p.12). 79

“At the beginning, it was a lot of happiness, but above all, the joy you experience when
you can talk to the person in front of you when you can tell the City Council — like in
Va Cabanyal, we were able to do —what way you want things to be done, and in what
way you don’t. You are heard, and that is very important. The fact that you tell someone
what you think, what would be good for your neighbourhood, how you think things

79 This staged the construction of new political subjectivities of Salvem and the AAVV for the previous
government “do not count, who do not exist as part of the polis become visible and audible, stage the
count and assert their egalitarian existence.”(Swyngedouw 2017, p.47)
should be from now on, and that the other listens to you and takes note and says good, well, we are going to take that into account. (Interview 13)

This new sentiment was felt by many and was exacerbated by the flourishing of new associations and the intensity of events and activities that were happening almost daily. Indeed, when I arrived in September, I could feel what many interviewees had mentioned, that there was a lot of movement and that the neighbourhood was bustling. One of the events that helped to create this effervescence in El Cabanyal was the opening of La Col·lectiva. A place for “Cultural, educational, and social participation activities open to all individuals who comes to Poblats de la Mar”. The Inauguration event was , attended by members of all movements, including Salvem, Millorem and Espai Veïnal (Figure 6.12)

What I have noticed a lot, after the elections, and even before the elections and later, in May, has been a very, very hopeful movement with a lot of excitement and enthusiasm and a lot of activity suddenly. The opening of La Col·lectiva was an exciting moment. It seemed that everyone was doing a lot of things and with a lot of energy, new things and people from the neighbourhood, or were linked to it, significantly linked to it, or had some attachment. I have noticed that quite a lot. (Interview 4)

Figure 6.12. Inauguration event of La Col·lectiva, attended by members of all movements, including

Salvem, Millorem and Espai Veïnal.
Interestingly, many of them described their high hopes regarding the change of El Cabanyal’s future not from their standpoint but as collective sentiment embraced by most neighbours. These accounts of their feelings and experiences with the shift in local government unveil how members of these groups were starting to generalise their individual experiences, desires, and aspirations for El Cabanyal in a relatively pluralistic manner, and permeating their discourses of what El Cabanyal
should be as the new hegemonic vision. And that vision, as we have seen in the previous section, was often framed as El Cabanyal being a normal neighbourhood like any other in Valencia. Indeed, the discourses revolving around the right to be treated like any other normal neighbourhood were a constant throughout my time in El Cabanyal, both in many interviews, statements, assemblies, meetings and news.

“What’s clear is that there was a sense of relief, joy or ease, respite and a tremendous rest. Nevertheless, it is like when you know that there’s still another step to be taken, and you say wow, we have already won this, but let’s see now what happens. On the one hand, a lot of rest and, on the other hand, considerable uncertainty. Until now, it was the uncertainty of feeling threatened by losing your roof. Now it was the uncertainty of feeling threatened that things may not be done as each considered they had to be done. (Interview 13)

This new order was based first on the immediate reparation of the rights they had been deprived of during so many years and second, that things should be done how they considered fair and appropriate, to which they claimed there were no alternatives for El Cabanyal. In a sense, many felt they had the right to decide El Cabanyal’s future regeneration as they had invested years and years of their life fighting for it and had finally saved it.

6.3.3 Impatience and frustration

During my fieldwork, it became clear that many of the long-term neighbours I met or interviewed, who were aligned to Salvem and the AAVVs, were starting to get worried about what they perceived as both a lack of action and direction. Though they knew their houses would not going to be demolished and that they would not have to face displacement or be left homeless, time passed, and many felt no security concerning El Cabanyal’s future and were anxious to see the changes they had longed for so many years. As narrated by long-term residents and local activists Interviewee 10 and 25, people soon started to get anxious and impatient as they had expected the new municipal government to act straight after the elections, in line with their priorities. Priorities that again revolved around receiving essential services like any other ‘normal’ neighbourhood.

“People barely notice the change [not] in the way they probably should. I think things are being done [...] not in a way that I would say what an evident change! They would need to do something very quickly for it to really show. And why does it have to show? Well, because the issue has been neglected too long for so many years.” (Interview 25)
“I see that people perhaps had too high expectations and are now a bit disillusioned [...] They are a bit critical [...] I try to hold them back a bit in the sense that, what has been destroyed in 24 years cannot be fixed in one.” (Interview 10)

Many long-term neighbours shared such feeling of despair, like Interviewee 19. This indicated that many expected the new government to fulfil their obligation to redress the grievances they had suffered for so long. As argued in the previous section, with the change of government, many neighbours experience a reidentification of their pre-assigned roles and start enacting a new political subject on the premises of the equality owed to them. What was initially met with high hopes was soon seen as a complete lack of action or direction. Many expressed their discontent that though not even a year had passed since the municipal government had changed, the material and spatial transformation they expected to see was not visible at all and that the destruction, abandonment, and economic disinvestment were still embedded in El Cabanyal’s urban fabric. Such transformation for them started with increasing cleaning services and police security and renovating the derelict houses they owned. This focus on the aesthetics of El Cabanyal pointed at what many considered the source and active agents of the existing decay with the connivance of authorities.

“We had invested all our hopes in the new government, and a year has passed, and we feel they are letting us down. Yes, they withdrew the PEPRI, and we must thank them. At least we know our houses will not be taken away from us or demolished. We know we will be able to keep our homes, but they have done nothing to avoid dereliction and decay. I would say there is the same, well not even the same, there is even more inaction and permissiveness from the Police than ever before. Things lately have become worse [...] and people are fuming [...] Of course, the previous municipal government punished us, but we cannot tolerate the new one continuing to do the same. We thought that from one day to another, this would be night and day“ (Interview 19)

Another long-term resident who had lived in the Zona Cero for what she claimed was all her life expressed the same frustration regarding their current situation and living conditions. According to her own lived experience, she perceived nothing had changed with the new government and felt as neglected as they had with the previous administration. In other words, many long-term residents of the area saw themselves as victims of both administrations since their lives had been negatively affected by both the direct actions of the previous municipal government and what they perceived as inaction of the new one. There was a mismatch between their given place and their subjective place in the symbolic order.
“With Rita, it was disastrous, but with this one, well, less oppression, but the same dog with a different collar. It gives me the feeling that, at this point, they haven't done anything. I don't see that they have done anything. Maybe on paper, they have. Initially, it was said that they had removed a certain number of families from the streets. How? As far as I know, those families are still there.” (Interview 18)

According to them, the general abandonment of the neighbourhood was a direct consequence of their struggle to save El Cabanyal. Indeed, many neighbours felt that the Zona Cero, which had endured a significant estate of dereliction for several years, was the direct spatial result of years of resistance against the PEPRI. It should have been addressed immediately, together with the conflicts derived from what they considered a complicated coexistence with other minority groups in the area. They felt that the new administration was not doing enough to improve their living conditions which had been severely undermined all these years.

### 6.3.4 Between Gentrification and Gettohisation.

When I arrived in El Cabanyal in September 2015, within barely a couple of months of the election of a left-wing progressive council, El Cabanyal’s social, economic, and urban landscapes had started to transform rapidly. Throughout 2016 and 2018, the transformation was evident in most areas except the Zona Cero, due to the estate of dereliction and abandonment of a significant number of buildings, and the number of Roma families living in substandard housing. The pace of change in the area deeply contrasted with the inactivity and abandonment that Rita Barberà’s government had subdued El Cabanyal during the previous 18 years. The rapid advancement of new economic activities mainly related to the hospitality sector, such as new cafes, restaurants, and bars, often replacing old or abandoned ones, together with the flourishing of sale ads in the windows of real estate offices and websites such as Idealista, started changing the landscape of El Cabanyal. This was probably a preview of what El Cabanyal’s future was heading towards. Soon the old banners against the PEPRI described in Chapter 5 were being replaced by ‘for sale’. As an anecdote, one morning I left my house I realised the ground floor was for sale.

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80 This rapid change was inversely reflected in the stagnation of the development of a new plan for El Cabanyal. The new local plan for El Cabanyal, known as PEC (Plan Especial d’El Cabanyal) has been drafted and recently approved just before the local elections of May officially.
Figure 6.14. Picture of my house with the ‘for sale’ sign on the ground floor. Source: Author.

Figure 6.15. Picture of a flyer I found in my house looking for properties to buy or rent. Source: Author.
Clearly El Cabanyal had become a place that attracted investment, and investors and real estate agencies were targeting individual homeowners leaving flyers such as figures 6.14 and 6.15 below. The flyers are looking for homeowners who want to sale or rent their homes. Figure 6.15 shows also a catalogue showcasing renovated homes from Cabanyal Viu, a real estate agency and developer that open in December 2015, who had been criticised for appropriating symbols and discourses from El Cabanyal, when had not collective interest and was just for-profit business. Throughout the 2016 the neighbourhood was busting with openings of cultural spaces and new ‘gastro’ bars, construction sites, and for sale banners (Figure 6.16 and 6.21), in such a way that it seemed I could not get track of all of them. During this time, the change of the municipal government clearly resulted in an increase of price per sqm of properties in El Cabanyal, outpacing the trends in Valencia and that of El Grau and Malvarrosa, an increase in the number of properties sold in El Cabanyal (Figure 6.17), but also in the number of foreigners, mainly Europeans buying properties in El Cabanyal. The Chart in Figure 6.18 shows a significant increase of properties bought both by Spanish nationals and foreigners in 2015. These trends continued After I left El Cabanyal. Every time I went back, there were new bars, more tourists, foreigners, freshly renovated homes and repaved streets all over the neighbourhood, except for the Zona Cero that was still somehow resisting, although not for long. If Squatters and Roma people were linked to discourses of ghettoization, as for sale-ads were replacing the old banners of Salvem, this effervescency of change was linked to discourses revitalization, and successful regeneration, described as booming, and the new Cabanyal, and framing the purchases of properties by people not from Spain as a positive sign.

Figure 6.16. Real estate flyers found around El Cabanyal appropriating the image of the neighbourhood. Source: Author.
Figure 6.17. Pictures of for sale banners and posters in different locations around El Cabanyal. Source: Author.
Figure 6.18. Chart showing increase in property prices euros/sqm in the neighbourhoods of the Maritime district and Valencia.

Figure 6.19. Chart showing increase in overall properties bought by foreigners and Spanish nationals in El Cabanyal from 2013 to the third trimester of 2016. Source: Author based on data from Colegio Notarial de Valencia.
Figure 6.20. Newspaper headlines on foreigners purchasing properties in El Cabanyal. Source: El País (11/04/2017), Las Provincias (23/05/2016) and Levante-EMV (29/04/2017)

Figure 6.21. Façade showing an old Salvem banner and a ‘for sale’ banner together. Source: Author.
The tensions between the threat of gentrification and the fear of ghettoisation were a constant friction between mainstream collectives such as Salvem and the AAVV and minoritized groups like Espai Veïnal and Millorem. The Zona Cero was not an easy place to live. One of the neighbours I interviewed left their house and rented a flat outside El Cabanyal, since he considered the situation not appropriate for his two young children, who were exposed according to him to drug dealing, piles of dirt, noise, and fights. Other neighbours speak about feeling unsafe walking on their own, or worried about their teenage daughters. Others complained about piles of garbage in the streets, and not being able to open the doors of their homes during the summer because it was full of rats. For a year I lived almost in the Zona Cero, just a few meters away from it, and walked around daily. I did not feel like them, but my situation was very different, I knew my situation was not permanent, sooner or later I would leave, and I had not endured all these things for 17 years, on a daily basis. It is true that the first time I saw the Zona Cero, it had an impact. I had never seen such dereliction in Valencia in my entire life. It seemed surreal, as if it was a post-conflict area, a no-go zone, suspended in time. But as interviewee 4 argues below, after May 2015, they all knew it was a matter of time until the situation improved, and it would no longer be considered or perceived as a ghetto. In other words, many felt gentrification was just not a matter of if, but rather when and how.

“I have seen it in other places. Gentrification will be the first problem. Maybe they don't see it yet. Many of them [Salvem] only talk about the danger of becoming a ghetto, or that it is already a ghetto, that we don't want it to be a ghetto[...], that was Barberá’s plan. But I believe that threat will disappear pretty quickly. I think gentrification will be the next problem. It's crystal clear to me that they will eat us alive if we don't wake up and try to resist.” (Interview 4)
Espai Veïnal claimed that gentrification had already started in El Cabanyal and that it was visible and tangible. They clearly positioned themselves against it, as they believed it posed a significant displacement threat not only to them but to other marginalised groups, including the Roma people and those from more vulnerable backgrounds. In December 2015, they issued a 30-page publication called “From extension to gentrification” (Figure 6.26) informing against the processes that they were starting to witness and suffer. Their fight against what they consider the elitization of El Cabanyal had a performative and visual component that contrasted with the for-sale ads and the new landscape of gastro bars and tourists (Figures 6.23, 6.24, and 6.25). Besides the numerous activities to raise awareness on certain issues related to evictions and the fines to vulnerable neighbours, and reporting harassment by the police or the authorities, they populated El Cabanyal with banners and stickers to visualise their resistance against gentrification. These stickers appropriated a symbol of El Cabanyal’s identity and heritage, the image of a traditional tile of the typical houses of the neighbourhood, combined with slogans such as “Renovation does not imply evicting people from their homes”, and their anti-gentrification stickers were demanding “A neighbourhood for neighbours, not for tourists”, “Their regeneration is your gentrification”, “A neighbourhood for people, not for markets” (Figure 6.28). Another performative act they organised was the so-called ‘Gentrificatour’ (Figure 6.27) to show the more visible and tabible effects that were happening at the time. The walk started in the CSOA L’Escola d’El Cabanyal which they already knew would close soon, since the owners had sold the building. In July 2017, I assisted the opening of the Gastro Space that replaced it ‘Mar d’Amura’ (Figure 6.23).

Figure 6.23. Opening of Mar d’Amura in March 2017, where the CSOA Escola d’El Cabanyal used to be. Source: Author
“the Marina Auxiliante, they have turned it into clubs, places that hold considerable industrial heritage. Casa dels bous being a pub seems an aberration to me. Have we lost our minds? Even the La Fabrیca de Hielo itself has turned into some kind of cultural container with pretensions, and it's causing a lot of nuisances among the neighbours in the area. Because, of course, the type of people who go there, they fit in very well. Dancing Lindy Hop or listening to jazz, all of that makes us all feel very bohemian and cultured and such. But then, of course, you go there to have a few beers and end up peeing on the neighbour’s door. On one hand, you have El Clot, where there are people who can't afford to have three meals a day, and there are children who can't go to school because they can't afford school material. And then, of course, right next to it, you have a bunch of cool and attractive people.

Figure 6.24. People in Fabrica de Hielo. Source: La Fabrica de Hielo.

The quote from Interviewee 4 presents a poignant critique of the transformation that the neighbourhood was starting to experience. The repurposing of historically significant spaces and industrial heritage, such as Marina Auxiliante or the Fabrica de Hielo, into cultural venues or trendy clubs was one of the earlier tangible effects if the regeneration. But this critique goes beyond the physical changes in the area and questions how the conflicting presence of affluent and culturally engaged individuals from outside El Cabanyal is when juxtaposed with the daily struggles of the local residents of the nearby El Clot to meet their basic needs. These concerns regarding the appropriation of historically significant buildings resonates with the process discussed in section 5.4.2 of the
previous chapter. Previously, Rita had acquired these spaces as symbols of El Cabanyal's heritage, like Casa del Bous and other historical buildings, to showcase her power and dominance in the neighbourhood. However, now it was the private sector that had taken over these spaces for commercial purposes. Similarly, when a house was painted with stripes or walled up by Salvem and other neighbours, it symbolized the disappearance of the neighbourhood and the displacement of many residents. Now, when the facades of these homes were being painted and renovated, Salvem saw it as a sign of neighbourhood regeneration, while squatters and other collectives viewed it as the beginning of gentrification and their eventual displacement.

Figure 6.25. Poster of an acoustic concert in La Fabrica de Hielo. Source: La Fabrica de Hielo.
Figure 6.26. Publication on gentrification in El Cabanyal by Espai Veinal. Source: Author.

Figure 6.27. Map of the Gentrificatour event highlighting key places. Source: Author.
Figure 6.28. Pictures of the different banners displayed across El Cabanyal by Espai Veïnal. Source: Author.
6.4 Narratives of dissensus

Upon arriving in El Cabanyal in September 2015, it soon became clear that the neighbourhood at the time presented a very complex scenario produced by an amalgam of squatters, Romanian and Spanish Roma groups, long-term residents, neighbours who supported the plan and neighbours who fought against it from Salvem or the AAVV. This diversity of interests coexisted in a fragile equilibrium, reclaiming a neighbourhood that was lived and perceived in almost opposite ways.

During my time in the neighbourhood, these diverse collectives were all involved in fierce debate on the future renewal of the neighbourhood. The main discourses revolved, on the one hand, around the legitimacy of participating and deciding on El Cabanyal’s future and, on the other, around the dangers of gentrification versus the need for urban regeneration. The critical questions were what kind of regeneration was coming, who it was for, who would be included, and who would be excluded. This section will explore the Va Cabanyal process and how it unveiled the new hegemonic order’s complexities to a neighbourhood that had been under siege for over seventeen years.

6.4.1 Va Cabanyal

In Chapter 5, I have discussed the impacts of the entrepreneurial urban development carried out by PP in both city and regional governments for over two decades, which left the municipal funds in a precarious state.\textsuperscript{81} Ribó’s administration was aware of this reality, having publicly denounced it for years, particularly during the lead-up to the elections. Their position was to consolidate finances and negotiate existing debts without compromising their progressive agenda. However, despite the urgent need for funding, there was insufficient money available for El Cabanyal to tackle its urgent social, spatial, and economic regeneration needs. To address this issue and be aware of how impatient neighbours were, the administration applied to the EU fund ‘Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies 2014-2020’ (ISUD\textsuperscript{82}). If successful, this would provide access to 30 million euros to start the long-awaited urban renewal of El Cabanyal. According to Jordi Peris, the city of Valencia was in debt to the neighbourhood “after 17 years of systematic and intentional neglect from PP in the neighbourhood”, and their priority was to “enable the regeneration and reconstruction of El Cabanyal, to allow people to live under normal conditions and normal quality of life, just like any other neighbourhood has”. (Valenciaplaza, 23/09/2015)

\textsuperscript{81} The debt left by Rita Barberà’s administration amounted to 711.5 million € when Ribó arrived, and his administration managed to reduce it to 469 million € by mid 2018, a 34.41%.
\textsuperscript{82} EDUSI is the acronym of this EU fund in Spanish and will be referred to hereinafter as Va Cabanyal
In July 2015, the municipal government initiated a public tender procedure to select a multi-disciplinary team to develop the ISUDS for Cabanyal-Canyamelar-Cap de Franca. The timeframe for the project was very tight, with a deadline before the end of 2015 and the submission due by January 2016. The process, led by Peris, was undermined by doubt and scepticism. The initial call for proposals only provided ten days for submission, which architects and planners criticized as a disguised closed invitation to tender. Due to public outcry and a desire to avoid any similarities with Rita’s administration, the deadline was extended by another 14 days. One member of the eventual winning team, Va Cabanyal, also noticed the haste with which decisions were made, which cast doubt on the legitimacy of the process.

“The day our team met to discuss if we were going to work on a proposal, we came across someone who was already going to submit theirs. We thought that the procurement was a negotiated procedure. Some people had already finished their proposal when we were just discussing ours! […] it was done rushedly, published in July in an ugly way, using something that has a hideous name but is actually a competition. They probably didn't like the proposals submitted, so they extended 10 days to 14 and started advertising it.” (Interview 20)

The key requirement of the call was implementing a well-structured participative approach in developing and deploying the strategy. This approach involved collaborative elaboration of the document with residents, social, economic, and institutional stakeholders, and other relevant organizations. A comprehensive list of the main stakeholders, including civic organizations (public and private), institutions, local associations, and others that had been consulted and involved in the development of the strategy, had to be included. Additionally, the involvement and capacity of each actor had to be detailed, along with how the final documents and workshop results would be shared and consulted among them. The main objective was to co-develop a sustainable urban development plan with residents and stakeholders, incorporating a shared or agreed vision decided by all participants. However, it seemed that residents of El Cabanyal, despite their active resistance against the PEPRI for 17 years, were not accustomed to being consulted or involved in decision-making related to their neighbourhood in such an intense manner, which could have its risks (Interviewee 20).

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84 as discussed in the previous chapter.
“as a result of the transitory norm, Tato was very crossed because everything had gone very fast, and they had made decisions without consulting anyone. He said that after 17 years of starving, they suddenly fed us an entire cow. After not eating for so long. Either you die or someone else eats it. Give me a small bite, a broth, a soup!” (Interview 20)

Figure 6.29. Picture of Va Cabanyal being advertised in local buses. Source: Author.

6.4.2 The new hegemonic order

My fieldwork in El Cabanyal began with the Va Cabanyal process, specifically with my attendance at the presentation of the selected proposal on the 17th of September 2015. After that, I went to as many activities, workshops, and meetings related to Va Cabanyal as possible. The winning Va Cabanyal strategy was unveiled to neighbours and main stakeholders at Ateneu Maritim on Calle de la Reina. The event had been widely advertised throughout the neighbourhood and in the city. Expectations were high after more than seventeen years of exclusion and neglect, of being antagonised by the authorities. Over 200 people attended, including members of Salvem, the AAVV, and well-known local politicians. This event inaugurated a new order of the sensible, and according

85 In return, I helped the Va Cabanyal teams in a different ways.
to Jordi Peris, it symbolized the new relationship between the city administration and the neighbourhood and its neighbours.

The aim of the strategy was twofold. The main one was to obtain financing from the EU to start working on the area's urban renewal, for which they had to define, prioritise, and agree on the entire strategy. The second aim was to initiate a process beyond this European call that would be the basis of a new form of urban governance, in which neighbours would be not only objects but also active agents in the regeneration of El Cabanyal. The ambition then was that this new order of urban governance would be extended beyond El Cabanyal and scaled up to the rest of the city. (Peris 2015).

The Va Cabanyal process took place from October to December 2015 through a series of collective Workshops in Teatre el Musical, meetings with steering groups formed by people who volunteered for this, and individual targeted meetings with relevant collectives and associations in the neighbourhood.

Figure 6.30. Hand sketch made by the Va Cabanyal team officers explaining the initiative's process and purpose during a meeting with the steering group. Source: Author.
Figure 6.31. Participatory actor mapping exercise with the steering group members organised by the Va Cabanyal team officers. Source: Author.
Figure 6.32. Comprehensive final actor map published in the EDUSI document based on the actop mapping workshop above. Source: EDUSI.
Va Cabanyal was presented as the opportunity for neighbours to decide on the long-term vision for the neighbourhood they wanted. It was described as the beginning of a process that would bind together urban renewal and citizen participation, aligning the new government's top-down political agenda with the district's long-term bottom-up aspiration. The process on paper was open to everyone, based on a participatory methodology that revolved around dialogue and diversity. Still, at a glance, on that day, there was not much inclusion in the hall (field notes 17/09/2015). Roma families, immigrants, or people from the squatter movement, such as Espai Veïnal, did not attend or were not visible to me. Instead, there were identified collectives and stakeholders whose voices were being heard and were leading the conversations, most of them members of Salvem and the AAVV. This lack of diversity and representation was a constant pattern throughout the entire timeline of the strategy and all its related activities and events (Santamarina and Mompó 2021).

We must think of a strategy so that all the neighbours of the neighbourhood are represented, and not just those who, in their own time, can read the flyer and come to the workshops, but we need to get to certain parts of the population, like the Roma population who are in a very depressed situation in the neighbourhood, to participate in the workshops and this process. When we see how many Roma people are here today, there are very few. (Demetrio fieldnotes and excerpt from presentation)
Figure 6.33. Materials prepared for the second Va Cabanyal workshop. Source: Author.

The participatory process in El Cabanyal was a perfect stage where the municipal government could inaugurate their new model of local governance. They had promised a more horizontal decision-making process and believed neighbours wanted this. In principle, it was well received, but once the process started, friction started to appear. When different collectives such as Espai Veïnal, Millorem, or Cabanyal Reviu took interest and got involved in different ways, it became clear that their different needs and aspirations were radically opposed to the interests of many members of Salvem or the AAVV. This led to discourses around the legitimacy of participating in Va Cabanyal. The process raised questions regarding which collectives were identified as active agents of regeneration and who were those that were being excluded and not given the same rights to make decisions.

“I realised how complex it has been and the difficulty brought by the power relations that have now been established. Some feel they have legitimacy over other groups due to the time they've been fighting because they've been there longer. After all, the neighbourhood is what it is thanks to them, and others think they have legitimacy because they bring a dimension that is not being considered. After all, they defend the
rights of other people. I’ve realized how hard it is to seek the common interest in everything”. (Interview 5)

Salvem and their members felt it was their turn to decide on the future renewal of El Cabanyal, a right that pertained to them. As such, they felt they had superior rights over other groups and collectives seen as newcomers or not from El Cabanyal. For the new hegemonic collectives, if El Cabanyal had survived, it was thanks to them and their resistance against the PEPRI. After 17 years of struggle, they were just waiting to get the fruits of that resistance, recovering El Cabanyal from neglect and turning it back into a normal neighbourhood like any other in Valencia. The architects who led the process explained how they had to navigate through uneven power structures to reach as many collectives as possible and include them in the participatory process and the impossibility of finding common ground amongst different collectives.

“Va Cabanyal was flawed from the beginning because everyone was given the same value, and some movements had been created the month before to get some benefit out of Va Cabanyal. Groups were presenting themselves as a force of the neighbours, but what force? They have never done anything to improve or help fix it. They have never been involved in any resistance. And in Va Cabanyal, everyone has equal voices and rights, those ones, and, for example, the AAVV, who has been here fighting always.” (Interview 19)

Va Cabanyal soon opened the question of which citizens had the right to decide, participate and produce the new socio-spatial reconfiguration (Purcell, 2002) of El Cabanyal, becoming one of the most conflicted aspects not just of the process, but of the newly inaugurated hegemonic order. It was a contentious issue that came across frequently throughout the workshops, meetings and multiple interviews the entire time I lived there. Many neighbours who took part in Va Cabanyal were vocal in their concerns about widening participation to everyone and anyone, with some not keen to even have it. Given their history of involvement in the resistance against the PEPRI and their long-term commitment to the neighbourhood, some members of Salvem and the AAVV viewed themselves as having a superior right to participate and decide the future of El Cabanyal, as opposed to those who were considered as newcomers or temporary residents. After all, many people within Salvem and the AAVV felt that El Cabanyal had resisted and existed thanks to the efforts of Salvem, and thus it was their right to decide. This raised concerns about what should be included in the participatory process and who had the right to participate in the decision-making process of spatial production (Mitchell 2003) in El Cabanyal, as a result of the imbalanced power structures within the new hegemonic order.
“It's as if they had the exclusivity of the fight, and it's true that they have done a lot. I suppose without them, the neighbourhood wouldn't exist anymore. But Jordi said something that seemed very, very simple to me. He said this will not take anything away from the work done by Salvem, but the reality was that new groups were forming. And if they were doing so, it meant that they couldn't find their place within the existing ones, like Salvem, and that they needed to understand, but wow! how difficult it is for them.” (Interview 4)

Given their history of involvement in the resistance against the PEPRI and their long-term commitment to the neighbourhood, some members of Salvem and the AAVV viewed themselves as having a superior right to participate and decide the future of El Cabanyal, as opposed to those who were considered as newcomers or temporary residents. After all, many people within Salvem and the AAVV felt that El Cabanyal had resisted and existed thanks to the efforts of Salvem, and thus it was their right to decide. This raised concerns about what aspects of El Cabanyal's regeneration should be included in the participatory process and who had the right to participate in the decision-making process of spatial production (Mitchell, 2003) in El Cabanyal, as a result of the imbalanced power structures within the new hegemonic order.

6.4.3 Participation vs results

In the presentation, one of the prominent topics of discussion was whether an intense and open participatory approach was necessary. Neighbours, like Emilio, a spokesperson for Salvem living in the Zona Cero, conveyed their utmost exhaustion. The process and its participatory nature were questioned by other interviewees who claimed that, first and foremost, they needed to see changes. This sentiment was echoed throughout the different workshops and meetings of the Va Cabanyal process. Emilio stated that neighbours were desperate to see immediate changes and were not keen on having a participatory process that could prolong time and delay the regeneration process. This perspective was also shared by several other interviewees (8, 11, 15, 18 and 19), including another Salvem member (Interview 13) who explained how they felt when the Va Cabanyal started. After so many years of struggle, they wanted to see rapid results. However, the process also allowed them to understand that what El Cabanyal needed entailed longer timeframes.

“We wanted the Va Cabanyal thing to happen right away, of course. We wanted the Municipal government to rehabilitate the neighbourhood in two months. Well, this is normal because it's a long time waiting and fighting, and you want to see the results already. But it's clear, we've understood with the whole Va Cabanyal process that it's a process that requires more time than doing it right away.” (Interview 13)
One of the themes that emerged during the presentation and the workshops was the immanent tension between participation and the urgency of transformation. Emilio explained that after seventeen years of harassment and degradation, neighbours were at the limit of despair and eager to see changes immediately. Members of Salvem demanded immediate measures that had a tangible impact on the daily lives of those who had borne the brunt of the struggle. These measures would improve the quality of life and coexistence of different groups. He reiterated that given the needs and desires of the neighbours were very clear, and they all knew what had to be done in El Cabanyal. They feared that a participatory process would further delay the so-longed regeneration of the neighbourhood. In their view, it is positive that participation was enabled, but they saw it more as a form of consultation. They claim they were not officers with expert knowledge to decide on specific things and that it was not their job to think about specific proposals. In the words of another member of Salvem, the process was important because participation is ‘good’, but there were “lots of meetings, lots of going on and on around the same themes”, and she was outraged that “after 20 years, they are still asking what I want for the El Cabanyal, that to me, to me, it feels like Groundhog Day (Interview 15)”. This was a surprising attitude given their history of active struggle and tactical resistance for almost 20 years.

“What do you propose?” No! Let them propose to us, and we will tell them what we think. It's not up to us to solve a problem that wasn't ours. On top of having suffered from it, it's shameful. And the issue with participatory citizenship is the same. “And what options or solutions do you propose?” No, propose them to me with your resources, and I'll tell you if you're on the right track. It's a disgrace, a mockery.

(Interview 15)

One of the main complaints from members of Salvem and those who had been more actively involved in the neighbourhood was the lack of engagement from the ‘silent majority’ of neighbours. During the presentation event, Emilio, from Salvem, complained that it is always the same people engaged in different events and meetings, who are everywhere, and that for them, participation did not start with Va Cabanyal but had been unfolding instead for 17 years. It had become an integral part of their life, permeating every aspect daily, while other people never actively participated in anything (field note 17/09/2015 and 12/10/15). This view is also shared by interviewee 19, who complained that it was always the same people and the same collectives engaging in different events and workshops, and the rest of the neighbours of El Cabanyal were not engaged. In her view, participation required a significant effort that some neighbours couldn’t commit to or simply didn’t
want to. She further claims they didn’t have the necessary knowledge, nor was their job, but the administration and its officers.

**Figure 6.34.** People attending the presentation of the second Va Cabanyal Workshop. Source: Author.

**Figure 6.35.** People participating in the second Va Cabanyal Workshop. Source: Author.
“you ask a person to make that effort, and they don't want to do it. That's why I voted for you, do it yourself since you get paid for it. But anyway, I think it's positive that it's done. The problem is that the people in the AAVV, the people from the Plataforma, some others that you already know forever, those from Santiago Apóstol. The ones who always know are the ones who go to everything. They were at Va Cabanyal, and they are anywhere there's something to gain. It's always the same people. The rest can't be mobilised. There's just no way to engage them. It's going to take a lot! Va Cabanyal has been a way to start, but I haven't seen almost anyone—I won't say anyone because someone might have—who isn't already tired of fighting for El Cabanyal elsewhere. So that's also a problem, people not wanting to participate.” (Interview 19).

The issue was also discussed in a meeting with the Steering Group (Fieldwork note 26/10/2015). Concerns regarding lack of participation were also echoed by several attendees when complaining that it was always the same people engaged in these sorts of activities when there are lots of people who avoid getting involved or engaged in anything related to the development of the neighbourhood (fieldnote 18/11/15). In a way, despite the workshops being apparently packed and all the buzz generated around the process by the new possibilities for the regeneration of El Cabanyal, the over 200 people participating is just a small fraction of the almost 20,000 inhabitants of the neighbourhood. This led to a discussion on the voluntary nature of participation and how the so-called ‘silent majority’ could be engaged in the process. For the first time, they also mentioned those who ‘feel that they have lost with this new government’, referring to those aligned to ‘Si Volem’ or in favour of the PEPRI, who are reluctant to participate in anything. These points highlight that while attending all these workshops and meetings is a personal decision, it is also a political act that requires a constant weekly commitment to maintain such engagement. And one that is not void of tensions and conflicts, with the emotional toll that might take on them. As many interviewees mention (8, 11, 15), the neighbourhood is ‘over-participated’ with some people tired of this.

And even participation becomes a bit of a caricature of participation itself. It's a neighbourhood where participation has already occurred, so much so that some agents are tired of it. 'Units pel Cabanyal', manifestos from I don't know, Portes Obertes, there's been so much that, of course, now new agents also emerge, especially those you know from Espai Veínal and so on, which of course, pose a fresh doubt. And that doubt is not easy to resolve from the political sphere, and they are new divisions (Interview 7).
As interviewee 2 mentions, while some collectives existed before 2015, Va Cabanyal opened the door to new sensitivities that questioned the established status quo. Thus, the process of de-identification triggered by Va Cabanyal was critical to setting the stage for new political subjects, such as Espai Veïnal or Millorem, to act on the premises of equality, visibilising a wrong and enacting equality. The following subsection will discuss how the new hegemonic majority reacts to the participatory process and emerging identities.

6.4.4 Participation and exclusion: the right to be included.

An interesting point regarding the implications of that voluntary nature of participation and who is invited to participate is made by another Salvem. She justified that the results of Va Cabanyal would be dominated by their hegemonic vision for El Cabanyal in the sense that they participate more than other collectives in the workshops. The higher presence of Salvem in terms of the number of people attending all activities is a result of their long-standing commitment to El Cabanyal and years of engagement. After all, it was their way of life, as described in the previous chapter.

As the name suggests, participatory processes depend on the people participating in them. If more people from the Col·lectiva participated in this process than people from the Platform, their opinion will be more represented than the others. And if more people from the Platform have participated than from the Col·lectiva, there will be more. It’s participatory with the people who want to participate. But it’s positive, in part it’s positive. (Interview 13)
Figure 6.36. List of proposals selected in the thematic table ‘Public Space, Environment and Sustainable Transport’ during Workshop III. Most of the recommendations relate to road and kerbside improvements, walking routes, school streets and even a local electric bus. Source: Author

The emphasis on the voluntary nature of participation poses blame on those who did not participate in it, who were perceived as not engaged enough, and did not want to be part of it. The interviewee understood participation as something you do if you want to. While it is true for many people participating in Va Cabanyal was something they actively wanted to do, she didn’t question the conditions that allowed them to be able to make that effort that other minority groups don’t have, as explained by interviewee 30 below. She doesn’t consider why a process such as Va Cabanyal, despite its participatory nature and being open to everyone, tended to exclude certain groups who don’t have the knowledge, the time or were not even aware that they could take part in the process. Agonist engagement is “often time-consuming and seems to entail an endles communicative processes”
(Ploger 2004, p.72), and not everyone has or can allocate enough time or resources to this, as they might have other needs or priorities.

“When things are done that are so top-down, like Va Cabanyal, that no matter how participatory it is, it was a political decision made at a specific moment, and being participatory was a necessary condition to submit the proposal. It was marked by the guidelines of the call that it had to be like this. It had to have a component of participation in the elaboration of the plan. So, all these kinds of things, which is a jargon, result very foreign, not only to the Roma people of Clot, but also to many people, older people without internet access or, I don't know, people who are not used to this kind of language, dynamics, or anything. In the end, specifically in the case of Clot, Social Services was not even there to try to do some awareness-raising work.”

(Interview 30)

During the workshops I attended, there was a lack of representation from the Roma community, especially those of Romanian origin who lived in the Zona Cero. Despite issues with them constantly being discussed and pointed out as one of the main threats and weaknesses during the workshops and the steering group meetings, none of them was included in the participatory process. Many participants claimed that the ‘Rumanos’ did not want to integrate into the neighbourhood or follow ‘our’ norms and did not want to participate in these events because they did not care about El Cabanyal. The barriers these groups faced to be part of Va Cabanyal were not a matter of willpower but depended on multiple and complex factors, such as different lifestyles, care commitments, priority needs, or cultural and language barriers, as explained by the interviewee below. These assumptions perpetuate power imbalances amongst other collectives in the new hegemonic order.

“In the case of the Roma people, I also believe it's a cultural issue too much to their regret. That is, when you have to live day by day, you don't have time to think that at seven o'clock on Thursdays, you'll have a workshop or can go to aerobics or things like that.” (Interview 30)

Ultimately, the question of who had the right to participate and decide within the new order was closely tied to discourses around belonging and permanence. Only those seen as being from El Cabanyal and committed to its future were allowed to have a voice in the process. As such, they viewed themselves as having a superior right to participate and decide the future of El Cabanyal, as opposed to those considered newcomers, “those who had just arrived”, such as the squatter movement and the Roma ethnic minorities. This led to claims regarding who had the right to decide on El Cabanyal and to be heard.
They have been given a voice at that moment which, later on, nobody will continue to uphold. (Interview 13)

We all know very well what each other wants. I don't think it's right - I mentioned before- the value that people who will be here for two months and then disappear have been given because we have seen this happen all the time. Since the beginning, for example, of the Plataforma, some people came, saw the situation, were not interested in knowing anything, and left. These movements appeared like mushrooms the day after the elections, and most disappeared (Interview 9).

A local councillor reiterated this discourse during our interview who complained that one of the main critiques against Va Cabanyal was that “it had included all these people in the participatory process when they wanted them to be excluded” (Interview 41). The right to decide and be part of El Cabanyal’s future soon developed into a question of us, the new hegemony led by Salvem, the AAVV and them, the others, formed by the Squatter movements with Espai Veïnal, and the Roma ethnic minorities.

6.4.5 Excluded from the process, excluded from El Cabanyal’s future.

The Zona Cero was identified as a threat while discussing the collective SWOT analysis during the second Va Cabanyal workshop. This led to a heated discussion since some participants argued that rather than a threat, the Zona Cero was an actual weakness (fieldnotes 25/10/15) since it was already a ghetto. Following the identification of the Zona Cero as a weakness, the discussion revolved around the problems caused by the ‘Spanish Roma’ and the nuisance they caused to the neighbours, recalling an incident involving Roma families fighting. There were similar complaints about the Squatters and their activities.

Groups like the Squatters from Espai Veïnal, or the Spanish and Romanian Roma people, as discussed in the previous section, were not only portrayed as opportunistic but also as active agents of degradation, responsible for the ghettoization of the Zona Cero (Interviews 8, 15, 18, 11, 12, 19, 25, 3, Fieldnotes 24/10/2015, 19/11/15). These groups were not considered ‘neighbours’, as we can see from how some interviewees talk about them. This differentiation between neighbours and Squatters, Spanish Roma, or Romanian Roma, is a clear example of how they were now being ‘othered’, rendered as ‘them’ by the demos – us, the neighbours –, thus they had become the new as ochlos.

“We are neighbours, and as neighbours, we think about improving our neighbourhood, which I believe we deserve after 17 years of struggle, and I believe we all deserve it [...] I
don't know about the squatter movement. What are their expectations for the neighbourhood’s regeneration? I haven't spoken with them.” (Interview 11)

“There are floating populations with activities less compatible with urban life, for example. Let's talk about scrapyards or [...] Let's see, we are citizens, and we are a city, so why is a scrapyard allowed in El Cabanyal and not in Almirante Cadarso? Someone explain this to me. Why do the residents have to accept this in one place and not another in Valencia?” (Interview 27)

The lack of involvement from the Roma community in the process was confirmed by the Roma people I interviewed. Out of the 8 Romanian Roma I interviewees, only their community leader knew that there had been a participatory process, and of the three Spanish Roma interviewees, only one, who was a spokesperson for Millorem, had attended the workshops. In response to these concerns, one participant suggested exploring ways to engage those living “outside the system” in the VaCabanyal process, as this may facilitate the resolution of conflicts between different residents within the Zona Cero. Those attending received this suggestion positively, but no specific details, concrete actions or proposals were discussed.

Espai Veïnal did not participate as a collective in the Va Cabanyal process, but some members did so individually. I interviewed four members of Espai Veïnal who attended the workshops, and all attended Va Cabanyal with scepticism. While they all had not trusted the process and the administration, they commended the officers' efforts leading it and thought they might have good intentions. They found that Va Cabanyal generated unrealistic expectations about what a participatory process was. In their view, participation was not genuine because the administration led it and not the people, and the purpose was plainly to access EU funds. Interviewee (Interview 3) even questioned how legitimate the process had been when they had not even applied the Citizen Participation Law of the Valencian Community in the context of urban plans. Another interviewee echoes the sentiment of many participants regarding the fast pace and tight schedule of the process, especially in the context of such a fragmented neighbourhood, with antagonistic positions on many aspects (Interview 17).

6.5 Spatialising agonistic urbanisms

Participants of Va Cabanyal often spoke with nostalgia about how life used to be a village with a different pace and rhythm to the city. That life happened mostly outside their homes, next to their neighbours, where children would play outside. The streets of El Cabanyal were the key socialising space of the neighbourhood, without a doubt, due to its densely knitted urban fabric and low-rise
terraced houses. The spatial configuration of the neighbourhood has been integral to that sense of El Cabanyal as a different place where people coexist in close proximity, thus developing their identity as neighbours of El Cabanyal. The street as a symbolic space was extended to incorporate the empty lots resulting from Rita’s demolitions and other abandoned open spaces like El Clot as public spaces. The focus of this section is to analyse how the new ochlos have transformed the streets of El Cabanyal into spaces of dissensus.

During my time in El Cabanyal, I had the opportunity to witness how dissensus is spatialised through different agonistic practices or instances, mainly in two specific spaces in El Cabanyal. Those instances of agonistic urbanisms reveal how different groups have used, appropriated and challenged normalised and accepted meanings and uses of public space. These everyday lived spaces represent the contestation to prescribed uses of space, thus transforming them into Mouffe’s symbolic space. In doing so, they have opened the door for alternative uses and meanings of those lived spaces. The first space I will look at is the Zona Cero, where we can find an amalgam of long-term neighbours, squatters and Spanish and Romanian Roma people. The first instance I will explore is the symbolic painting of the stripes, which occurred in two different organised events. The local government organised the first event in agreement with Salvem in October 2015. The second event I will analyse is the collective painting organised by the squatted social centre CSOA La Fustería and Espai Veinal, organised just a week later. The second instance where I explore the spatialisation of dissensus in the Zona Cero is the use and appropriation of public space by minoritized groups. The second space I will examine is El Clot, where I look at how neighbours from El Bloc de Portuaris and people from Cabanyal Horta have used the space to contest its marginal condition and exclusion from the local planning frameworks. This area is characterised by diverse people, including some long-term residents, Spanish Roma, Espai Veinal and the Cabanyal Horta collective.

6.5.1 Painting and contesting the scars of El Cabanyal in the Zona Cero

“Scars generally carry a rather negative connotation. They are not shown to others, not exhibited in public, and are to be kept quietly hidden away, or measures are taken so they won’t be seen - they belong to an extremely private realm. I take photographs of such scars, which are like a personal secret. Illness, Injury, accidents, war. These are all distressing, painful, unhappy experiences that, one day, suddenly befall a person. While a person hopes to remain unblemished through life, we must all sustain and live with wounds, visible and invisible. Running fingers over the smooth flesh, the encounter of some irregular coarseness, an unevenness of sensation, will tell you of the presence of a
El Cabanyal is indeed full of wounds. Wounds that speak about years of struggle to preserve its cultural and material heritage, leaving a neighbourhood full of emotional, political and spatial scars. The scars seen all around El Cabanyal are reminders of a past traumatic experience that invades its present and extends into its future. They tell us a story of a conflict, a struggle whose memories have been inscribed onto the territory, retained into the present. The most visual aspect of the scars was the stripes painted by Rita’s government on the properties they were purchasing and demolishing, as I explained in Chapter 5. The Zone Cero represents the essence of spatial dissensus in El Cabanyal and is the area that concentrates the majority of empty lots, abandoned houses, squatted houses, and the scars of El Cabanyal.

The previous council had many plots of houses that were demolished or things they did. They were painted with brown stripes. The famous lines, they are a sign of a ghetto, give a terrible impression. I don’t want there to be walls. I want there to be what needs to be there. It was said that initially, with good intentions, those stripes would be removed. As of today[...] I don’t want just the stripes removed. I want something to be done.

(Interview 15)

While these represented battle wounds and symbols of resistance for some, most neighbours despised and rejected them, fearing the stigma of the scarred tissue would be carried on into El Cabanyal’s future. The brown stripes on the houses had a detrimental effect and for some had a clear negative connotation as a no-go area. People were impatience and wanted those empty plots and abandoned houses not just to be painted, but to be brought back to life. However, as we will see in the following sections, how this symbolic painting was done had also different approaches and implications.
6.5.1.1 Erasing the stripes

One of the first gestures of the new municipal government was to erase those stripes as a way of erasing the traces of Rita’s politics and the stigma inflicted in El Cabanyal. The initiative aimed to paint over the stigmatising brown stripes the previous municipal government used to signal their advancement over El Cabanyal. On the 23rd of October, they organised a public event, widely publicised, led by two councillors, to engage neighbours in the symbolic repainting over the stripped walls of an empty lot located on Calle Francesc Eiximenis, at the beginning of what would have been the extension of Blasco Ibáñez. The call responded to demands from the main entities, such as AAVV and Salvem, to create a new urban landscape emancipating El Cabanyal from the stigmatising stripes. The initiative was branded “Al Cabanyal ara pinta el veïnat” (In El Cabanyal, now it is the neighbours who paint) and was open to all neighbours. According to Cllr Tello, the measure was approved by the Economic and Cultural Development Subcommittee of El Cabanyal, which included all cultural and neighbourhood entities in the area.

El Cabanyal empieza a borrar el 'estigma' de Rita Barberá

La alcaldesa ordenó pintar los solares vacíos expropiados con unas rayas marrones que hoy los vecinos tienen de color a la espera de que el nuevo gobierno las elimine totalmente

Figure 6.37. Newspaper article about the painting events. Source: La Vanguardia (27/10/2015).

86 The Councillor for Culture, Glòria Tello, and Councillor for Heritage and Housing, María Oliver
However, the reality of the event fell far from the expectations created. I attended the event with Maria Jose, a long-term neighbour of El Cabanyal and a member of Cabanyal Review. On approaching Frances Eiximenis, around 5.30, we saw a crew of people from the municipality, the two councillors, local camera people, and just a handful of neighbours were there. Maria Jose told me that she had hoped many more people would show interest after all the expectations around the event. We wait for a bit longer, but no one else appears. She complained that despite being the Zona Cero, and after school hours, there were no children, and she approached some Roma children that were looking at us with curiosity and asked them if they wanted to paint with us. The few neighbours that attended were complaining about several aspects related to the event’s organisation and how that had impacted the low attendance. According to them, the date had not been agreed upon will all entities,

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87 I had met Maria Jose during the Va Cabanyal workshops and Steering Group Meeting and we soon established a strong connection. She was a key person who helped me open many doors with other collectives and entities.
nor had there been any discussions on what the event would consist of or what location would be selected. The most controversial aspect of all, however, was the colour chosen for the paint. The vanilla paint brought by the municipal officers was rejected by them, who indeed showed their discontent with selecting a colour almost identical to the colours of the stripes. They were misled by the posters released to announce the event, with a brush with blue paint. This symbolic colour was linked to the historical identity and tradition of El Cabanyal as a fisherman village.

**Figure 6.39.** The two local councillors who organized the event painted the wall. Source: Author.

**Figure 6.40.** Participants in the event organised by the city council. Source: Author.

### 6.5.2 Painting the future
On Saturday, October 24th 2015, Espai Veïnal organised a ‘Jornada de Convivencia’ under the slogan ‘Let’s paint our streets!’ The event included various activities, such as collectively painting the striped walls to erase the brown stripes. Though the event was, in essence, similar to that organised by the municipality two days before, they couldn’t be farther apart, not only in terms of ownership but in their symbolic meaning and staging two opposite ways of understanding El Cabanyal. The first difference was the transversality of the action, evidenced by the poster created for the event in three languages, Valencian, Spanish, and Romanian. This was an explicit attempt to engage and include the Romanian Romani from the Zona Cero, who were neighbours, in many different ways.

Figure 6.41. Flyer of the event organised by the Espai Veïnal. Source: Author.
The event started at 10 am with juices and various activities, including stencils for graffiti and painting walls and empty lots. This was followed by a collective meal at midday: a vegan paella, where everyone contributed as much as they wanted. The day ended with a flamenco concert at 5 pm. I arrived towards the end of the event, and there were still over twenty people there. I saw several members of La Fustería and Espai Veïnal who I had met before, and according to them, the day had been a success in terms of attendance and engagement, with a very festive atmosphere and a constant stream of people. There were mainly from Espai Veïnal and Romanian children with their mothers left when I arrived, but other had neighbours also attended. The paint chosen to cover the stripes was white, creating a symbolic white canvas where neighbours could paint with various colours. No one was encouraged to paint anything specific, it was free drawing. Unlike the event organized by the City Council for the main entities, the relaxed atmosphere of this event was not full of cameras or all the paraphernalia deployed in the other.

Figure 6.42. Participants of the event organised by Espai Veïnal painted the walls of La Fustería with different drawings and colours. Source: Author.
Figure 6.43. Participants of the event organised by Espai Veïnal play outside the walls of La Fusteria while organisers start cleaning up. Source: Author

Figure 6.44. Diversity of participants of the event organised by Espai Veïnal playing outside the walls of La Fusteria while organisers start cleaning up. Source: Author
However, the presence of two police officers supervising and monitoring everything from a distance surprised many people, including the author. When approached, they stated they were doing their job and did not want to be photographed to avoid identification. Some people also painted in a vacant lot on San Pedro Street, creating a graffiti in several languages that said something in Cabanyal: “Nobody is illegal.” They were identified and questioned about the event’s organization and permits.

Figure 6.45. Wall painted by members of Espai Veïnal with ‘In El Cabanyal, no one is illegal’ in Valenciano and Romanian. Source: Author.

Figure 6.46. Local policemen are taking pictures of the flyers and paintings of the event organised by Espai Veïnal. Source: Author.
One question was the need for control and surveillance when the event consisted of local neighbours getting together, in a relaxed and festive atmosphere, with children painting colourful drawings. At the same time, they also played in the street. Ultimately, the walls painted at La Fustería were a testament that this was a more transversal and inclusive event, organised collectively, self-managed and self-financed by Espai Veïnal and La Fustería collectives. From its inception to its spatialisation, the event represented a different type of political claim, an alternative understanding of who has the right to erase the stigma of the past and who can paint the future of El Cabanyal.

6.5.3 Contesting meanings and ownership of public space in Zona Cero
The previous chapter has given an overview of the estate of abandonment and dereliction as a result of 17 year-long battle against the PEPRI. Long-term neighbours abandoned the area, and houses and streets were gradually occupied by Squatters and Romanian Roma families, and Spanish Roma people. (Garcia Pilán and Juan Nadal 2017; Santamarina and Mompó 2021). In the Zona Cero, the Squatters and Roma families were the subject of numerous complaints during the Va Cabanyal process and the following months. The main ones were: accusations of illegal occupation of empty houses, dirtiness, illegal scrapping, nuisance, late-night parties and drug dealing. While some interviewees differentiated between squatting as a political statement or out of necessity, in the case of the Roma families, the central discourse revolved around their perceived lack of integration and adherence to basic civic norms of urban life. This led to claims of unfair treatment and permissiveness of the authorities towards minority groups, accused of not enforcing the laws equally on everyone.

“I used to go to the beach for walks and used to get there walking along the cycleway, but I have never been able to do it again. If you now walk along the cycleway, the backtalking, the staring, they offer you drugs, but the worst is how men stare at you.” (Interview 15)

According to many participants in the Va Cabanyal workshops (fieldnotes w2 and w3), the central conflict in the Zona Cero stemmed from the way in which the Spanish Roma appropriated public space. This included how men occupied streets, which interviewees living in the Zona Cero claimed made women feel unsafe and uncomfortable in their streets. The Spanish Roma were accused of drug dealing (mentioned by 18 interviewees) and having late-night parties. At the same time, the Romanian Roma were being blamed for the area’s dirtiness and for not conforming to basic norms. Many of them survived through illegal scrapping in their homes, and we were accused of loitering in the streets near their homes, accused of making fires in the street, and not sending their children to school, who instead played outside for many hours on the streets while their mothers watched.

“The City Council had allowed any use that encouraged residents to leave the neighbourhood. And there are absolutely detrimental uses, such as traffic, drug trafficking, and drug use, and one can have a perspective on the idea of drugs, etc. But what is clear is that drug trafficking on the streets, with minors present, creates a zoned-off space. Because in that space, latent violence makes people prefer to go elsewhere. Eventually, the space becomes zoned, so people don’t want to go through that area and choose to go elsewhere. And what is happening is that people don’t want to pass through that part of the neighbourhood anymore. So, there is a zone that is the Zona
Cero, the area we are talking about directly, because if you go to the other side of the neighbourhood, they probably have other problems, right? But in this zone, we have this. It's not just the affected urban area, it's not just bad for tourists. It's terrible for the residents, not just for me, a resident who feels ashamed to see how the neighbourhood has degraded over time and has family here. And the people who come to visit us, many of them feel the same way.” (Interview 8)

These issues existed and were evident; I observed them personally daily. It was common to see trash left on the corners of my street. I also encountered drug dealing from some homes and witnessed people starting fires late at night from my balcony (Figure 6.48). The EDUSI document, produced from the Va Cabanyal process, addressed these issues and concluded that the central area of El Cabanyal, particularly the Zona Cero, exhibits a state of neglect and deterioration in its urban fabric, affecting both residential and commercial uses as a direct result of the PEPRI. The decline that has engulfed the Zona Cero has been rooted in various factors enabled by Rita's government and their mobbing strategy to empty the area and displace residents. These factors included the abandonment of the area and denial of essential services like cleaning and basic waste collection, the concentrated arrival of Romanian Roma residents and permissiveness towards the occupation of empty houses, as well as the lack of maintenance of properties, leading them to become substandard housing without basic amenities.

Figure 6.48. Pictures showing things I witnessed from the balcony of my house quite often in Calle Padre Luis Navarro: drug dealing during the night. Source: Author.
However, on many occasions, I could observe how Roma residents of the Zona Cero used the streets and empty lots in a way that echoed the romantic rhetoric of how life used to be in El Cabanyal. A life that unfolded outside their derelict, tiny and overcrowded homes, in the same streets where neighbours used to get together for dinner outside their homes, everyone knew each other, and children played in the streets. Many Romanian Roma people used the streets of the Zona Cero in a way that blurred the line between their domestic and public life again, mirroring the way of life of El Cabanyal, just like ‘before’. Some everyday images help us grasp this idea, such as figures 6.50, 6.51, 6.52, and 6.53 below. We can see women hang laundry on empty lots near their homes, contesting their meaning as a leftover space. The vacant lots acquire a different dimension as an extension of their domestic lives. When getting together outside their homes, chatting while their children play next to them, they also transform the streets of the Zona Cero into spaces for collective gatherings and socialising. The thing that was quite surprising from these narratives is that, sitting outside your home, in the street, ‘a la fresca’ and chatting with your neighbours or even dinner with them, and, which children playing outside in the streets were things that were constantly mentioned as characteristic of the ‘unique way of life’ of El Cabanyal that neighbours were always talking about with nostalgia. However, it was clear that now everyone in El Cabanyal was included in that imaginary
A very controversial issue that happened during the first months into my fieldwork was the removal of some benches in C/Reina because one or two families were being quite loud at night or something. Someone who lived in the house next to benches complained in the emergency commission, which were quickly addressed and resolved. Within a week or two, 15 benches disappeared, four of them in front of the woman’s house were removed. Despite this, Roma families and children found ways to sit outside, bringing their own chairs. The story of the benches in Calle Pescadores and Calle Reina is a clear example of how public space becomes inherently political, where conflicts and disputes are constantly being played out, with different groups competing for the right to use the space in a particular way. But is also an example of how Roma people contested prescribed and sanctions uses of public space. When the benches were removed after neighbours complained of noise and hassle late at night, these were immediately replaced by chairs. The benches were not just urban infrastructure, they represented different ways of understandings and using of public space, which conflicted with each other. This conflict was not just about noise and disturbance but about the right of different groups to appropriate and use the street.

Figure 6.50. Romanian Roma children playing and their mothers in Lorenzo Laflor Square. Source: Author.
Figure 6.51. Clothes hanging from the wall in one of the empty lots. Source: Author.

Figure 6.52. Romanian Roma children playing football in one of the empty lots resulted from the demolitions explained in the previous chapter. Source: Author.
Figure 6.53. Romanian Roma women and children take their chairs outside their homes, sit, and socialise. Source: Author.

Figure 6.54. Romanian women attending the Holly Week Parades in the Zona Cero. Source: Author.
Figure 6.55. Romanian Roma children sitting on chairs where once were benches that were removed. Source: Author.
Figure 6.56. Members of Salvem occupying a square to organise a collective lunch. Source: Author.

Figure 6.57. Group Women of El Cabanyal playing board games outside in the terrace area of a local bar. Source: Author.
Figure 6.58. Group of Spanish Roma men occupying the street to play cards outside during the summer with their own table and chairs. Source: Author.

6.5.4 El Clot

El Clot is the name given to an area between Zona Cero and the beachfront. The word in Valenciano means whole, but the first thing one sees is a massive, tall block comprised of three high-rise towers visible from anywhere in El Cabanyal. In a neighbourhood where most buildings have just two heights and a much humble scale, the tall housing towers have a significant presence in the neighbourhood, with the best views towards the sea and of the entire neighbourhood. Currently known as ‘Bloc de Portuaris’, the official name of the towers until recently was Grupo Ruiz Jarabo and were designed by local architect Antonio Tatay between 1949 and 1952 to house dock workers from Valencia’s Port and developed between 1952 and 1955. Before the development of the building, the area was a small neighbourhood of houses informally developed, which were cleared for the development of the Bloc. With the closing of the shipyards and the change of commercial activities linked to the port, many dockworkers left, and the houses were decanted into social dwellings for the Roma population from El Cabanyal. Most of them had been living in the old informal houses of El Clot.

88 or simply El Bloc
Figure 6.59. Location map of El Clot. Source: Author

Figure 6.60. Ground figure map dating from 1929 shows the original neighbourhood's urban structure. Source: Visor Cartografico Ayuntamiento de Valencia.
Figure 6.61. Aerial picture from the 1950s showing the newly built Bloque Ruiz Jarabo. Source: David Estal.

Figure 6.62. Aerial pictures showing the site clearance in 1960, 2000, and 2010. Source: Author based on Visor Cartografico Ayuntamiento de Valencia.
6.5.5 A ghetto within the ghetto

Since the implementation of PGOU88, the block has remained in a state of legal ambiguity, existing outside established planning frameworks (Maria Oliver, Estal, Pons). However, it is one of the most prominent landmarks in El Cabanyal. Maria Oliver, former Councillor for Housing, revealed that 52% of the properties within the block are privately owned, with the majority being owned by banks. The remaining 48% are publicly owned. Oliver further explained that El Bloc encapsulates the most pressing issues faced by El Cabanyal. In her view, this single building concentrates all the neighbourhood's problems. With 168 flats, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of residents or determine the legal or illegal occupancy status of the homes, as there is no existing census data.

According to interviewee 22, a spokesperson for Millorem El Cabanyal, the block is home to over 100 Roma families and approximately 20 to 30 non-Roma families. The remaining 15 to 20 homes are either vacant or closed. He perceives El Clot as a segregated enclave within the larger El Cabanyal neighbourhood, a ghetto within the ghetto.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 6.63.** An article from May 2017 says the municipal government is considering the demolition of El Bloc. Source: Las Provincias (27/05/2017).
Despite their marginalised condition, the Spanish Roma residents of El Clot have a different consideration from those who live in the Zona Cero, from El Cabanyal. Several interviewees say they are integrated and somehow included as neighbours in people’s discourses. Several interviewees within the Roma community also consider themselves El Cabanyal, born and bred. This consideration of them as being from El Cabanyal is anchored on the fact that, as Interviewee 22, many Spanish Roma had lived there for several generations and worked as vendors in local street markets.

The blocks that used to be Ruiz Jarabo were full of well-integrated people and children going to school, and there were no problems. I have friends there, we've helped them clean the plot, and we've helped them on every occasion they've required our help (Interview 10)
These are people who work as street market vendors, they are ordinary people, and we have no problem with them. They would sometimes come to our meetings for whatever reason, and we’ve had them in many meetings and had a good relationship, more or less committed people, people who want to improve their harsh lives. (Interview 13)

Figure 6.66. Collage made by school children exhibited in the third Va Cabanyal workshop claiming El Clot is part of El Cabanyal. Source Author.

El Bloc is an isolated entity, thus not enmeshed within the urban fabric and located outside the main source of spatial conflict, the Zona Cero. On that account, it was not perceived as a threat nor a weakness by interviewees not in the Va Cabanyal process. For many neighbours, El Bloc was a problem, or, in other words, not their problem. Many interviewees had never been inside the buildings or even close enough. They knew all the issues that affected El Bloc and their residents but were not directly affected by them. Since it was not an immediate threat to mainstream neighbours, it was not included in the main debates around El Cabanyal. Somehow it was a lesser problem for many since those issues were contained within that small triangle that had become no man’s land, as described by interviewee 11 below. Whatever was happening there was not happening to them, in
their streets, at their doorsteps. Everyone acknowledged the problems, but since they were not visible, they did not see them, and what cannot be seen by the majority doesn’t exist.

Regarding Bloc de Portuaris, where there's also a concentration of Spanish Roma people living in the neighbourhood. However, it seems like the media gives the impression that only Romanian Roma people live here, but there are also Spanish Roma in the Bloc de Portuaris. The Bloc is now in a limbo situation, outside the plan from '88, you don't see it anywhere. So, if someone upstairs messes with the electricity, they don't have a certificate of occupancy because they've stopped being in that legal situation. It is a complicated life, but many people there are integrated and live from street markets.

(Interview 11)

Figure 6.67. Pictures of the staircases and common areas inside the buildings. These pictures show the dereliction estate of communal areas, which include walled doors, blocked lifts, rubbish, and rubble. Source: Author.
Interviewee 22 considers himself un ‘gitano dEl Clot’ from Cabanyal. He was born in one of the small houses that originally populated El Clot, and some years later, his family moved to the Bloc de Portuaris. Years later, upon getting married, they were given a house there, too, through a long-term social rent agreement. He explains that probably 80 or 90% of dwellings are in a significant state of disrepair, many lacking basic living conditions and needing substantial work, and only one block with a working lift. He complains about the surrounding area, which is not even urbanised and lacks basic facilities, like street furniture, lighting or sidewalks. This situation of neglect and inequality surfaced in the tensions and conflicts that were latent amongst many of the residents of El Bloc, who felt mistreated and abandoned by the administration. The contrasting image with the surrounding streets shows how this building and its residents have been systematically excluded even from basic city infrastructures. This is reflected in figures 6.69 and 6.70 below. The aspiration for basic urban infrastructures can be seen in one of the collage drawings done by school children from las Arenas Primary School as part of an engagement activity of the Va Cabanyal process. The school is attended by most children from el Bloc, who drew how they would like to see the empty lot around their homes, including basketball racks, flowers, and trees.

Figure 6.68. The collage made by school children exhibited in the third Va Cabanyal workshop shows their aspirations for the leftover space around the building. Source Author.
“There's a problem at the architectural and urban level because the surroundings aren't well-maintained [...] It is neglected. You see, it's as if it's been left to the hands of fate [...] The football pitch is quite striking compared to the one next. You should see it. It's sheer apathy. On the one side, you have the tennis federation, where youngsters pay 150 euros monthly to play tennis. On the other side, you have the maritime team, the issue with the football pitch, and in the middle are children throwing stones, the children from the ‘Spanish Roma’. That must change because if some have rights, the others should too.”

The lack of legal urban planning frameworks left El Clot in a limbo state, abandoning the site with an isolation veil that increased further the marginal condition of the site. However, the neighbours of El Bloc have found ways to address that lack of basic urban infrastructure. Figure 6.72 shows they have managed to get car seats and old benches to create a seating area where neighbours can sit and socialise like it used to be in El Cabanyal. This is a quotidian act, with the motivation to at least dignify the space they perceived as neglected and lacking dignity. These benches created a symbolic and discursive space that contested both the existing marginalised condition of the space and the lack of planning frameworks that would have prevented their condition of ghetto within the ghetto.

In the same way, in the void space, Interviewee 22 refers to above, Figure 6.71 below shows how children improvised their football pitch, starkly contrasting with the pristine sports facilities flanking it. As mentioned during one of the workshops, creating that informal football pitch allowed the children of el Bloc to play football while their mothers watched from their homes and called them for dinner, just like it was before in El Cabanyal, in the good all days. Lastly, we can see the use of the vacant lots as spaces between the public and domestic domains, where the outside area represents an extension of their homes, where they can do activities that they cannot do inside due to lack of space. Some everyday images help us understand this idea: we see hanging clothes on the sidewalks. Despite not being regulated and its neglected condition, El Clot is used intensely by its residents.
Figure 6.69. An aerial view of El Clot from 2015 shows the empty lot between two sports facilities. Source: Google Maps.

Figure 6.70. Panoramic view of El Clot and the football pitch next to it. Source: Author.

Figure 6.71. El Clot and the football pitch next to it. Source: Author.
Figure 6.72. View of El Clot and the football pitch next to it. Source: Author.

Figure 6.73. Picture of neighbours of El Clot using the space with old benches and car seats. Source: Author.
6.5.6 Cabanyal Horta

The liminality presented in El Clot, a space outside the ordered city, with no planning documents deciding on its uses, offered the perfect canvas for different collectives to appropriate the space in different ways, giving El Clot different meanings and staging there their alternative vision of El Cabanyal. The space has been used by Espai Veïnal for collective events and assemblies such as *Falles Populares* and was used to show signs claiming against the gentrification processes that were threatening El Cabanyal, amongst other things (see figures 6.73 and 6.74 below). However, in this section, I will explore Cabanyal Horta and its agonistic uses of the unregulated space of El Clot.

*Figure 6.74.* Members of Espai Veïnal playing football in the empty lot with Roma children of El Clot. Source: Espai Veïnal (renamed Sindicat de Barri d’El Cabanyal).
Figure 6.75. Poster of a collective lunch organised by Espai Veïnal in El Clot to discuss challenges they and the Roma people face. Source: Espai Veïnal (renamed Sindicat de Barri dEl Cabanyal).
Cabanyal Horta emerged in late 2015 or early 2016, occupying the vacant space of El Clot. They aimed to create common urban gardens and improved green spaces that would cater to the neighbourhood's diverse identities and cultural profiles, which they perceive as a space of encounter for the diversity and plurality of El Cabanyal (Mompó 2021). Cabanyal Horta created a local mutual support network among neighbours, providing Zero km food options, and has reclaimed El Clot as a self-managed open space that embodies an agonistic alternative to the planned future of El Cabanyal. Indeed, the prevailing narrative of El Clot as a leftover marginal space has been contested through the materiality of the redesigned lot as a productive urban garden and a new public space with alternative uses to those that used to be associated with it. Cabanyal Horta caters for a range of activities and projects involving members of the collective, residents, and interested individuals. It is an open space where people can get together, cultivate, and collaborate by participating in cleaning, improving gardens, recycling and reusing materials, and maintaining old paths, trees, and gardens. The project seeks to blur the boundaries between public and private space in favour of the collective. Their fundamental premise is that space should be collective, and their aims, beyond their political project are real, concrete and material, which is to create an infrastructure that facilitates collective inhabitation, as we can see from this excerpt from their website:
Figure 6.77. Poster of the event in Figure 6.75, organised by Cabanyal Horta. Source: Cabanyal Horta.
“These needs of this neighbourhood are real: there is a need for open spaces where people can practice, children can play, run[...], and the idea is clear: we don’t need large investment projects to achieve them because they can be created from the grassroots, with the help of the community.” (Cabanyal Horta)

During the initial cleanup efforts, the members of Cabanyal Horta made an exciting discovery—the unveiling of paved paths that were once part of the original street grid of the old Clot neighbourhood. Recognizing the significance of these paths, they decided to embrace and value them, incorporating them into the spatial design of their collective gardens. The space has been divided into sections, including dedicated areas for local school gardens with raised planters. Additionally, there are allotted space for collective gardening, and more recently, individual plots have been assigned while still maintaining a sense of shared care and responsibility for the overall space. This allows the initiative to engage the plurality of interests that coexist in the area through various activities and parallel projects in an open and inclusive space. The project aims to create a self-managed infrastructure that facilitates understanding public space in terms of its creation, management use and perception as a collective project. A project demonstrates that collective action and organization in El Clot, particularly in the context of a shared symbolic public space, can showcase how local neighbours exercise control over public facilities by engaging through their collective aspirations and capabilities rather than relying on the municipal authority to take action and address the neglected conditions of the area. Through shared interests and collective action, Cabanyal Horta has materialised in a potentially disruptive and community-led urban design as an alternative to the one local authority would plan.

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89 People can go for a walk to Cabanyal Horta, cultivate, and collaborate in tasks such as cleaning, garden improvement, recycling and reuse of materials, and the maintenance of paths, trees, and plants.
In terms of its relationship with the local administration, Cabanyal Horta has positioned itself as an agonistic agent that, while keeping its autonomy, has negotiated deals with them to stay in the area. In this sense, Cabanyal Horta has materialised its relation with other agents, like Espai Veïnal, the Santiago Apostol school, Millorem or the administration horizontally and inclusively, through shared activities and workshops that have taken place in El Clot, which is reflected on this statement from their website:

“Today, we join other collectives in demand for a public space in El Clot, which goes far beyond empty criticism[...] This is just one action, but what matters is what lies ahead.”

(Cabanyal Horta)

This coordination with different political agendas at different scales, from local collectives and neighbours to wider organisations that share their same alternative political projects and academia is what Mouffe claims “A radical democratic politics calls for the articulation of different levels of struggles to create a chain of equivalence among them” (2007, p.5) to expose a wrong in the name of equality. The diversity of the neighbours critically engaged is quite heterogeneous and includes
people of a very different nature. Adults, children, Roma women, elderly, immigrants, long term neighbours have engaged with Cabanyal Horta in different ways, all with a particular interest, but working together towards achieving their common goal of making El Clot a shared space that belongs to them. The critical engagement between the neighbours and external actors has been done through various social and spatial practices. Besides all the activities mentioned above, El Clot is still the common symbolical space around which activities like common Paellas (an encounter around food), workshops, or concerts occur.

Figure 6.79. Poster of the artistic project (In)clots organised with the other associations, the UPV university. The title plays with the name of El Clot to make it sound like ‘Included’. Source: Cabanyal Horta.
Figure 6.80. Workshop with local Roma women. Source: Cabanyal Horta.

Figure 6.81. Workshop with local Roma children. Source: Cabanyal Horta.
Figure 6.82. Collective event organised by Cabanyal Horta with different neighbours. Source: Cabanyal Horta.

Figure 6.83. Panoramic view of El Clot Figure and the space collectively created by members of Cabanyal Horta. Source: Cabanyal Horta.
6.6 Conclusion.

The contextualisation of how the change of government in May 2015 impacted clarifies how El Cabanyal's future changed and how differently this change was understood by different collectives that had been actively involved in the fight against Rita Barberà and the previous PEPRI plan. As we have seen, this diversity of interests of various collectives and neighbours seemed to be in a precarious equilibrium, fighting to live in a neighbourhood that was lived and perceived in almost opposite ways between other groups. This fragile balance broke when the local elections of May 2015 unexpectedly brought in a new municipal authority in the political antipodes of the previous administration. This chapter has delved into the very complex scenario El Cabanyal presented a very complex socio-spatial configuration from 2015 to 2018, produced by an amalgam of squatters, Romanian Roma groups, Spanish Roma groups, residents who were not able to leave or resisted abandoning their neighbourhood and their houses, neighbours who wanted the plan to be developed and neighbours who made their life defending it and fighting against the PEPRI and the destruction of their homes, or what they considered their neighbourhood and a very precious way of life. Despite the initial hopes for positive change after the PEPRI was repealed, after a year, besides political will, not much had changed in the area, raising concerns and fears among the neighbours.

More importantly, the chapter has revealed how effective the previous government was in fracturing and atomising the social tissue of the neighbourhood. Once the common enemy disappeared, real tensions and conflicts of interest between different collectives soon appeared. They were latent daily through numerous collective events, cultural acts, meetings, and manifestations. The neighbourhood appeared more fractured than ever around the debates on the future renewal of the neighbourhood, discussing what kind of regeneration is coming, who it is for, who will be included, and who will be excluded. Fears of the dangers of gentrification or further ghettoisation have been tabled together with demands for investment or the lack of social services or secure housing solutions for the most vulnerable groups. Meanwhile, El Cabanyal has become this cake everyone wants a piece of.

However, contrary to what many long-term mainstream neighbours felt, this new scenario had the potential to a real politicisation of the neighbours that had been until recently outcasted and treated as scum, extremists. This new scenario allows for new and unpredictable ways of creative thinking to be materialised in the future of El Cabanyal, by opening spaces where dissensus can be manifested in an agonistic fashion. Despite being despised by many neighbours as the material and discursive symbol of twenty years of struggle, the Zona Cero was used by groups of Roma families intensely and sometimes in unpredictable ways. Families everyday lived experience was displayed in the streets, in the same way described by many of the mainstream neighbours when mourning their life in El
Cabanyal when they were children, a life that would happen outside, in its streets, collectively with their neighbours. Other groups related to the radical left and the Squatter movement have occupied houses and transformed them into collective social centres. They organise cultural and leisure activities in these centres open to all the neighbours, taking the role that the new administration has not been capable of keeping up with, as exemplified by the striped walls painting. These examples have also been accounted for in El Clot and Cabanyal Horta.

Again, through the multiple ways through which they materially and symbolically unfold in and through space, the practices analysed in this chapter, have spatialised dissensus in El Cabanyal during instances, short periods of time. In doing so these spatial practices have revealed, albeit in a contingent and temporary manner, how those who are othered, such as Espai Veinal, or the Roma minoritised people, are able to take their “right own time and their own place” (Swyngedouw 2011b, p.375) to question their given order in the “capitalist post-political spatiality” (ibid, p.378). The agonistic urbanisms examined show that “no single spatiality should be privileged since they are co-implicated in complex ways, often with unexpected consequences for contentious politics” (Leitner et al. 2008, p.169). Through events such as Gentrificatour, the painting of the stripes, or the use of the empty lots in the Zona Cero, they have occupied and re-appropriate different spaces of opportunity in El Cabanyal reveal their emancipatory potential to show that no order is definite and as such, it can be questioned and disrupted. These instances therefore become properly political spaces that contribute to the making of “alternative mappings and cartographies of the thinkable, the perceptible, and, consequently, the possible and doable” (Swyngedouw 2007, p.72).

These agonistic urbanisms show the diverse aspirations of different groups and how they “collectively, think and organise the spatialities of their political practices” (Kaika and Karaliotas 2014, p.245). These spatialities and their different urban meanings can potentially have profound implications on how the renewal project of El Cabanyal should be, one that is inclusive and open to all the neighbours, including those who usually represent the invisible sectors of the city, transforming noise into voice. For many years, El Cabanyal was staged as a proper counter-hegemonic site where dissensus spatialised challenging the existing order, where the ochlos had the potential to stage their transformation into demos. If in the previous chapter we have seen how the neighbourhood became the space in the city that symbolised local resistance to top-down neoliberal oppressive forms of urban development, this chapter has shown El Cabanyal can became the place where an alternative model of urban regeneration was embraced, one where not only the market leads, but where everyone has a place in it. However, El Cabanyal now is facing a different threat, that of being gentrifying or turning into a ghetto, but at the same time has a unique opportunity to resist market-led regeneration and fight for an urban future that is open and inclusive of everyone.
The neighbours, local authorities, and planners have the chance to use Urban Planning as a mechanism of inclusion of residents of El Cabanyal and newcomers to the redevelopment of the maritime district, in line with locals image and desires.
7. AGONISTIC PRACTICES AND THE POSSIBILITIES AND IMPOSSIBILITIES OF DISSENSUS

7.1 Introduction

At the start of this thesis, the research aim was to contribute towards the understanding of the transformative potential of dissensus as an agent of change in the context of urban regeneration and, subsequently, to consider its implications in terms of urban governance and planning. In particular, this research considers how an agonistic approach to dissensus can help spatial practices engage with political and social urban realities opening up spaces where that are open and inclusive, geared towards the recognition and active creation of new political subjects, those otherwise left outside the current mainstream production of space and knowledge within the city.

Across its chapters, the thesis has explored how dissensus has shaped urban development and regeneration processes in El Cabanyal through different periods and their impact on those neighbours who have resisted and contested them.

The main focus of the exploration is on two different periods of the recent history of El Cabanyal and the city of Valencia. The first corresponds to the period under PP’s hegemony with Rita Barberá’s government. It was characterised by the staging of dissensus from those who resisted their neoliberal urban agenda that sought to erase El Cabanyal from the map. The second and more recent period covers from May 2015 to late 2017, during which the situation changed completely, and a new progressive left-wing government took over at both local and regional levels. In this period, we can see how new hegemonic discourses emerge, with new dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Identities and positionalities were reconfigured; some of those who were othered by the previous government were now emerging as the new hegemony and perpetuated exclusionary discourses on minoritised groups. The transformative potential of dissensus and its materialisation into agonistic spaces has been investigated by looking at resistance and contestation practices to hegemonic discourses and urban agendas and shifting identities during these two different political contexts in Valencia.

This conclusion revisits the strands of argument built up over the previous chapters and offers theoretically grounded insights supported by empirical evidence. The following sections address, in turn, the first three research aims explained in Chapter 1 by directly responding to the three research questions drawn together in this thesis: First, in what ways has dissensus shaped the socio-spatial configuration El Cabanyal throughout time? And how does this relate to ongoing processes of urban change in the neighbourhood? Second, how have discourses of dissensus contested hegemonic
agendas of urban regeneration processes in El Cabanyal? And third, how have narratives of dissensus materialised as agonistic spaces in El Cabanyal? In the last section, I address my fourth research aim reflecting on how the findings contribute to theory in terms of what insights and limitations they give to understand the potential of dissensus and agonism for planning theory and practices in the post-political context. Finally, the chapter also points to critical new avenues for research in the current and emerging post-consensus debates in urban practices.

**7.2 Research Findings**

**7.2.1 RQ1: How has dissensus shaped, throughout time, the socio-spatial configuration and processes of urban change in El Cabanyal?**

This thesis has uncovered the deep roots of the conflictual relationship between El Cabanyal and Valencia, between a city and its maritime periphery. In doing this, it has revealed how dissensus has transformed the socio-spatial configuration of the neighbourhood from its origin (Chapter 4) and has shown how this relationship necessarily spatialised in different ways through two key periods in El Cabanyal’s urban regeneration. The first period under the intense entrepreneurial urban redevelopment agenda of the neoliberal conservative government of Rita Barberà spans over seventeen years from 1998 until 2015. It is characterised by the struggle between neighbours of El Cabanyal against the tabula rasa plan that wanted to demolish and erase El Cabanyal from the map (Chapter 5). The second period under the so-called ‘municipalities of change’ covers from 2015 until 2017, was characterised by a more horizontal urban governance that would see neighbours not only as objects but also as active agents in the regeneration of El Cabanyal. The neighbourhood became the priority in the urban agenda as a political restitution gesture but was also used to inaugurate a new urban governance model (Chapter 6).

The historical perspective provided in Chapter 4 shows how the development of El Cabanyal was directly driven and shaped by the geopolitical interests of the city of Valencia to be at the centre of the maritime trade through different key historical periods, with the Port as the key element that shaped that relationship. The analysis of historical documents and cartography has proven that the relationship between Valencia and its seafront has always been a challenging one and that the discourses that link the physical distance between Valencia and the seafront to a political, economic, or even historical detachment have been used to serve the strategic interests of the city. Through the analysis of the historical cartography and different texts, the thesis has traversed key historical developments that led to the emergence of Valencia as a maritime city has proved that the interest in capitalising on the potential of the city for maritime trade and related commercial activities have been
driving the political, administrative and spatial development of El Cabanyal. In other words, the political and spatial boundaries of El Cabanyal were subverted to the economic and political interests of the City of Valencia. At the same time, the data in this chapter shows that El Cabanyal evolved into an independent and autonomous self-organised fishermen’s village with its own identity, and a distinctive social life, a result of how the barracas were built in close proximity, responding to the needs and lifestyle of its inhabitants. This way of living and socialising in has been a permanent feature of El Cabanyal, ingrained in the neighbourhood’s collective memory and the conception of Valencia as a different place, not only geographically and politically but also emotionally, enabling the emergence of an ‘us’ and ‘we’ perception of El Cabanyal and Valencia.

The empirical material in Chapter 5 provides an in-depth account of the ways in which the government of Barberà tried to impose their hegemonic vision of the City of Valencia as a maritime city and the tactics employed to advance its regeneration agenda. To achieve this ambition, it was imperative to transform its existing maritime landscape, aiming to positioning the capital city, Valencia, on the map of globally attractive and competitive cities. Evidence from the case shows how the efforts to put ‘Valencia on the map’ perpetuated the narratives around the challenging relation between Valencia and El Cabanyal, where El Cabanyal was seen as an impediment to fulfilling Valencia’s maritime aspirations, which was framed as the higher common good.

To achieve this supposedly higher common good, findings in Chapter 5 point to the lengths that the conservative local authorities went to to impose their hegemonic urban agenda in El Cabanyal. Their strategy was twofold: on the one hand, there was a deliberate manipulation of information and discourses, and on the other hand, there was an active degradation of the area. The PEPRI was an urban plan and, as such, was an instrument of the urban police to redesign, order and distribute activities, functions, and people in El Cabanyal (Rancière 1996; Dikeç 2007; Swyngedouw 2008; Baeten 2010). Drawings functioned as mechanisms to connect, disconnect, exclude or include the ‘ochlos’ (Dikeç 2007)(Boano & Talocci 2014). Indeed, the plans and documents in the PEPRI, in what they show and what they omit, used to reinforce the hegemonic narrative, were techniques of power in Foucauldian terms used to govern for the benefit of those who were part of the hegemony, the demos, ‘the majority’, and leaving out those outside who disagreed to the consensual pluralist view of the PEPRI as the only alternative to address all the ailments El Cabanyal was suffering from.

Furthermore, data from this chapter has shown how the degradation strategy employed by Rita’s government was twofold: discursive and material. The narratives around El Cabanyal as a marginalised and dangerous area were so effective that even when I arrived in 2015, they were quite entrenched. This was a constant complaint of many informants, but also, this was how the area had
been represented in local media outlets and constantly portrayed by authorities. The spatial degradation strategy was clear and intentional, as shown in Chapter 5. At the same time, this had two operational aspects: passive and active. On one side, there was a clear abandonment of the area and the denial of basic services. On the other hand, the administration started to buy properties and demolish them, painting them with the famous stripes to visualise their advancement in the area. This material degradation was the most visible way in which dissensus spatialised in El Cabanyal. While concentrated in the Zona Cero, it still reached the entire neighbourhood and its residents.

Every hegemonic order is divided between those who belong to the demos and those who belong to the ochlos. Findings in Chapter 6 show how a new form of hegemony was inaugurated with the change of municipal government. Identities were reconfigured: Salvem and those aligned with them became the demos, and alternative and minority collectives, Espai Veïnal, and the Spanish and Romanian Roma collectives, were still part of the ochlos but were now being othered by them. With this new recalibration of power dynamics in El Cabanyal, the spatial dimension of dissensus described in Chapter 5 was carried on with the new hegemonic order. Chapter 6 has shown that despite the possibilities that had opened after May 2015, the Zona Cero was still the essence of the conflict in El Cabanyal. The area with a higher concentration of empty plots, abandoned houses, walled or squatted, was also the focus of most complaints from those who were now part of the hegemonic order. For those aligned to mainstream movements like Salvem and the AAVV, who are now part of the hegemonic order, the occupation of empty houses, dirtiness and illegal scrapping used to claim “security as the normal technique of government” (Agamben 2005, p.14) suturing the space of the political by asking for policing (Rancière 1995; 1998) and exerting their rejection to the overall nuisance, late night parties and drug dealing issues that affected the area.

At the same time, the findings suggest that the Zona Cero represents a zone of exception (Agamben) where dissensus is spatialised in ordinary spaces of spaces in El Cabanyal. The proliferation of activities organised in occupied social centres and associations in the area was almost parallel with the mushrooming of gastro-bars and for-sale ads. Indeed, as seen in Figure 6.4 in Chapter 6, the Zona Cero concentrated the majority of squatted self-managed social centres that were open to all the neighbours or spaces like La Col·lectiva., and these places symbolised alternative ways of reimagining El Cabanyal’s future. Alternative collectives and minority groups envisioned El Cabanyal’s future in different ways to traditional Cartesian planning, demystified the technocracy of the urban regeneration processes, and questioned the authority of experts that the neighbours claimed. Roma families intensely used the empty space of the Zona Cero and its streets, contesting its prescribed and normative uses, and self-managed urban agriculture projects and collaborative consumer groups flourished in that central stripe that had been earmarked for demolition for so many years.
RQ2: How has dissensus contested hegemonic discourses and agendas of urban regeneration processes in El Cabanyal?

Not only urban plans, policies and legal frameworks have contributed to the implementation of hegemonic regeneration agendas in El Cabanyal, but also, as findings in Chapters Five and Six point to, the role of hegemonic discourses has been fundamental in ensuring hegemonic urban agendas were implemented and moved forward by those in power. While the actors have changed in the two main periods of this study, in essence, the discourses and the mechanisms employed to disseminate them have not. The discourses about dereliction and decay, together with narratives depicting El Cabanyal as a dangerous area, have, on the one hand, disseminated a narrative that has been instrumentalised as a driver for urban regeneration and, on the other hand, have elaborated a construction the ‘others’ as barriers to that regeneration, as I will explain in detail below.

Chapter 4 has given an account of how the main discourse that blamed El Cabanyal for being a barrier to the aspirations of Valencia no longer being a city living with its back to the Sea emerged during Franco’s authoritarian regime. El Cabanyal was a peripheral area, the ‘back’ of the city, so it did not matter. From then onwards, documents on the PGOU46 and PGOU66 show no intention to plan El Cabanyal as part of the city. Its spatial heritage or its social value was largely disregarded in the local authorities’ planning efforts, and Valencia’s interests were imposed over El Cabanyal. If before the Regime, planning efforts would see Paseo al Mar as a way to connect Valencia with El Cabanyal, considering El Cabanyal was the seafront of Valencia, after Franco came to power, Paseo al Mar would connect Valencia directly with the seafront. The first democratic plan inherited this rhetoric, the PGOU 88, whose main strategic driver was creating an image of ‘Valencia and the Sea’. Despite acknowledging El Cabanyal’s value and that there were other alternatives to connect Valencia with the seafront, it still was not clear how the conflict should be addressed.

Chapter 5 shows how Rita’s conservative government embraced two main discourses to impose their hegemonic urban vision for Valencia. First, they adopted a discourse around the impossibility of alternatives to the PEPRI. Taking advantage of the well-embedded narrative that Valencia was ‘giving its back to the sea’, for them, the only possibility to ‘open up Valencia to the sea’ was extending Blasco Ibanez through El Cabanyal. To justify this message, despite the PEPRI being a ‘reform and protection’ plan for El Cabanyal, the plan was in the interest of the city of Valencia. This meant that whatever happened to El Cabanyal and its neighbours was for a common and bigger good. This was symbolised by having the consultation of the PEPRI outside El Cabanyal, so all citizens of Valencia could attend and give their opinions (section 5.3.1). This discourse was also perpetuated through the documents and drawings of the plan, and was echoed publicly, was that
since there was nothing worth preserving in the area affected by the extension of Blasco Ibanez, the only alternative to address the dereliction of the neighbourhood and initiate its renovation was demolishing them. Indeed, Figures 5.12 and 5.13 show how these maps and plans were fundamental to advancing Rita’s neoliberal agenda. The documents portrayed the area affected by the PEPRI as not worth preserving. Therefore demolition was the only way forward.

The other discourse adopted by Rita’s hegemonic order was that no alternative to the PEPRI was possible, and those who opposed the common good were othered. They were treated like radicals. Statements from Rita Barberà and her councillors prove that in their eyes and discourses, Salvem and those who aligned with them don’t "belong to the demos; they are the Rancièrian’ part of no-part’” (Swyngedouw, 2014, p.127). Any contestation was foreclosed, even with violence if needed, like the blocking of Salvem of demolitions in April 2010. All those interviewees who were aligned with Salvem or the AAVV (a total of 18) and had been involved or affected directly by the struggle against the PEPRI shared this sentiment. They all mentioned how they did not matter, were never invited to any meetings, and the municipal government never engaged with them. They were excluded from any decisions that affected not only the neighbourhood but, in some cases, their homes and felt treated as violent and repressed as such. They were othered; they became the ‘part of no part’ because, for Rita’s hegemonic order, they were an impediment to the PEPRI to fulfil her ambitious vision of Valencia. Consequently, their rights as citizens of Valencia were suspended; they did not deserve basic services like cleaning, rubbish collection or upgrading of any type, as other neighbourhoods had.

Against these discourses, the analysis in section 5.4 shows the different contestations to these were channelled by Salvem. Beyond their legal strategy, Salvem’s resistance strategy was an articulation of practices and alliances at different scales and "levels of struggles so as to create a chain of equivalence" (Mouffe 2007, p.5) both with other collectives in the neighbourhood like the Squatters, other Salvem movements across the city and other international neighbourhood movements like Mukojima and Ottensen (Interviewee 11). This articulation was made upon allied groups that sought to challenge hegemonic power structures and discourses, contest their position in their order, and share a common goal of exposing a wrong and enacting equality. In the case of their coalition with the Squatter movement to stop demolitions, they both retained their own identity and positionalities since experiences and interests cannot be reduced to those of the other collective while working collectively towards that common goal, resisting the PEPRI.

The relevance of the spatial dimension of dissensus became visible through the way in which Salvem challenged hegemonic discourses in the streets of El Cabanyal. If Rita displayed her hegemonic
power with a specific aesthetic associated with negative discourses about El Cabanyal—the brown stripes that symbolised her advancement in the area, Salvem was countering this by displaying their own aesthetics of dissensus. They visualised their resistance spatially through banners with different slogans hung around the streets of El Cabanyal. Their aim was to disturb the aesthetic regime imposed by Rita’s hegemony and expose a wrong in the name of equality in an attempt to bring about a reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible.

Another way in which Salvem materialised dissensus was through art, transforming their homes into symbolic spaces where neighbours, visitors and artists shared their common vision of El Cabanyal as a valuable place. The annual art festival Portes Obertes initiated a process of deidentification of the engaged members of Salvem: their homes and their neighbourhood were not worthless, they were valuable pieces of art worthy of being both exposed, and they were not radicals or outcasts but citizens who would display their homes as such but also explain the works of arts exhibited in their homes. In other words, Portes Obertes started a process of subjectification of political identities contesting and reconfiguring their position in the hegemonic order. Visual and spatial practices establish an aesthetic regime that can disturb established aesthetics assumed to be legitimate and accepted (Rancière 2004). And this aesthetic regime orders the sensible so that both the houses of El Cabanyal—as objects and containers of art, and their value—which is worth preserving, can no longer appear separate from each other.

The finding of Chapter 5 points out how the struggle of Salvem went far beyond the urban tabula-rasa plan, as they claimed against oppression and injustice. All the strategies and practices that lead to different processes of deidentification, political subjectification and the staging a wrong proved to be an effective and very successful form of urban politics, reflected not only in the incredible support and recognition that they received but also in the fact that they managed to stop demolitions of houses, and contest the PEPRI and the discourses around it, and challenge a very powerful and authoritarian local government for over 17 years. The key lesson from this chapter is that sustained protests and resistance can lead to political and social wins that contest authoritarian urban governance. However, the challenge of Salvem was to overcome the aestheticisation of their struggle beyond merely resisting the PEPRI, as resistance as a main goal just reinforces the hegemonic order, leaves it untouched and forecloses any political space.

Chapter 6 shows that the complex socio-spatial dynamics of the neighbourhood were a direct result of Rita’s authoritarian forms of governance and hegemonic vision for Valencia. After her departure, the new hegemonic order established brought a new distribution of spaces and a new designation of who was qualified to decide upon that configuration. Salvem and those long-term neighbours aligned
to them, the mainstream actors, were now the new demos and were legitimised to decide how El Cabanyal’s regeneration would unfold and who would be included as neighbours of plain right. Espai Veïnal and the Romanian Roma were seen as newcomers with no right to decide because they did not belong.

The main discourses of mainstream groups followed, in essence, the same rhetoric as Rita’s government had used with them. For them, the priority was the material renovation and the economic reactivation of El Cabanyal to become a ‘normal’ neighbourhood again. That was the only possible alternative for El Cabanyal, and they had the right to decide upon this, as they had saved El Cabanyal from disappearing. In consequence, Espai Veïnal and the Roma collective were portrayed as barriers to the ‘urgently needed’ regeneration of the neighbourhood (section 6.2.2.). They were blamed for all the ailments El Cabanyal was suffering from. While this was not always clearly spelt out, comments referring to the Romanian Roma people not necessarily being all confined in El Cabanyal and that their situation was a city-wide problem prove that, in their eyes, they should be removed from El Cabanyal. With squatters of Espai Veïnal, they were less subtle demanding police intervention to end the illegal occupation of abandoned houses. The main narrative was that El Cabanyal was a dirty and unsafe place as a result of the practices of these groups. Thus the only possible solution was to increase the police and remove them from El Cabanyal. They were never referred to as neighbours and were often described as violent and radicals, causing nuisance and appropriating public space.

The findings in chapter 6 reveal that against these discourses, the same process of subjectification of political identities that Salvem experienced was now happening to alternative and minoritised collectives, who contested and reconfigured their position in the hegemonic order established by mainstream neighbours. First, with the occupation of houses in the Zona Cero and El Clot, they were actively fighting the socio-spatial decline of those areas at that moment that would otherwise be abandoned. With the occupation of houses came the intensive use of public space in echoing the traditional use of public space in El Cabanyal. This use of public space was seen in El Clot, which became a symbolic space for encounter where alternative visions for El Cabanyal could be spatialised. All these practices contested hegemonic discourses portraying the area as a ghetto, unsafe and dangerous. The Occupied Civic Centres established by the squatters and aligned Espai Veïnal were open to everyone and played an important role in providing services that were visible to collectives like the Roma children. Actions like the Gentrificatour represent a spatial visualisation of their challenge to the process of regeneration that was embraced by the authorities and mainstream collectives.
Espai Veïnal articulated their claims against exclusionary urban regeneration and gentrification through alliances with other squatter movements in Valencia and Millorem, who represented Spanish and Romanian Roma neighbours. And once again, the aim was to challenge hegemonic discourses, contest their position in their order, and share a common goal of exposing a wrong and enacting equality on common issues such as no tenure security, poor living conditions, and exclusion from decision-making spaces. In their alliance, the experiences and needs of each collective were unique, and they all kept their identities and positionalities while working together towards their shared goal, having the right to belong to El Cabanyal and decide how its regeneration should look in the future.

7.2.3  **RQ3 How have narratives of dissensus materialised as Agonistic Spaces at the scale of the micro-politics of people’s everyday life in El Cabanyal?**

I have defined agonistic urbanisms as the spatialisation of dissensus. This is the materialisation of the counter-hegemonic political practices of the ochlos within the threshold spaces (Stavrides 2006, p.177) of the post-political mechanisms of order, distribution, control, inclusion or exclusion. These spaces of opportunity challenge the logic of the consensual given political order. Articulating a chain of equivalence where a pluralistic diversity is enabled, agonistic urbanisms provide a platform where new spatial imaginaries can be envisioned, and identities can be reconfigured, a process of political subjectivation that challenges the mainstream development of neoliberal and post-neoliberal.

Agonistic urbanisms materialise in symbolic spaces, enacting dissensus and exposing a wrong that the post-political consensus wants to hide. It is constituted by multiple distinctive socio-spatial practices of those “whose voices are silenced in the post-political hegemony ”(Mouffe 2007, p.5). These spaces are the materialising alternatives to the post-political city. The spatialisation of dissensus into potential agonistic urbanisms has been explored in Chapter 6. The last section of the chapter has looked at how potential agonistic urbanisms have manifested in public space in El Cabanyal by those who are the new ochlos. One of the main findings points out that agonistic urbanisms materialise in spaces that are suspended or undefined, spaces of exception. El Clot does not legally exist as an urban space, as it is outside planning frameworks and the empty lots that resulted from the demolitions under Rita’s hegemonic rule, despite being private spaces, have been incorporated as public space in the Zona Cero. Both spaces are used intensely in different ways, contravening master planning and legal frameworks but also assuming and accepting the uses and meanings of public space in El Cabanyal.

But at the same time, the analysis of these spaces has revealed marked shifts of power between different actors, mainstream neighbours and alternative groups, therefore providing interesting material for analysing (realised and potential) agonistic urban spaces. The first space analysed, in the Zona Cero, has looked and symbolic uses of space and concrete and material use and appropriation.
of public space by minoritised groups and contested by mainstream groups. The second space I have explored is El Clot, where I show how the leftover space has been transformed by the neighbours of El Bloc de Portuaris and the Cabanyal Horta collective, contesting its marginal condition and exclusion from the local planning frameworks.

The first case shows how, despite the municipal government having an open and horizontal way of understanding and exercising urban governance, the top-down initiative to erase the brown stripes as a way of erasing Rita’s authoritarian hegemony and placing emphasis on the neighbours as protagonists of this symbolic act of leaving the stigmatisation of El Cabanyal behind was not a successful event compared to the collective event organised and facilitated by Espai Veïnal and the CSOA La Fusteria. This event was materialised as a truly transversal, open and inclusive space where all neighbours, which included themselves and the Roma families that lived nearby, could take part in that symbolic act of putting the past behind. From its inception to its spatialisation, this event represented a different type of political claim, an alternative understanding of who has the right to erase the stigma of the past and who can decide on the future of El Cabanyal. During the time that event lasted, I argue that the space around la Fusteria was an instance or a moment where dissensus is spatialised through different agonistic practices. First, the openness of the event reflects an adversarial understanding towards other collectives. Second, they contest their given position in the newly established hegemonic order and claim their right to be included as neighbours in the collective construction of El Cabanyal’s future and redesign socially and spatially the symbolic space they enabled, which represents an alternative to the one organised by the authorities.

The same can be said of how public space is used by minority Roma groups in the Zona Cero. On the one hand, their use of the leftover voids of the empty lots incorporated as an extension of the socialising space streets challenges their conception as leftover residual spaces, materialising them as perceived public space. On the other hand, their intensive use of the public space in the Zona Cero contests normalised discourses that place them as agents of dereliction. The Zona Cero goes beyond the consensual givenness of the area as a dangerous no-go zone, with children playing in the empty lots and adults occupying the streets for social purposes, just like mainstream neighbours are allowed. As they give life and transform the streets of the Zona Cero into spaces for collective gatherings and socialising, they demand their right to be included as neighbours in the permitted uses of public space that were part of the imaginary of El Cabanyal. These everyday lived spaces represent the contestation to prescribed uses of space, thus transforming them into Mouffe’s symbolic space.

In moving to El Clot, the analysis shows that in both instances examined, the uses of public space of those who do not belong to the demos— the Spanish Roma who live there and the self-managed
collective of Cabanyal Horta– have contested the discourses that define El Clot as a ‘ghetto within the ghetto’ and exposed a wrong in the name of equality in doing so. The wrong is the abandonment of the area outside legal planning frameworks that would provide them with basic living conditions that they lack. In the case of the neighbours of El Clot, they have reused car seats as benches where they can socialise and have turned the leftover space in front of them into an improvised football field where their children can play. The symbolism of these spatial practices confronted together, side by side, shows two different ways of understanding the use and planning of public space in El Cabanyal. One is planned, surveyed and controlled, accessible only to those who pay or are part of the order: the other is an informal sports playground were there are no rules on how it should be used or what games and uses can take place in them. Their claim for a public space with material dignity has been articulated with other groups like Espai Veïnal and different architects, academics and activists.

Cabanyal Horta symbolises an agonistic urbanism in all its dimensions. First, it emerged within a new hegemonic order, occupying a space in its cracks. They were not radicals or violent people doing illegal or unpleasant spatial practices, but inclusive and productive ones. Second, despite being a self-managed collective defying regulatory uses of space by occupying an empty lot that does not belong to them outside regulatory planning frameworks, their relationship with the authorities is adversarial rather than conflictual. This agonistic approach to their relationship with authorities has enabled a successful outcome, as they negotiated with them their right to use El Clot as a co-created public space. The authorities had not planned an urban gardening project there but have allowed –for now– the continuation of their spatial practices. This has been intertwined with a very successful articulation of their claims and demands with other collectives both at the local and city scales to claim for a public space in El Clot, one that is used, conceived and created by them, that does not need a top-down urban plan to guide its design. In other words, it is a common symbolic space that is owned and managed collectively that has become a political project. The material outcome of this project is a space that has been co-designed incrementally in an agonistic fashion with different people from different collectives and backgrounds and elaborating visions of how they would like the space to look in the future. A public space that articulates dissent product of the passions of "insurgent architects". (Swyngedouw 2011c, p.10) Who design it "in the widest possible sense of the term" while working for a shared vision and personal interests.

These examples show that regulated planning frameworks have very little space to allow for the emergence of agonistic urbanisms. However, still, they find their own opportunities to emerge through the contradictions and cracks of those same frameworks. By taking and occupying spaces of opportunity within these rigid frameworks of the post-political hegemonic order, such as unregulated
or leftover spaces, self-managed autonomous co-design of public spaces can challenge and contest their prescribed uses and meanings dictated by the hegemonic order. They turn these otherwise abandoned spaces into vibrant enclaves full of people and activities, creating alternatives for the future of El Cabanyal that are not dictated by the of the market but owned and managed by its neighbours.

Agonistic Urbanisms spatialise dissensus and have shaped El Cabanyal, but their spatiality has also been rendered by the urban space of El Cabanyal, shaping people’s needs and desires. This affective dimension is unpredictable and hence cannot be mapped or planned by the local authorities or the planners, as the analysis of the participatory process of Va Cabanyal in section 6.4. The examples presented and analysed as agonistic spaces are a clear example of how these desires and passions for a better place can trigger political actions at the scale of the micro-politics of everyday life in El Cabanyal, constituting new subjectivities (Mouffe 2014) while refusing "to produce subjects that can be captured" (Secor et al. 2008, p.502) and are therefore excluded by ‘Post-political’ governance arrangements from El Cabanya’s future regeneration. Given the crucial role of the affective in triggering processes of political subjectivation, if we want to enable a truly democratic and inclusive city, we must understand how they spatialise in the space of the city and people’s subjectivity. At the same time, it is true that people’s desires and motivations, or the obscure mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion embedded in urban plans and documents, are too abstract to be included in the topographic planning and design of our cities and that, as would be the most challenging design task of all. The challenge is twofold. First, we need to understand how we can move agonistic urbanism beyond the micropolitics of the neighbourhood and articulate the expansion of these agonistic spaces into wider scales to enable the creation of a counterhegemony political project in a Mouffian understanding of politics. Second, it is difficult to ensure, even at present, that these located claims and resistances will not end up finally absorbed and co-opted by the managerial webs of ‘Post-political’ urban governance arrangements, thus facing new threats of gentrification in the area (Novy & Colomb 2013) or depoliticising them completely.

7.3 Theoretical contributions

This research has adopted a theoretical framework that draws together theory from political philosophy with urban planning and urban studies, combining concepts such us post-political, dissensus, agonistic planning and urban regeneration with the aim to consider the socio spatial impacts of resisting urban regeneration in a specific place. One of the key contributions of this study is a spatial reading of these concepts. These insights are specifically related to the central frameworks integrated throughout this thesis: the post political city and hegemonic urban governance
mechanisms, the potential of dissensus to shape urban change and the creation of agonistic spaces that can inform an alternative, counter-hegemonic approach to urban planning practice.

Across its chapters, the thesis explained how dissensus has shaped urban development and regeneration processes in El Cabanyal from a spatial perspective and how this has affected to those who have resisted hegemonic urban dynamics, and their assigned position in that space. Rather than a violent rupture, this research has contributed to the understanding of dissensus as an agent of design (Rancière 2001, p.6 (Dikeç 2007, p.3) and critical engagement, that has the potential of being source of creativity and innovative practices (Rancière 2001; Žižek 2002; Mouffe 2005a; Baeten 2007; Swyngedouw 2008; 2010; Swyngedouw 2011c; Agamben 2014b). The spatial analysis of dissensus in Cabanyal contributes to an understanding of “how roles and functions are distributed within that space and who is legitimated to be part of that space.” (Rancière 2003, p.201). It was also provided valuable insights into the discursive and material processes of de-identification and political subjectification of those who are excluded from the regeneration processes of El Cabanyal in their claims for their essential rights as citizens, to be included. They enact as a new political subject on the premises of equality (Rancière 1996, p.373), challenging the hegemonic order. (Rancière 2000; Swyngedouw 2011b; 2014b; Ploeger 2017). Aligned with Swyngedouw (2014a) and Žižek (2002), this research has shown that resistance as an ultimate goal will not challenge the hegemonic order and will be either absorbed into the hegemonic order (Swyngedouw 2009; McClymont 2011), or repressed (Swyngedouw 2009; 2011a).

This research has contributed to a better understanding of the spatiality of dissensus as a political practice and how space plays a crucial part in processes of political subjectification that contests the consensual given order and has the potential to question the establish hegemonic status quo it matters. The spatialisation of dissensus is process through which the relationship between the visible and the sayable, the relation between words and bodies (RanciÈre 2000, p.115) is reconfigured. It is in and through space that political subjects transcend the mere staging of dissensus as a form of resistance, towards their potentiality of creating agonistic urbanisms, those properly political spaces (Rancière 1999; Žižek 1999; Swyngedouw 2009; Mouffe 2014) capable of reshaping the hegemonic Cartesian planning of our cities and contest wider hierarchies and geometries of power (Massey 2005 quoted in Fluri 2013) Swyngedouw, 2007).

The Spatiality of dissensus therefore plays a crucial role in shaping and contesting public spaces, (Massey 1995; Mouffe 2007; Kaika and Karaliotas 2016). These spatialities unfold through a multiplicity of material and discursive practices to stage the theatrical appropriation public spaces, to assert and stage a claim, enact equality, become visible, disrupt the perceptible, and break through the
'partition' of the sensible (Rancière 2007; Swyngedouw 2011b). Practices of dissensus occupy and re- appropriate different spaces of opportunity revealing their emancipatory potential to show that no order is definite (Stavrides 2006; Stavrides 2009a) and as such, it can be questioned and disrupted. These thesis has shown how agonistic spaces of dissensus can become properly political spaces that contribute to the making alternative ways of thinking, perceiving, and thus, possibilities of designing the post-political city (Swyngedouw 2007; Fezer 2010). The practices and instances explored in Chapters 5 and 6 had shown that in any process of political subjectification, no matter the scale or impact, no particular spatiality should be privileged over others, as they are all intricately interconnected, often resulting in unanticipated ramifications for urban conflicts and their contentious politics (Leitner et al. 2008; Kaika and Karaliotas 2016)

Chapter 6 has shown the significance of embracing an agonistic approach to dissensus for spatial disciplines, one where the identification of ‘us/them’ is an adversarial one, not amongst enemies, (Mouffe 2005a, p.22) with shared ethico-political values of “liberty and equality for all” that legitimise it and the need for institutions to inscribe these” (2013, p.7). For agonistic practices to have the potentiality to challenge the hegemonic order, they need to establish a network of ‘equivalence’ (Mouffe 2005a; Purecell 2009; Bond 2011) with other adversaries and allies, at different scales. In doing so, their different desires and needs bring them to work in coalition in which every actor, with individual aspirations, and work together in a collective action to obtain their own benefit and achieve their common goals. The recognition of this difference can deepen the bonds of solidarity between the adversaries and open up those identities to a new reconfiguration. The recognition of difference is not opposite to the collective as it creates a sense of solidarity, which is grounded not to what they have in common, but to what they aspire in common (Frediani & Boano 2012.). In doing so, the material outcomes of agonistic urbanism materialise into Mouffe’s symbolic public space and articulates dissent as a product of their passions.

This study also contributes to highlight the crucial role of the affective dimension of dissensus to spark political action (Jones 2014b; Mouffe 2014). This study has shown how spatial practices must understand the crucial role that desires and aspirations have in motivating political actions and constituting subjectivities. Weather they are tracing people’s desires and motivations or unveiling obscure mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, they are too abstract to be included in the topographic planning and design of our cities, and the most relevant and challenging design task. However, as Secor points out, the fact that they are abstract, does not mean they are not real, that they do not exist. Furthermore, these spatialities, will be, or potentially not be, but will always exist in one form or another.
The empirical materials in Chapters 5 and 6 has contributed to the understanding of spatial disciplines as tools of the post-political city, to order, control and assign places functions and meanings in the hegemonic order and has shown how relevant it is for spatial practices to open up agonistic spaces to ensure no one is left behind. Processes like Va Cabanyal show that, despite their ‘good intentions’ they are not inclusive of those other sensitivities and identities whose voices are never heard. This thesis contributes on the wider debates on the need to embrace agonism in planning theory and practice to bridge the gap amongst them and deal better with conflict in our cities (Hillier 2001; 2002; Ploger 2004; Bäcklund and Mäntysalo 2010; Bond 2011; McClymont 2011; Munthe-Kaas 2015; Rannila and Loivaranta 2015; Ploger 2017; McAuliffe and Rogers 2018; Kühn 2021).

These research has tried to address the literature gaps that I identified in the literature on Valencia and urban generation searching for a common-ground between studies focusing on Urban Planning and Planning History in Valencia and El Cabanyal (Giménez Baldrés 1995; Boira i Maiques 1997; Sanchís Pallarés 1997; Simón 1998; Boira i Maiques 2003a; Rosselló Verger 2004; Sanchís Pallarés 2005; Sanchís Pallarés 2009; Serra Desfilis 2009; Simó Terol 2013; Herrero García 2016b; Serra Desfilis 2017b), Urban governance and Urban policies related to neoliberal urban agendas (Prytherch 2003a; Prytherch 2003b; Prytherch and Huntoon 2005; Gaja i Díaz 2006a; Gaja i Díaz 2006b; Prytherch 2006; Prytherch and Boira i Maiques 2009; Tarazona Vento 2013; Gaja i Díaz 2015; Tarazona Vento 2017b), and literature on social movements their contestation to neoliberal urban agendas. (Santamarina Campos 2008b; Santamarina Campos 2014b; Santamarina Campos and Mompó 2018; Santamarina Campos and Mompó 2020; Santamarina and Mompó 2021). What is missing is research on the spatial dimension of these aspects of urban change in El Cabanyal and Valencia.

While Valencia’s transformation garnered widespread recognition, it also exposed the pitfalls of neoliberal urban development, as a of failure of our democratic political system (Rancière 1999; Žižek 1999; Mouffe 2000b; Crouch 2004; Mouffe 2005b; Rancière 2005; Rancière 2007; Žižek 2008a; 2008b; Rancière 2009a; Mouffe 2010). Based on major urban transformation projects and mega events, the spectacularisation of the city’s seafront contrasted with the dereliction and abandonment that El Cabanyal was subject to. The PEPRI would only benefit businesses and elites and exclude middle-class residents and minoritised groups from any benefits it could have provided (Swyngedouw et al. 2002; Fainstein 2009). While research has been done into the spatial transformation of Valencia and the impact of mega-events, the spatial impact of this urban agenda at the local scale, on the neighbourhoods has not been addressed. In line with this, this research has
situated the PEPRI in this context of entrepreneurial urban development as a tool to ensure the successful economic restructuring of the region.

Finally, the empirical material served to show how deeply enmeshed the processes of urban social, spatial, and political change in El Cabanyal are to the area’s historical specificity and wider historical processes of urban transformation in Valencia. The spatial approach into the historical research taken in this thesis shows the importance of contextualising and tracing the origin of dissensus in order to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of intertwined dynamics of co-constitution between the city and the neighbourhood and between the neighborhood and the conflict.

7.4 Limitations and future avenues of research

The findings of this research suggest several interesting topics for further development. I have been particularly attracted by embracing agonistic planning theory and more empirical research should be done to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Analysing and unpacking how agonistic can be embedded in spatial practices is crucial to ensure urban processes are democratic and inclusive. More than not, any processes of urban change results in a war between us and them, as we have seen with the implementation of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods in London or the Superblocks in Barcelona. It is crucial that we move from theory to the concrete to understand how conflicting antagonistic potions can turn into adversarial negotiations that lead a transformation of the urban that is shared and accepted. Another interesting avenue for future research directly related to the first one is exploring how minoristised and often marginal people experience processes of urban regeneration and understand how their knowledge can be used in these processes. In the case of El Cabanyal, this would be quite relevant, if not urgent, attending to the latest political changes at City Council. A new conservative Mayor has been elected, who look at Rita Barberà as a reference.

Having analysed the PEPRI in the context of the entrepreneurial hegemonic agenda, a potential future avenue of research would be addressing the gap identified in relation to Valencia in terms of understanding how this agenda of neoliberal urban development and mega events has transformed peripheral neighbours. Further research into the spatial impacts of these neoliberal policies at smaller scales, would allow to understand if these have generated issues of decay, displacement, or gentrification.

Having analysed how potential processes of gentrification or touristification were emerging in El Cabanyal, it seems appropriate that an in-depth study into these dynamics is done, to understand processes of neighbourhoods change and how different neighbours are affected. In relation to this, it
would be interesting to look at other similar cases in Valencia and other Spanish cities, and understand how we can mitigate the impacts of these processes.

Lastly, in-depth research of how agonistic urbanisms like Cabanyal Horta expand and articulate their claims, how they question the expert role of the architected, the planner or the designer. It would be crucial to research those spaces that have potential to be alternatives to hegemonic neoliberal production of space in terms of their materiality and design. Linked to this would be to explore how collective management of public spaces can allow for a democratic and inclusive design of the later.

The limitations of this research stem precisely on how inclusive or not I have been. Beyond issues of representative samples, I was interested in listening to as many voices as I could, and that was something that I did not manage to do. Another limitation has been researching an ongoing process that did not allow me to take much distance to reflect.
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