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Claimed spaces of participation and their role in strengthening community resilience and resistance

Nicolina Kirby^a and Marina Pera^b

^aResearch Institute for Sustainability; ^bUniversität Oberta de Catalunya

ABSTRACT

Claimed spaces of participation can enable collective action to address complex urban challenges societies are facing. In this article, we elaborate on the extent to which these spaces foster community resilience while also mobilizing resistance. Taking into account different dimensions of community resilience, we analyze how these are strengthened through claimed spaces and how this impact relates to resistance. Instead of regarding community resilience and resistance as two opposing concepts, we argue for a complementary relationship between the two. By analyzing nine different claimed spaces in Barcelona, we show how the concepts can even be considered mutually reinforcing.

KEYWORDS

Claimed spaces;
participation; community
resilience; resistance;
Barcelona

Introduction

Urban environments are increasingly characterized by complex social, environmental, and economic challenges requiring new approaches to community engagement. As societies face pressures from the polycrisis—including climate change, social divisions, and systemic transformations—traditional mechanisms of participation have proven insufficient in addressing these challenges: they frequently exclude marginalized voices and reproduce existing power asymmetries (Dryzek et al., 2019; Mouffe, 2008; Niemeyer, 2013). Social movements can create participatory spaces to address them. Through the concept of community resilience, the collective ability of communities to cope with, transform and thrive in times of change and uncertainty (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Magis, 2010; Norris et al., 2008), we can assess how communities respond to and navigate such challenging environments. By applying an indicator-based multi-dimensional assessment framework, this paper aims to explore how claimed spaces of participation can contribute to community resilience. Further, we elaborate on the extent to which resistance, understood as intentional acts of opposition against dominant power structures ranging from acts of false compliance to organized collective action (Asara, 2017; Scott, 1989), is mobilized in these spaces and how this relates back to community resilience.

While participation enables democratic engagement, traditional top-down approaches in “invited” spaces of participation sometimes fail to capture the nuanced ways in which communities negotiate power, create meaning, and develop collective capacities (Cornwall, 2002). Bottom-up approaches, or “claimed” spaces of participation, can range from social movements and neighborhood initiatives to self-managed cultural centers. The distinction between these two types of engagement highlights how citizens actively create and negotiate the boundaries of spaces for collective action beyond institutionally prescribed frameworks. Drawing on Gaventa (2006) and Cornwall (2002), we adopt a Lefebvre (1991) conception of “space.” In this perspective, “space” is understood in both physical and socio-political terms: as concrete, situated places where people gather, and as arenas of negotiation in which

CONTACT Nicolina Kirby ✉ Nicolina.kirby@rifs-potsdam.de  Research Institute for Sustainability, GFZ, Berliner Str. 130, Potsdam 14467, Germany.

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power relations, norms, and practices are contested and co-produced. Thus, claimed spaces are simultaneously material settings and sites for the production of political meaning. They often operate as sites of resistance that contest the prevailing order by prefiguring and enacting alternative socio-political practices (Asara, 2017) or by direct opposition through confrontational collective action such as occupations and protests (Schouw Iversen, 2022).

While participatory spaces and collective action are increasingly understood as enablers of community resilience (Arvanitis et al., 2023; Kirby et al., 2025; Schauppenlehner-Kloyber & Penker, 2016), we lack knowledge on the mechanisms and characteristics through which these spaces become enablers. The concept of community resilience has evolved significantly from its understanding as persistence to a more transformative perspective that emphasizes proactive capacity-building and systemic change. Resilient communities develop the ability to “bounce forward,” anticipating and actively reshaping the structures producing vulnerability (Carmen et al., 2022; Moghadas et al., 2022). This understanding positions collective agency, social capital, and structural transformation as fundamental mechanisms. In the context of community resilience, social capital, understood as the networks, norms of reciprocity and trust facilitating collective action within and between communities (Putnam, 2000), has been described as an important enabling resource to promote close relationships as well as interconnectedness with people from other social groups, and a sense of community (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Carmen et al., 2022). Drawing on case studies from Barcelona, we seek to assess how certain participatory spaces contribute to community resilience. We thereby build on existing research, positioning claimed spaces as an enabler of community resilience, by elaborating on the mechanisms and structural and relational similarities fostering this. We do so by applying a multi-dimensional indicator-based assessment framework, as is often done in resilience assessment literature (Cutter et al., 2008; Jacinto et al., 2020; Saja et al., 2018). We apply a framework proposed by Kirby (2026) which operationalizes resilience dimensions through specific categories and indicators, focusing on how these may be strengthened through participation. Considering individual, social, governance, economic, and infrastructural dimensions, this research aims to discover key characteristics shared by participatory spaces to foster community resilience. By having a transformative understanding of community resilience, we argue that claimed spaces represent critical sites where *resistance* and *community resilience* intersect. These spaces create opportunities to reimagine social relations, challenge dominant power structures, and develop collective capacities for navigating complex societal transformations.

Hence, the central research questions guiding this article are: How do experiences within participatory claimed spaces contribute to promoting community resilience across different dimensions? What structural and relational characteristics do these spaces share? And how might the dynamics of resistance and resilience mutually reinforce and strengthen each other? To answer these questions, we will give an overview of the theoretical background on claimed spaces, participation, community resilience and resistance, as well as introduce the framework applied in this paper to assess community resilience. Nine claimed spaces are then analyzed according to their impact on different dimensions of community resilience and the way they mobilize resistance. Lastly, commonalities amongst the spaces and the relationship between resistance and community resilience are discussed.

Spaces of participation, community resilience and resistance: Theoretical background and literature discussion

Claimed versus invited spaces of participation

Claimed spaces of participation were introduced as a opposed to *invited* spaces of participation, relating to dimensions of power within a participatory setting (Gaventa, 2006). Spaces of participation can be defined on a continuum from closed to invited to claimed, describing whether a space is not open for public participation but reserved for bureaucrats or elected representatives; created by governing entities to invite the public to participate in a certain manner; or created autonomously

by social movements or community associations (Gaventa, 2006). These spaces open for participation have also been described as top-down and bottom-up participation. Top-down participatory processes, where decision-makers invite citizens to provide input on specific issues, have been described both as means of maintaining hegemony and as opportunities to develop public spheres for engagement (Cornwall, 2002; Habermas, 1984). Spheres of public engagement are understood as discursive arenas wherein individuals deliberate on matters of common concern (Fraser, 1990; Habermas, 1984). Citizens are not a homogenous public due to critical differences in power, positionality and access but heterogenous, differentiated by class, gender, ethnicity, legal status, disability, and age, shaping their capacity to participate in these spaces (Young, 1990).¹ Also termed “governance-driven democratization” (GDD), such processes like citizen assemblies offer democratic potential through increased participation and public representation (Warren, 2009), yet risk citizen placation when they lack real impact and inherently limit citizen influence since the creators of the participatory spaces retain the ultimate power (Bua & Bussu, 2021; Cornwall, 2002).

In claimed spaces, citizens create the space deciding on its scope and content (Gaventa, 2006). These spaces are not necessarily created as a means to enhance democratic virtues but as a practice located within “actual political, social, cultural and historical particularities” (Cornwall, 2002, p. 29). In practice, this means that these spaces can be demonstrations and petitions as well as localized places for people to “gather to debate, discuss and resist, outside of the institutionalised policy arenas” (Gaventa, 2006, p. 27). However, if such spaces are institutionally linked or have a scope aiming to embed citizen participation within existing institutions, Bua and Bussu (2021) have described them as “democracy driven governance” (DDG) processes. DDG is bottom-up processes employing routinized procedures for participation such as social movements fighting for randomly selected citizen climate assemblies (Bua & Bussu, 2021). Claimed spaces have been examined empirically across diverse urban contexts. Urban community gardens have been studied as sites of ecological activism as well as community resilience (Bródy et al., 2018; Camps-Calvet et al., 2015). Community-managed cultural centers have been analyzed as civic co-management of public assets (Alcaide Manthey, 2024; Pera, 2020; Pera & Bianchi, 2021). Social movement squats have been studied as spaces of prefigurative politics (Cattaneo & Martínez, 2014). Neighborhood platforms like Barcelona’s PAH have been examined as claimed spaces generating political agency (Eizaguirre & Parés, 2019). Collectively, this literature confirms the role of claimed spaces as arenas for political contestation as well as material infrastructure.

The claimed spaces in this study are physical, place-based urban spaces, specifically community managed cultural centers, urban community gardens, and an autonomous open space. While claimed spaces can also operate digitally or through social networks (Earl & Kimport, 2011), our analysis focuses on spatially rooted spaces due to their role in neighborhood-level community building (Colding et al., 2021; Sampson, 2012).

The potential impact of participation on community resilience

To discuss whether and how claimed spaces could impact community resilience, we need to briefly elaborate on what community resilience means. Resilience conceptualizations have developed a lot since being defined as the “ability ... to absorb changes of state variables, driving variables, and parameters, and still persist” (Holling, 1973, p. 17). Many social understandings of resilience have moved toward more pro-active and transformative understandings, i.e., from persistence to adaptability and transformability.

While all three are relevant components of resilience, transformability is gaining importance (Brown, 2014; Folke et al., 2010). Instead of arguing that the concept is inherently conservative, resilience is increasingly understood as the capacity to transform in periods of change (Bahadur & Tanner, 2014; Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). While adaptation describes responses to changes, transformability anticipates them and aims at shifting current paradigms (Brown, 2014; Carmen et al., 2022; Edwards & Wiseman, 2011). By seeking paradigm shifts, transformative resilience takes into account

politics and power to create new structures, not in reaction to a disaster but in anticipation of one, to create a more sustainable state of being. Instead of “bouncing back” the aim is to “bounce forward” (Carmen et al., 2022; Moghadas et al., 2022). Resilience can be specific, focusing on certain threats, or more general (Khalili et al., 2015; Norris et al., 2008). If resilience is understood as the ability to thrive in times of change and uncertainty, it is usually understood more generally as dealing with large-scale socio-ecological transformations, e.g., in the context of the polycrisis (Berkes & Ross, 2013; Steiner et al., 2016).

However, this does not mean that communities should adapt to the fact that they are becoming more unequal or exposed to climate risks; rather, that communities should be empowered and united to fight for structural changes and make political demands. Hence, empowerment, agency, and self-organization are examples of indicators for resilience (Berkes & Ross, 2013). Conditions for participation within a community determine the extent to which empowerment is possible (Siddiquee & Kagan, 2006). Empowerment connects individual well-being with social structure (Zimmerman, 2000), as the process enabling individuals or communities to gain control through the acquisition of new resources to establish new contexts enhancing their well-being (Rappaport, 1984). If communities seek empowerment, it requires a collective awareness of a common cause, group solidarity, and critical understanding of each individual about the external constraints and conditions shaping their lives (Siddiquee & Kagan, 2006). Hence, empowerment can be employed strategically and flourish through participation and by developing a collective identity to build necessary alliances.

The concept of “community” has traditionally been understood in spatial terms (Tönnies, 1887). While networks built on shared interests and practices beyond spatial boundaries are increasingly emphasized as community foundations (Putnam, 2000; Wellman, 2001), spatial proximity—especially in neighborhoods—is key to fostering place-based social connections, facilitating local community building, and increasing social capital (Sampson, 2012). Neighborhoods as social units often directly impact life trajectories. Hence, we stress the importance of physical spaces in the urban realm to foster community building, civic engagement, and social cohesion (Anderson, 2004). “Community” in this article is understood as a spatially and socially bound group within a city or neighborhood.

Conceptualizations of community resilience integrate approaches looking at individual actors within systems as well as social structures (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013; Obrist et al., 2010). Resilient communities are described as being able to utilize resources, adapt to challenges, and thrive amidst continuous change and crises (Revell & Dinnie, 2020), encompassing responsive and proactive measures. As a framework, the concept explores how communities can respond to and transform when facing social, environmental, and economic changes.

Many factors impact community resilience, driving a growing body of research that aims to understand what can strengthen it. Participation is often discussed as a core characteristic of it (Carabine & Wilkinson, 2016) and also as an enhancing factor (Arvanitis et al., 2023; Rahman & Ghosh, 2016). We can find research on the positive impact of bottom-up participation through initiatives and collective action on community resilience (Arvanitis et al., 2023; Kirby et al., 2025; Schuppenlehner-Kloyber & Penker, 2016), as well as on the positive impact of community-based bottom-up responses in times of crisis (Xu et al., 2024). They conclude that bottom-up participation, community engagement, self-organization, and collective action are crucial for community resilience but that more extensive research on the relationship between participation and resilience is needed (Mahajan et al., 2022).

Community resilience assessment framework

Multi-dimensional indicator-based frameworks for assessing community resilience are well established in the literature on resilience (e.g., Cutter et al., 2008; Jacinto et al., 2020; Norris et al., 2008; Saja et al., 2018). These typically distinguish between different dimensions like individual, social, or economic, recognizing that resilience is not a singular characteristic but emerges from the interplay of various capacities across different scales (e.g., Berkes & Ross, 2013; Obrist et al., 2010). Building on this tradition, we will apply an indicator-based assessment framework to examine community

resilience proposed by Kirby (2026) (Figure 1). This framework operationalizes resilience across five interdependent dimensions: individual, social, governance, economic, and infrastructural/natural. Particularly, we will focus on the impact of participation on these different dimensions by employing community resilience as a framework to foster transformation and adaptation. The framework's dimensions consist of a set of categories and indicators to help assess community resilience. This framework builds on and synthesizes established framework approaches (among others: Jacinto et al., 2020; Khalili et al., 2015; Norris et al., 2008; Saja et al., 2018) while extending them to explicitly incorporate participatory dynamics and a proactive transformative approach (Kirby, 2026, p. 81). It understands community resilience as a social dynamic.

The *individual dimension* describes the human capital of actors within a community, characterized by coping, adaptive, and transformative individual capacities (Cinderby et al., 2016). Coping capacities describe the available personal resources to deal with risks, change, or disaster (e.g., Cutter et al., 2008; Khalili et al., 2015). Adaptive capacities describe a person's flexibility and ability to adapt (e.g., Bahadur et al., 2013), while transformative capacities refer to the ability to anticipate future need for change as well as the ability to transform beyond mere adaptation (e.g., Revell & Dinnie, 2020; Wolfram, 2016). The *social dimension* focuses on the community as a collective (Saja et al., 2018). Social structure describes the composition and diversity of a community (Blau, 1977), social capital refers to its relationships and networks (e.g., Aldrich & Meyer, 2015), and social mechanisms explain *how* the community functions—such as collaboration or inclusivity (e.g., Quinlan et al., 2016; Saja et al., 2018). Social capital is often discussed as a core component of community resilience (e.g., Aldrich & Meyer, 2015), especially regarding the role of support networks (e.g., Idziorek, 2025), a sense of community (e.g., Steiner et al., 2016), and interconnectedness between social groups (e.g., Berkes & Ross, 2013). The *governance dimension* is characterized by community governance and the transformative capacity of governing actors. They are described through engagement across different levels of governance, including civil society, as well as a commitment of governing actors to more sustainability (e.g., Bahadur & Tanner, 2014; Wolfram, 2016). The *economic dimension* evaluates characteristics such as economic capital, a diverse local economy, or community infrastructure (e.g., Berkes & Ross, 2013; Steiner et al., 2016). It describes structural conditions for community resilience and intersects with aspects of social structure. These four dimensions assess community resilience as

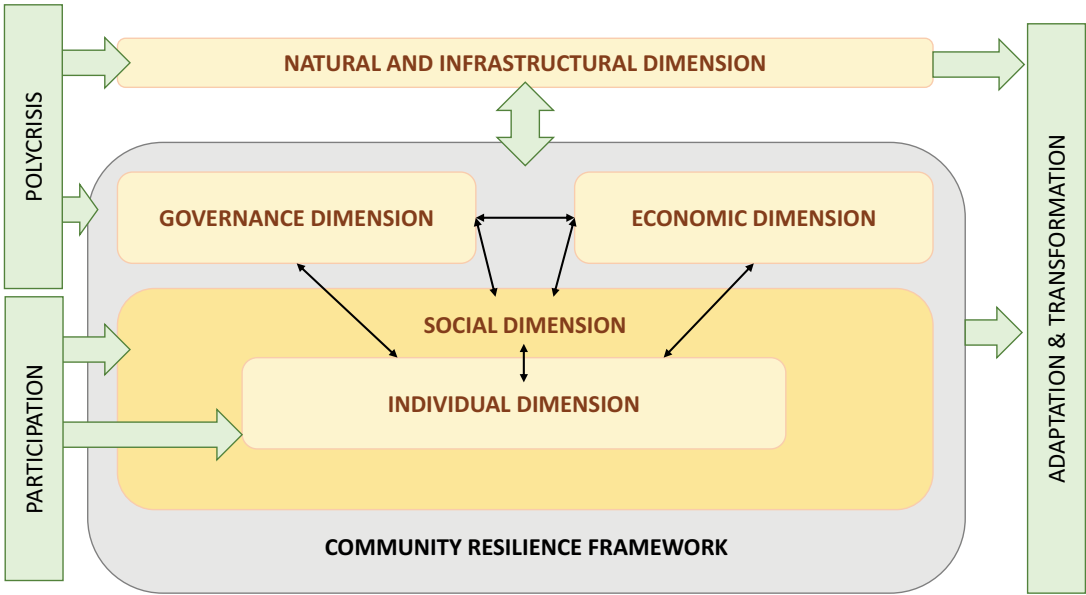


Figure 1. Community resilience assessment framework, Kirby (2026).

a social dynamic. Last, the *natural* and *infrastructural dimension* describes the provision of green and blue infrastructure, as well as climate, buildings, and transport infrastructure (e.g., Jacinto et al., 2020). This last dimension lies outside of the understanding of community resilience as a social dynamic but interacts with all four aforementioned dimensions together (Kirby, 2026).

Resistance in claimed spaces and its relationship with community resilience

Claimed spaces can be the result of a contestation movement, often being created as a site of resistance to develop alternative narratives and challenge dominant power structures (Gaventa, 2006). Resistance can be conceptualized as a disruptive power, ranging from minor acts such as false compliance to protest movements (Piven, 2014; Scott, 1989). Resistance as infrapolitics (Scott, 1989) describes strategic and sometimes disguised resistance in oppressive contexts, where open political action is not an option (Asara, 2017), usually deployed by less powerful groups through acts such as false compliance, desertion, pilfering, or sabotage (Scott, 1989).

Further, resistance may be understood as confrontational collective action against a dominant narrative or power outside of the system through occupations or protests (Schouw Iversen, 2022). It is seen as an intentional act of opposition toward a hegemonic or dominant power, such as the state or other social forces, often described as reactive movements (Asara, 2017).

When talking about social movements resistance can also be understood proactively as an attempt to oppose the status quo and change power structures by implementing alternative practices to incrementally modify the underlying structures of a system by providing alternative solutions and mechanisms (Asara, 2017). An example would be a movement providing alternative food sources or working with new economic models (e.g., cooperatives, solidarity purchasing groups, or community supported agriculture) (Asara, 2017).

Some discourses see resilience and resistance as opposing values while others describe them as interdependent. Since social movements and claimed spaces are often regarded as spaces of resistance, we will briefly delve into the discourse of how these dynamics interplay. In discourses, critical of resilience, the concept is seen as having an apolitical nature and a neoliberal agenda (Evans & Reid, 2013; Joseph, 2013; March & Swyngedouw, 2022). These discussions usually focus on the reactive nature of resilience where resilient subjects need to adapt to circumstances rather than fight and resist them (Evans & Reid, 2013). Understanding resilience as something initiated by top-down actors promotes individual adaptability and responsibility to accommodate changing circumstances and crises instead of opposing and resisting them (Joseph, 2013). Further, resilience is criticized for being apolitical and inherently conservative which prohibits questioning existing power structures and dominant systems, which in turn supports them (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013).

On the other hand, some scholars argue that resilience and resistance are not mutually exclusive but in fact assist each other (Bourbeau & Ryan, 2018). Arguing from a relationalist point of view, Bourbeau and Ryan (2018) find resistance and resilience to be complementary, conceptualized as dynamic processes with resilience being a potential condition for resistance. Prolonged resistance of social movements requires resilience from activists, to keep up their struggle over a prolonged period of time (Agra, 2024; Bourbeau & Ryan, 2018). In a recent study, Çağatay et al. (2024) expand on this line of research by exploring the role of resilience through the cultivation of support networks, mobilizing positive affect and forming dynamic solidarities to help sustain resistance of LGBTI+ activists. They find that collective resilience is an important condition to sustain resistance. Further, a transformative and proactive understanding of resilience seeks to change paradigms and power constellations to deal with the anticipated threats of climate change, increasing social inequality and societal polarization (Ruiz-Mallén, 2022).

Thus, in this paper, we argue for the need to understand resilience beyond the neoliberal paradigm as community-based and transformative to create shifts in power structures as well as to support resistance movements. In this research, we will delve further into the relationship between resilience and resistance in claimed spaces.

Historical background: Social movements and participatory spaces in Barcelona

Barcelona and Catalonia have a rich tradition of participation and self-management (Pera & Bianchi, 2021). After being suppressed under the Franco regime, the city saw a rise in social movements, starting in the 1970s. Blanco (2009) elaborates on the development of the city's policy strategies for urban transformation, describing a duality of urban development models: On the one hand, models focused on co-operation between administrative departments at different levels and private agents, and on the other emerging responses from neighborhood initiatives throughout the 1990s, demanding new ways of regeneration that are supported by some administrative departments (Blanco, 2009). In the mid-2000s, another wave of bottom-up movements emerged in response to the financial crisis, creating a new wave of urban activism, including the platform of mortgage victims (PAH) led by Ada Colau, an association employing different strategies of collective action to fight for housing rights (Eizaguirre & Parés, 2019). Colau leading *Barcelona en Comú* won the elections in 2015 and began tackling a long reform program with innovative policies for social housing, to improve living conditions in deprived neighborhoods, and green spaces, as well as strategies for more participatory governance approaches (Blanco et al., 2020).

This research examines two Colau-era public policies promoting participatory governance and described as fostering DDG in order to illustrate recent developments in Barcelona's claimed spaces and their potential effects on community resilience. We know from previous research that the Pla Buits program (which is now called "Mans al Verd" [MaV]) approved in 2013 to revive empty, administration-owned lots through urban gardening initiatives, has positively impacted community resilience and articulated resistance by, e.g., fostering bridges between initiatives and the administration, diverse types of involvement, providing spaces for learning, but also by contesting hegemonic urban models (Bródy et al., 2018; Camps-Calvet et al., 2015). The Citizen Asset Program (CAP) was implemented to enable the self-government of claimed spaces in municipally owned places (Pera et al., 2023). Approved in 2016, it is a regulatory framework enabling the transfer of municipal assets to local grassroots organizations in order to offer the neighborhood civic-cultural activities (ibid.). They may also serve as critical sites of resistance and resilience by responding to collective needs of neighbors, supporting the economically vulnerable, fostering social connections, providing spaces for learning, and contesting exclusionary urban policies (Pera, 2020).

Methodology

Data collection

For this study, we conducted case-study research with a qualitative content analysis of semi-structured interviews,² qualified and supplemented by desk research on online information provided by each of the analyzed spaces (Figure 2). Field work consisted of 17 interviews with fifteen members of nine different participatory spaces in Barcelona. To qualify the findings, we further spoke with one expert who helped develop and implement the CAP and one member from the municipal "Mans al Verd" (MaV) program, Pla Buits' successor. Organizations or spaces for interviews were firstly selected based on their relationship with the CAP ($n = 4$) or MaV ($n = 2$) program. As the MaV was undergoing a process of plot re-allocation, very few garden spaces had the resources to conduct interviews. Through a more exploratory approach by talking to people in the neighborhoods, further cases with no ties to either program were selected to compare approaches and find similarities through a most-different-systems approach ($n = 3$) (Anckar, 2020). Cases were selected if the project constituted a claimed participatory space and had the explicit aim to contribute to the neighborhood by providing free access to its space or services. Interview partners were chosen by the organizations, based on their availability and in some cases their ability to speak English, as one of the study's authors is not a Spanish or Catalan native. The interviews were conducted between March and April 2024. Further, the study adopts an exploratory approach: While some spaces are structurally quite similar, others differ greatly. Hence, its aim is not to be representative but to create an understanding of potential

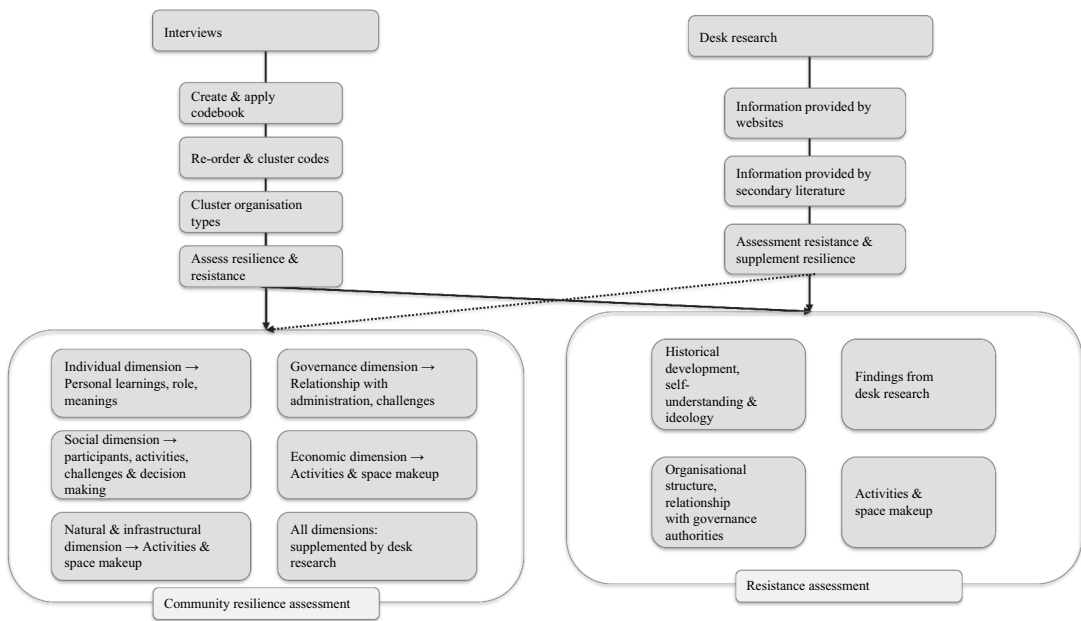


Figure 2. Flow of analysis.

success factors for participatory spaces, so understanding what motivates people and how participatory spaces affect them is crucial (Adams, 2007). To understand the space structures, the interview findings are supplemented by desk research about the different spaces to qualify and relate them. Especially, assessing resistance requires a deeper look into online materials provided by the spaces themselves, such as websites, statutes and objectives, as well as reports and findings about them from third parties.

Data analysis

The interviews were structured in two parts: the first half focused on the background and organizational structure of the space, while the second half was centered on the interviewees and their motivation to participate in the space and the impact it has had on them. All interviews were transcribed, and if necessary translated, using AI-based transcription and translation software. For a qualitative content analysis, data were coded using MaxQDA software. The approach was abductive, meaning that a few codes were deductively derived from the literature on resilience and participatory spaces, while the other codes were created inductively (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013). After all interviews were coded, codes and sub-codes were clustered and re-ordered to create a coherent codebook.³ In a further step, findings were clustered and different types of cases defined according to their structural qualities. Then, the impact of the spaces on the different dimensions of CR was evaluated. Lastly, commonalities among spaces and actors were analyzed and discussed in relation to the discourse on resistance and resilience.

Findings: How do these spaces foster community resilience and mobilize resistance?

Table 1 shows an overview of the analyzed claimed spaces. This table was created based on findings from the interviews, as well as online source analysis of the spaces. Based on this overview, we can derive four different types of spaces identified through the interviews: community managed cultural spaces (CMC, $n = 4$); entrepreneurial community hub (ECH, $n = 1$); community gardens (CG, $n = 3$);

Table 1. Overview of the different claimed spaces according to structural criteria.

Name	Type of space	History	Activities	Objectives	Organizational structure & decision making	Members & participation options	Relationship with administration
La Lleidat Santenca	Community managed cultural space	Originally a factory, the building was acquired by the city council in 2006. It was subsequently occupied by squatters until 2009. Following years of neighbor mobilization advocating for its use as a socio-cultural center, the building was officially transferred to a neighbors' association in 2018.	e.g., theater productions, circus, workshops, thematic film screenings; activities should benefit neighborhood; resident artists and theater groups rehearse in the space; school for adult learning.	Promote local and cooperative culture; provide space for local culture and leisure organizations to conduct their activities; defend residents' capacity to manage public resources and to underscore the transformative power of citizen organization. To promote the historical memory of consumer cooperativism and self-management that had previously existed in the neighborhood.	7 paid employees (public funding), 40 associations organizing activities, 20 supporting associations, 50 individual volunteers, thematic and organizational commissions and main assembly for decisions, space managed by community, owned by municipality	Associations offer activities and people volunteer; some people merely consume, e.g., theater; others actively join productions; others use space to offer events/activities to others	Part of the CAP, municipal asset receiving annual amount of money to offer activities to community and run facility.

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Name	Type of space	History	Activities	Objectives	Organizational structure & decision making	Members & participation options	Relationship with administration
Can Batlló	Community managed cultural space	Former factory compound, space was claimed in 2011 after long negotiations and struggle against a luxury flat development project leading to ultimatum by neighbors; bottom-up demands to government, political history	Open classroom for senior citizens, social bar, auditorium for concerts and theater, library for studying or reading events, green outdoor space; + spaces in building with exhibitions, yoga rooms, small gym or rented out.	To establish collective spaces for participation and decision-making concerning the management of the facility; to serve as a meeting space for local movements and associations within the neighborhood; to foster environments free from racial, gender, and functional discrimination; to strengthen cooperativism and promote economic models alternative to the current dominant system; to promote new social and urbanistic models founded on mutual aid and equality.	2 part-time employees (no public funding). 40 associations organized in different working groups, monthly assembly for decisions, funding through member contributions and bar/events, space managed by community, owned by municipality	Active <i>volunteers</i> from associations; students or children <i>use</i> library for reading and studying; others <i>offer</i> tutoring or smaller events; others <i>consume</i> at the bar or concerts; others <i>rent</i> spaces for activities or work	Part of the CAP, regular committee meetings with city council representatives, often a lot of disagreements

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Name	Type of space	History	Activities	Objectives	Organizational structure & decision making	Members & participation options	Relationship with administration
Casa Orlandai	Community managed cultural space	Former school, discussion process for re-use began in 2004, space started in 2007; bottom-up demands to government, political history	Offer cultural activities, many of them count on the involvement of neighbors in their organization. Leisure time perspective on participation → social bar, entry point to association	To promote art and social transformation based on principles of coexistence, respect, and freedom; to contribute to a public and social development that is more just and participatory; to foster the values of peace, social transformation, nondiscrimination, sustainability, and solidarity, and multiculturalism through cultural participation.	7 employees (public funding), main assembly and smaller commissions where decisions are taken; space managed by community, owned by municipality	Participants depend on type of activity, generational divide, older active participants and younger consuming participants; they implemented a process of revision of gender roles, and they have increased the number of women who are part of the coordination board.	Part of the CAP; municipal asset receiving annual amount of money to offer activities to community and run facility. They have regular meetings with the district administration (City Council). Some disagreements on the activities they can develop and the support they receive from public administration.
Ateneu Popular 9 Barris	Community managed cultural space	Former factory squatted in 1977 by neighbors, followed by agreement with city council; bottom-up demands to government, political history	Cultural program; circus shows, production: artists in residence creating and practicing circus shows; educational: circus is used as a social project and means for education	To establish forms of direct democracy in the center; to promote culture that is proximate and accessible; to guarantee nondiscrimination on the basis of economic status, origin, gender, sexual orientation, or physical/psychological disability; to foster creativity and critical thinking.	12 employees (public funding, partly from city but also other sources, like national, EU), quarterly assemblies for conflict prone decisions, many voluntary associations organized in working groups with volunteers and employees; 10 people take most important decisions; community managed space owned by municipality	Different types of participation, some <i>consume</i> during shows and concerts; others <i>actively</i> participate as <i>volunteers</i> or offer things, once or regularly, others <i>participate</i> in workshops, etc.; in general, active participation decreased	Part of the CAP, municipal asset receiving annual amount of money to offer activities to community and run facility, good and longstanding relationship with administration, 50% of funding comes from sources other than the city to retain autonomy

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

Name	Type of space	History	Activities	Objectives	Organizational structure & decision making	Members & participation options	Relationship with administration
Akasha Hub	Entrepreneurial community hub	Born from idea to create independent community center for neighborhood in 2011; bottom-up independence from government, unpolitical history	Meeting space for different organizations and people; events and workshops with focus on teaching and learning with focus on a “better” future (e.g., science communication, arts, gardening, prototyping, community organizing)	To promote social self-awareness; to encourage citizen self-organization; to develop sustainability projects; to achieve economic independence of the project.	Nonprofit association with 3 members, 2 decision takers; community members take no decisions, €5 membership fee per year, €30 per month for residencies in community space; privately owned and rented space with private funding, no public funding	<i>Members</i> come from all over the world, membership necessary to participate in events; <i>residents</i> have a co-working space to work and share and sometimes <i>offer</i> events or workshops, from different backgrounds	One city council project in the past that failed causing a lot of frustration; independence from administration and city council
Hort Can Valent	Community garden	Used to be empty lot for drug abuse, neighbors wanted to re-use the space so it became part of the Pla Buits program; created through collaboration with government, semi political history. Emerged from the unemployed people’s assembly of the neighborhood	Garden generally open most days; educational workshops for young people/students with threefold focus: taking care of plants, taking care of each other, taking care of community, all through physical work.	To promote the creation of more ecological and sustainable cities; to generate social and economic projects in collaboration with other collective actors within the local neighborhood/district; to promote eco-agriculture and cooperativism	Community managed garden space; decisions mostly taken informally through negotiations and discussions; municipally owned, publicly provided space	Responsible group of 13 people regularly taking care of the garden as <i>volunteers</i> ; space is open to the public and visited by young and old; educational workshops geared toward students/children	Part of Mans al Verd program, regular visits by specialist administrative employees, sometimes challenging cooperation
Benet Corner	Community garden	Former supermarket space, then empty lot, space was initiated by foundation in collaboration with government agreement, unpolitical history	Mainly provision of space for neighbors; many projects run by foundation, e.g., educational program for migrants also in garden; volunteers responsible for taking care of the space; sometimes foundations or other people hold workshops with educational focus.	To promote the establishment of safe spaces underpinned by the core values of care, sustainability, interculturality, and intergenerationality; to enhance the sense of belonging within the neighborhood.	Garden space managed by a foundation, most important decisions taken by foundation representative, regular assembly to discuss decisions, no public funding but municipally provided space	Small group of active volunteers, many with history of mental health problems; participants of workshops often neighbors or part of the foundation’s educational programs (e.g., for migrant youth)	Garden based on agreement between foundation and local government

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Name	Type of space	History	Activities	Objectives	Organizational structure & decision making	Members & participation options	Relationship with administration
Hort Isabel/ Col. Iectiu Superilla	Community garden and initiative	Collective founded in support of Superblock when the local government wouldn't support it; garden space was one idea to re-use public space; created through collaboration with government, political history	Garden has not been a space for many activities and mainly used for private growing of crops, but Superblock itself has been a space of action mobilized by collective	To promote the development of a healthier and more sustainable city	Community managed garden space organized by the Col. Iectiu Superilla; members of the garden are also members of the association, municipally owned, publicly provided space	Mixed group of members from the association living in the neighborhood, they have their own parcels	Part of MaV program, member of association joined previous government
Àgora Juan Andrés Benítez	Community garden and open space	Squatted space on privately owned land claimed in response to police murder of a neighbor sparking lots of protest in the neighborhood; space created in opposition to government for the marginalized, political history	Mainly oasis for people in the neighborhood open daily during the week; sometimes film screenings, workshops teaching about gardening, paella nights, political protest preparations, book readings, cinema, etc.	To promote self-management and autonomy from the state; to serve as a pivotal space for encounter; to mobilize against speculation and neoliberal expansion	Space officially managed by assembly consisting of approx. 5–10 people, those that are more involved have more to say, one person mainly in charge of the space; no public funding, squatted space	People from the neighborhood (marginalized, misfits, people who have nowhere to go) use the space to rest and be; active assembly 5–15 persons are more active volunteers taking care of the place	Good relations with Ada Colaus government on individual level, generally a lot of distrust of public and private body, government, NGOs

and an autonomous community garden and open space (AGOP, $n = 1$). The differences between these types of spaces are linked most strongly to their historical development, political positioning, relationship with governing authorities, types of activities and participation, and organizational structures.

As outlined in the theoretical section, the applied framework assesses community resilience across five dimensions: individual, social, governance, economic, and natural infrastructural. Each of these comprises specific categories and indicators (Kirby, 2026). In the following, we analyze findings for each dimension in turn. This allows to shed light on some of the internal mechanisms within the participatory spaces and how they may foster community resilience.

Impact on the dimensions of community resilience

The individual dimension of the community resilience assessment framework distinguishes between coping, adaptive and transformative capacities (Cinderby et al., 2016). The following findings examine how participation in claimed spaces shapes each of these.

Coping capacities

Claimed spaces significantly impact individual activist resilience by fostering coping capacities such as well-being, quality of life, positive outlook, access to resources, security, health, and belonging. Interviewees described their spaces with deep personal connection as a “refuge from society” (Akasha), “one big family” (Can Batlló), “home in the sense of being part of a neighbourhood community” (Àgora A.), or “happiness” (Benet Corner), particularly emphasizing a strengthened sense of belonging. For example, volunteers at Hort Can Valent, many from rural Spain or abroad, found that the garden represented their local village within anonymous Barcelona; they initially joined for nature and hands-on work but stayed for friends who became family. Most interviewees expressed positive outlooks, sharing plans to improve administrative agreements (Can Batlló), make cultural programs more inclusive (Ateneu), and attract more participants (Akasha, Àgora, Benet Corner), though one organizing member questioned their space’s future (Hort Isabel). These spaces also increased access to resources through public funding and space provision (Casa, Lleialtat, Can Batlló, Ateneu, Can Valent), or private funding (Akasha), while aspects such as security and health showed no direct impact, although garden work may offer health benefits.

Adaptive and transformative capacities

Claimed spaces foster adaptive capacities such as flexibility, adaptability, and learning by teaching activists to make compromises and work with people who think differently. Beyond learning, transformative capacities include experimentation, self-organization, personal agency, empowerment, self-efficacy, system awareness, reflexivity, and sustainability. Interviewees described social learnings: working with diverse people and building empathy (Akasha; Can Valent; La Lleialtat), trusting others’ capabilities (Benet Corner), and understanding different lifeworlds (Àgora A.), always emphasizing unity despite differences. One experienced Àgora activist explained that learning to abandon “idealised versions” of activism, compromising with messiness, and recognizing that spaces managed by marginalized people differ from those run by professional middle-class activists in decision-making and language, led to embracing contradictions between left-wing politics and everyday reality rather than seeking black-and-white answers: fostering both reflexivity and adaptive capacities. These spaces enable experimentation through new collaborative approaches and collective projects (La Lleialtat, Ateneu), innovative ways of bringing people together (Akasha), allowing organizational messiness to create alternative management models (Àgora), and developing sustainable soil-working methods within constraints of rules, finances, droughts, and ground conditions (Benet Corner, Can Valent). All spaces require high degrees of self-organization, fostering personal agency and self-efficacy. The community gardens particularly cultivate sustainability awareness through understanding nature, crops, and sustainable growing practices (Benet Corner, Can Valent).

It appears that sense of belonging, adaptive, and transformative capacities are fostered most strongly in the claimed spaces especially through collective social learning, experimentation and self-organization.

Social dimension

The social dimension focuses on social structure, social capital, and social mechanisms as collective properties of resilient communities (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Saja et al., 2018). Our findings address how claimed spaces strengthen each of these categories.

Social structure

Regarding population composition, spaces aim to be accessible to the diversity of people and collectives in the neighborhood. The CMCS, Àgora, and community gardens target their neighborhood communities specifically, while CMCS also offer broader cultural activities (circus, concerts, theater, bars), attracting culturally interested residents citywide, contrasting with neighborhood-focused social and educational programs for local students, teens, and seniors. CMCS employ various mechanisms to reach diverse residents: Lleialtat Santsenca houses TROCA, a horizontal lifelong learning facility for adults; the CMCS and Benet Corner partner with nonprofit associations serving vulnerable groups, allowing them to host activities that familiarize participants with the space and potentially inspire further engagement or proposals. Garden spaces including Àgora open to the public on weekdays for leisure and activities, with Benet Corner and Can Valent offering educational programs for students and migrant youth, while Àgora explicitly provides a safe space for marginalized neighbors including homeless people to spend time, charge phones, and feel at ease without discrimination. Akasha's structure is more homogenous, catering to educated members interested in collaborative work while increasingly opening to the neighborhood through initiatives such as inviting elderly neighbors to harvest from their community garden. While spaces generally aim for neighborhood diversity, achieving this remains difficult and exclusion risks persist: historically, political spaces attract similarly minded people (e.g., Can Batlló's associations involve politically like-minded participants), topic-specific spaces draw certain crowds (e.g., Àgora's safe-space status doesn't prevent male majorities), and Casa Orlandai struggles with actively engaging young people. Nonetheless, these spaces fundamentally aim to benefit their neighborhoods, especially less advantaged residents.

Social capital

Social capital includes social networks, close relationships, sense of community, volunteerism, and interconnectedness between social groups. All spaces except Akasha rely on voluntary structures, with fully voluntary community gardens and CMCS mixing voluntary and paid structures, although all depend extensively on volunteerism. Social networks and sense of community are fostered, intersecting with an individual sense of belonging. They are places where people spend time, form friendships, and feel valued. Regarding interconnectedness between different social groups, interviewees learned to work with people very different from themselves, enabling them to step outside social bubbles, while spaces address social exclusion (Àgora) and education (La Lleialtat, Can Batlló, Can Valent, Akasha, Benet Corner). All spaces share the goal of providing space, activities, and offerings for the neighborhood and city beyond those directly involved.

Social mechanisms

Social mechanisms such as collaboration, inclusiveness, community competences, collective action, and innovation creation and transmission show *how* the communities function. Collaboration and inclusion manifest themselves through varied participation levels: while many visit as users or consumers, deeper involvement is possible. The CMCS comprise volunteer associations as well as individual neighbors participating in management through periodic assemblies deciding on functioning and important issues, with members often joining working groups on specific topics such as programming, city council relations, technology, or

feminist committees (La Lleialtat, Can Batlló, Casa Orlandai, Ateneu); participants range from association-only involvement to highly active assembly engagement, with options for one-time event hosting (La Lleialtat) or single-event volunteering (Ateneu). Non-volunteers access spaces for leisure, a shelter from extreme temperatures, education, project participation, or as a workspace. However, this creates the challenge that many prefer user participation over volunteer support and active management engagement, reflecting a broader post-COVID-19 trend toward consumer rather than organizer roles.⁴ While this is necessary for neighborhood inclusion, it doesn't always strengthen initiatives' cores. Garden spaces offer similar scaled-down options, inviting neighbors to spend time, volunteer, and participate in workshops or educational activities (Can Valent, Benet Corner, Àgora), fostering inclusivity for non-active community members. Spaces develop competencies across fields: circus (Ateneu), education (La Lleialtat, Can Batlló), blockchain and biodiversity conservation (Akasha), and sustainable crop growing (Can Valent, Hort Isabel), with political education and empowerment for marginalized members (Àgora, Benet Corner). These thematic foci create common goals and field-specific innovation: new planting practices (Can Valent), novel circus applications (Ateneu), and alternative collaborative organizing models (Akasha, Can Batlló).

Taken together, these findings suggest that claimed spaces strengthen social capital and social mechanisms of inclusion and strive for a diverse social structure, although this can be challenging to achieve.

Governance dimension

The governance dimension is described through transformative capacity of governing actors and their engagement across different levels of governance, including civil society (Bahadur & Tanner, 2014; Wolfram, 2016). Our findings elaborate on the extent how the analyzed claimed spaces affect this dimension.

Governance findings vary significantly by case. The four CMCS have transfer agreements with local governments, strengthening new local governance forms by including civil society in decision-making: grassroots organizations manage city council-owned facilities offering community activities, with most centers (except Can Batlló) receiving annual public funding. Centers maintain open, participatory spaces where neighbors propose activities and engage in management, although involving people in facility management proves more difficult than encouraging activity proposals.

While satisfaction with agreements varies, all spaces seek eye-level working relationships with administrative actors, with city council–CMCS relations characterized by alternating tension and cooperation: described as fluid and cooperative under the BCN en Comú government but with increased tensions since the June 2023 government change according to Can Batlló and others. Although formal agreements provide essential legal and financial stability for community-led projects, disagreements arise concerning the nature of the activities, funding adequacy, and conditionality. Volunteers of the garden spaces within the MaV program expressed some dissatisfaction: viewed more positively under Pla Buits, MaV faces greater eye-level cooperation issues because, unlike Pla Buits (situated in the participation department), it operates within the parks and gardens department (“Parcs i Jardins”), focusing on biodiversity and green space promotion where participation is a means, not an end. Conversely, Akasha and Àgora deliberately avoid governance collaboration with local authorities: For Akasha, it is due to negative city council collaboration experiences, and for Àgora, it is members voicing a deep distrust of government officials stemming from negative personal experiences with police and officials. In both cases, negative experiences with governing officials created trust deficits and a reluctance toward official collaboration.

This variation confirms that the governance dimension of community resilience is most contingent on the specific institutional configuration of each space.

Economic dimension

The economic dimension is characterized through economic capital, community infrastructure and a diverse local economy (Berkes & Ross, 2013; Steiner et al., 2016). In the following, we examine how claimed spaces affect these.

The claimed spaces' effects on the economic dimension are limited since they don't function as economic entities, but our findings suggest contributions toward diverse local economies: Can Batlló offers working spaces to smaller organizations and cooperatives exploring new working modes, including mechanics workshops and art spaces, fostering diversity within local economic structures and enabling sustainable practices. The CMCS participate in Barcelona's and Catalonia's Social and Solidarity Economy networks promoting democratic and participatory management, fair wealth creation and distribution, human-needs orientation, and community commitment. Akasha functions similarly to a co-working space but emphasizes member collaboration, mutual learning, and thematic focus. By offering low-rate spaces, they support small local economic enterprises that might otherwise fail. La Lleialtat, Casa Orlandai, and Ateneu provide spaces to resident artists for creation and presentation, fostering arts and culture practices while generating events, with all CMCS providing important cultural community infrastructure. In the Hort Isabel and Can Valent community gardens, members grow crops for private use, supporting economic independence to a small extent. Conversely, Àgora deliberately excludes the economic dimension by banning money from the space, a demonstrative act against neighborhood gentrification and investor-driven sellout.

These mixed findings do not give a united answer on the extent to which claimed spaces positively impact local economies, underlining differences in approaches found in the different spaces.

Natural and infrastructural dimension

The provision of green, blue, and transport infrastructure as well as the climate and buildings describe the natural and infrastructural dimension of community resilience (Jacinto et al., 2020). Many aspects of this dimension are not directly affected by the claimed spaces. However, within their limits, many of them foster either more green space or its sustainable use. By unsealing the paved grounds in the community gardens, more green surfaces were created, fostering urban greening and cooling. In Can Batlló, the recent outdoor area was designed for gardening and greening; similarly, part of Akasha's space is reserved for this. Hence, within their limits, some of these spaces strengthen the natural dimensions of community resilience.

Five shared characteristics fostering community resilience

While the types of spaces differ in terms of their impact on the economic, governance, and natural dimension, we can see strong similarities in the individual and social dimension. Specifically, we can single out five shared characteristics of spaces that seem to have a positive impact on community resilience. These findings align with, complement, and extend previous research on claimed participatory spaces, such as urban gardens (Bródy et al., 2018), CMCS (Pera, 2025), and community initiatives (Arvanitis et al., 2023; Kirby et al., 2025) by adding further analytical depth and complexity. Moreover, the analysis provides a more nuanced understanding of how participatory spaces contribute to community resilience across multiple, interrelated dimensions.

- (1) *Strong personal connections.* Looking at the activists themselves, we can see the most commonalities. The claimed spaces foster strong personal connections between activists and the space. Activists are personally attached, fostering their belonging to the neighborhood, especially through social connections with other participants and their intrinsic motivations to contribute to the space. This increases coping capacities through a sense of belonging and well-being but also their social capital. These findings complement Copeland et al. (2020) on the need for

sense of belonging and research by Aldrich and Meyer (2015) on the impact of civic volunteerism as core drivers of social capital, necessary for community resilience.

- (2) *Working together despite differences.* Activists learn working together with people who are different from them, either because they come from a very different background or have a different approach to doing things. While this can be challenging, it strengthens empathy, enables social connections across different social groups, and can foster adaptive capacities among the activists. This resonates with research by Aldrich and Meyer (2015) as well as Magis (2010) who state that bridging social capital is just as crucial as bonding social capital for community resilience.
- (3) *Openness to the neighborhood.* While challenging, all claimed spaces do not only show an openness toward the neighborhoods they are embedded in, but they also undertake concrete actions to involve as many different people as possible. This is done by offering different activities to get people involved and being open to the neighborhood whenever possible. The explicit aim of the spaces is not only to provide space and activities to its actively involved participants but to the wider city and neighborhood community. Such openness enables these spaces to function as sites of encounter. As noted by Pera (2025), facilities that promote user plurality contribute to the development of public familiarity, understood as the recognition of other residents as part of a shared neighborhood. Furthermore, Feinberg et al. (2023) suggest that the openness of commons plays a significant role in supporting communities in addressing socio-economic challenges.
- (4) *Different options for involvement.* One way in which these spaces get diverse groups of people to participate is by offering different options for involvement. By enabling access with a leisure perspective on participation, people can visit the spaces as consumers. They can also come as learners to workshops or open classrooms. Further, people are invited to volunteer on a one-time or a more regular basis. By offering diverse options for participation, people with different availabilities, interests, and abilities can be accommodated. While this may invite more people as consumers rather than volunteers, it enables diversification of these spaces. In this respect, the findings resonate with Schauppenlehner-Kloyber and Penker (2016), who highlight the importance of flexible co-management models in sustaining long-term community engagement.
- (5) *Education and learning.* While the spaces offer different kinds of activities, they all offer educational ones. A goal in each space is to provide a room for learning. This may range from learning about organic planting practices to coding and to circus productions. In many cases, these educational practices also have bigger goals such the socio-ecological transformation or collective capacity building in mind. As Moghadas et al. (2022) suggest, collective learning can play a key role in achieving transformative resilience. In this regard, the findings align with existing research linking processes of collective learning to transformation and collective capacity-building (Edwards & Wiseman, 2011; Folke et al., 2010).

These five characteristics can be understood as relational and organizational conditions through which claimed spaces foster resilience across individual and social dimensions. They complement the structural conditions (funding, legal frameworks, physical infrastructure) enabling governance and economic resilience, and together constitute infrastructure to generate community resilience through participatory claimed spaces.

How do these spaces enable mobilization of resistance?

Our findings show that the claimed spaces contribute to resistance in varying degrees, partly shaped by their relationship with public funding. Organizations dependent on public funding may be less free to resist or protest than those operating autonomously. The type of funding also matters: while the MaV garden spaces or Can Batlló receive municipal support for infrastructure, neither has annual activity

funding—unlike Casa Orlandai, Lleialtat or Ateneu. We have no clear evidence that less public funding equals more resistance, but funding structures may shape *how* resistance is exercised.

The studied CMCS emerged from neighborhood movements seeking direct influence over public resources, arising in peripheral and deprived areas with little public investment (Ateneu), in working-class neighborhoods with strong neighborhood and cooperative movements (Lleialtat Santsenca and Can Batlló), and in areas with few spaces available for civil society organizations (Casa Orlandai). As members of the Communitarian Spaces Network,⁵ they share principles for social transformation, social and solidarity economy and place people and care at the center, reflected in everyday practices: Lleialtat Santsenca uses and promotes open-source software and hosts a shared electric cargo bike, while Akasha supports digital sovereignty through open-source and blockchain-based tools for grassroots self-organization. These practices foster resistance by building and promoting alternatives to a certain status quo.

Further, CMCS provide the physical infrastructure for collectives to carry out activities and disseminate critical discourses. This is especially valuable in a high-density city where free spaces are scarce. Ateneu de Nou Barris hosts *Solidaris* (In Solidarity), a program featuring theater groups inspired by social struggles, Can Batlló houses the printing press “Editorial Descontrol,” operating through direct democracy and a model of self-sufficiency. These spaces primarily promote resistance by hosting collectives that create alternative structures rather than through direct protest—though Can Batlló has been vocal about their criticism of the city council.

The community garden spaces are diverse in their resistance practices. Àgora Juan Andrés, which emerged from squatting an abandoned plot in response to police violence and real-estate speculation, maintains full autonomy from the city council and actively supports neighborhood social struggles. One interviewee described a common characteristic among participants as “being against the system.” The other urban gardens studied demonstrate lower levels of resistance involvement. However, Hort Can Valent’s promotion of food sovereignty and alternative food production can be understood as creating alternatives to the status quo. Hort Isabel and Benet Corner focused, respectively, on individual crop growing and educational workshops show no direct links to resistance practices.

The analysis shows that analyzed claimed spaces foster resistance in diverse and context-dependent ways, influenced in part by their reliance on municipal funding. While those spaces not dependent on municipal agreements, such as Àgora Juan Andrés, show a more disruptive repertoire of action (Tilly, 2006), studied spaces with municipal agreements tend to promote more subtle and less confrontational forms of resistance, such as the creation of alternative structures, practices, and imaginaries aligning with the proactive understanding of resistance of social movements by Asara (2017). Further, we extend the findings of Pera (2020), which show that CMCS provide essential infrastructure for grassroots movements, by demonstrating that other types of claimed spaces fulfil a similar function. Thus, claimed spaces indirectly support the promotion of prefigurative forms of social organization and resistance in urban contexts where available space for citizens’ initiatives is scarce (Narotzky, 2013).

Discussion

This article examined the dynamics of claimed spaces, resistance, and community resilience in Barcelona, exploring how these spaces contribute to community resilience across multiple dimensions, what structural and relational characteristics they share, and how they mobilize resistance. We will further discuss how resistance and resilience related to each other.

Fostering community resilience

Our findings extend existing research on the impact of participation on community resilience dimensions. The claimed spaces most strongly foster individual resilience with a strengthened sense of belonging and through social learnings that build adaptive and transformative capacities, through

collaboration with diverse groups, experimentation, and reflexivity. As Brown (2014) and Wolfram (2016) argue, reflexivity and learning are crucial elements of transformative capacities, a connection our empirical findings corroborate. Social structure and mechanisms are strengthened by offering varied activities and levels of participation while remaining open to the neighborhood, enabling inclusion of diversity, a crucial factor for transformative resilience (Revell & Dinnie, 2020). The social networks emerging from these interactions develop social capital, which enhances individuals' life trajectories (Coleman, 1988), and strengthens civic capacity at the community level (Putnam, 2000). In line with Feinberg et al. (2023), who find that urban commons support community resilience by generating social capital, this study extends knowledge on the importance of both bonding and bridging social capital for community resilience (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015).

Governance dimension findings range from positive formal relationships with the administration to total refrain from collaboration. As Schauppenlehner-Kloyber and Penker (2016) note, urban co-management between state and civic actors is crucial for resilience building but requires constant renegotiation and mutual learning. This dynamic is well reflected in our cases and consistent with what Fulton and Doussard (2023) observe in other grassroots-institutional collaborations. The variance in governance relationships confirms that this dimension is most contingent on the specific institutional configuration of each space, a finding providing another nuance on the spectrum of positions between autonomy and co-optation described by Bianchi et al. (2024). Many spaces also contribute positively to alternative economic models, supporting social solidarity economies and non-monetary exchanges, though impacts are more limited and variable.

These findings confirm the value of examining community resilience through a multidimensional lens. It can be understood as a contribution to understanding the mechanisms behind participatory resilience, which according to Mahajan et al. (2022) requires further investigation. We further find that the distinction between the dimensions can become blurred in practice, and greater impact is consistently found on the individual and social dimensions—suggesting that simplifying the framework in future applications could be useful.

Beyond social capital, our findings complement and extend existing research in several ways. Bródy et al. (2018) and Camps-Calvet et al. (2015) show that urban gardens in Barcelona foster ecological knowledge, social cohesion, and the contestation of dominant urban models. Our study corroborates these findings while extending them across a broader range of participatory spaces. Furthermore, the article brings together multiple dimensions that have previously been examined in isolation. For instance, Alcaide Manthey (2024) highlights the capacity of such spaces to strengthen belonging and civic capacity in disadvantaged areas, while Feinberg et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of openness of commons for fostering personal connections. Our article advances a multidimensional framework that enables the integrated assessment of these previously fragmented aspects. This approach provides a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis of claimed spaces, while also identifying preliminary interactions among different dimensions.

Claimed spaces, resistance, and state collaboration

The creation of alternative structures seems to be the most prevalent form of resistance among the analyzed claimed spaces in Barcelona (Asara, 2017). While spaces dependent on municipal funding do not directly protest government regulations (Lleialtat Santensa, Casa Orlandai, Ateneu), they do provide essential infrastructure for associations and social movements engaged in building such alternatives at the local level. Public funding has been criticized for softening resistance and enabling co-optation, a concern reflected in Àgora's deliberate refusal of collaboration with government entities.

Whether public funding automatically leads to co-optation, however, requires nuanced analysis. Research informed by Marxist theory frequently interprets any engagement with the state as inherently co-opted. Studies on the CMCS show that collaboration can lead to depoliticization or force spaces to neglect their transformative agenda due to bureaucratic

constraints, yet Pera and Bianchi (2021) also find that these same spaces consistently develop strategies to maintain their political aims. This tension was also voiced by interviewees in this research.

Forming coalitions with ruling entities for a common purpose can constitute what Wright (2010) calls a symbiotic strategy for foster transformation: collaborative agreements between civic groups and city governments that enable grassroots organizations to survive and develop alternative structures. Pera (2020) shows that Civic Management Facilities (such as CMCS) maintain a symbiotic relationship with social movements: they provide physical spaces for meeting, organizing actions, and enhancing neighborhood visibility, while social movements, in turn, foster solidarity and can mobilize when the continuity of these claimed spaces is threatened. Similarly, Bianchi et al. (2024) find that access to physical spaces is essential for movements to realize new approaches. Despite governance tensions, the provisions of spaces enabled collective action for resistance, ensuring citizen control over public resources that might otherwise be privatized. As Russell et al. (2023) argue, public-commons partnerships can function as mechanisms to democratize municipal resources and exercise the right to the city, an effort aligned with Wright's (2019, p. 64) vision of using the state to sustain emancipatory alternatives from below, visible here in digital sovereignty initiatives, physical infrastructure for alternative economic structures, and prefigurative democratic practices.

While state collaborations can constrain transformative action, crucial elements of resistance are maintained. Most spaces studied are rooted in resistance, emerging from reactions to urban planning that failed to prioritize citizens' welfare, or, in the case of Hort Can Valent, from unemployed residents seeking to reclaim public space for encounter and ecological agriculture. By managing municipal assets and creating accessible spaces for civic engagement, these claimed spaces reinforce existing imaginaries of democratic urban governance and exercise a transformative capacity (Pera, 2025; Roth et al., 2023).

The neighborhood versus the city

Some scholars criticize the focus on local urban practices as it increases micro-fragmentation of the city at administrative and functional levels, focusing on local approaches to global challenges (Frago & Morcuende, 2024). The critique points to the important notion that larger-scale policies within an urban context should not be neglected in favor of the local scale. However, many of the claimed spaces also actively engage in calling for city-level mobilizations such as promoting demonstrations against the war on Gaza (documented on websites of Casa Orlandai and Lleialtat Santsenca) or mobilizing for energy sovereignty and against energy poverty (Can Batlló). Many of the studied cases enable a multilevel connection between neighborhood and urban scales. As Sampson (2012) reminds us, the neighborhood level profoundly shapes people's everyday lives through social networks, civic engagement, health and well-being—and the claimed spaces ensure that city-level political movements remain accessible to residents whose lives are anchored locally.

While localized practices like food sharing and consumer cooperatives may not disrupt the macro system of food production and consumption directly, Wright (2010) argues they function as interstitial strategies of social emancipation—sharing an alternative vision to the prevailing status quo with some having grand objectives and others more modest ones. Wright (2010, p. 255) argues for combining interstitial strategies to “strengthen popular understandings that another world is possible and . . . symbiotic strategies [to] open up greater spaces for interstitial strategies to work.” This combination of strategies opens greater space for transformation and is visible in several of the analyzed cases. It resonates with Russell et al.'s (2023, p. 2152) argument that coalitions in commonly managed spaces may foster “a broader narrative of collective action that goes beyond the ‘local-ness’ of initiatives themselves.”

Resistance and community resilience

Further, our findings challenge perspectives that position resistance and community resilience as oppositional, as in Evans and Reid (2013), and instead reveal their interdependence, providing empirical support for Bourbeau and Ryan's (2018) relational argument. Rather than understanding resilience through the ontology of vulnerability, where resilient subjects are seen as merely reactive in an ever-changing world (Evans & Reid, 2013), we apply a transformative understanding of community resilience that enables proactive capacities to foster transformation beyond the status quo. The high level of resilience demonstrated by activists appears necessary for sustaining spaces of resistance over time. Conversely, the practices of resistance contribute to community resilience by developing adaptive capacities, strengthening social connections, and creating alternative resource systems. Claimed spaces are thus sites where resilience and resistance not only intersect but mutually reinforce each other—something that Bourbeau and Ryan (2018) describe as mutual assistance, here supported by concrete empirical evidence. Exemplary, this convergence is visible in Can Batlló where space is provided for political activists while also serving educational purposes, in Can Valent, where engagement with nature leads to sustainability and biodiversity practices, or in Akasha where community membership draws people into working on digital sovereignty.

The practices that build community resilience—strengthening social connections, developing adaptive capacities, creating alternative resource systems—simultaneously enhance communities' capacity for resistance, and vice versa. This connection has not yet been studied extensively. We propose doing so, especially in research on (bottom-up) participation to both better understand the impact of participatory processes and the mechanisms that sustain claimed spaces. Including more spaces not collaborating with government entities in the future research would further illuminate how autonomy from the state enables different forms of resistance and affects which dimensions of resilience are strengthened.

Conclusion

This article analyzes how claimed spaces contribute to different dimensions of community resilience, adding more detail and depth to previously published research by drawing on case studies in Barcelona.

Regarding how participatory spaces contribute to community resilience across dimensions our analysis shows that claimed spaces most consistently and strongly impact the individual and social dimension of community resilience. Impacts on the other dimensions were more variable and dependent on specific institutional relationships with public authorities. This might suggest that the individual and social dimensions may be intrinsic to claimed spaces while other dimensions are more strongly shaped by structural and other context-dependent conditions.

Five structural and relational shared characteristics that enable community resilience have been identified: strong personal connections, working together despite differences, openness to the neighborhood, different options for involvement, and an educational focus. These are structurally rooted in the nature of claimed spaces as grassroots environments where self-governance and participation are constitutive. This finding extends existing research on community-led social infrastructure and social capital by specifying relational mechanisms through which resilience-building functions.

Lastly, our findings challenge the framing of resistance and resilience as opposing values and provide empirical support for their complementarity. Transformative resilience appears to be a necessary condition to sustain resistance over time, while practices of resistance simultaneously develop resource systems that constitute resilience.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to two bodies of research. (1) They add empirical depth to research on participatory resilience literature and the mechanisms strengthening community resilience by specifying which dimensions of community resilience are most strongly fostered through claimed spaces. (2) The findings advance Bourbeau and Ryan's (2018) relationalist argument by providing empirical evidence on how resilience and resistance co-develop in claimed urban spaces.

Here, we suggest the need for frameworks incorporating both resilience and resistance as complementary rather than opposing dimensions, moving beyond an understanding of resilience as adaptive and apolitical. This kind of integration could benefit researchers working across separate theoretical traditions and disciplines.

Practically, the findings highlight the importance of supporting claimed participatory spaces as vital infrastructure for both community resilience and democratically empowered resistance. For policymakers, this implies investing in the development of legal and financial frameworks protecting the autonomy of claimed spaces while enabling their institutional stability. This can enable claimed spaces to function as durable infrastructure for community resilience and to ease democratic participation. For community-based initiatives, it shows that their engagement in claimed spaces can have a broader impact on participants' individual capacities, on the social fabric of their neighborhoods, and on the wider political culture of the city. However, we acknowledge that these impacts carry tensions such as risk of activist burnout, intra-community conflict and dependency on public funding. These ambivalent dynamics should be subject of further research.

Notes

1. We attend to this heterogeneity by examining how the studied spaces (fail to) actively address inclusion of differently positioned community members.
2. The interview guide for these interviews can be found in [Appendix A](#).
3. The codebook can be found in [Appendix B](#).
4. This data was collected through the DEPART project, which one of the authors is involved in (<https://blogs.uoc.edu/depart/en/home/>)
5. <https://xes.cat/xec/>

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About the authors

Nicolina Kirby is a research associate in the research group “Co-creation in democratic practice” at the Research Institute for Sustainability in Potsdam. She is currently completing her PhD at the University of Stuttgart and holds an MA in political science from the University of Potsdam. She researches the nexus of urban transformations, community resilience, civic participation and social movements in the urban realm.

Marina Pera is a Juan de la Cierva postdoctoral researcher at Turba Lab, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. She holds a PhD in Public Policy from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and an MA in Sociology from Columbia University. Her research examines critical perspectives on social infrastructures as spaces of encounter, such as community facilities and urban gardens, as well as public-common partnerships in urban contexts and collaborative governance with civil society organizations.

ORCID

Nicolina Kirby  <http://orcid.org/0009-0004-8612-8845>

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview guide

1) General questions

- a. What is the history of the initiative: How was initiated and why?
- b. How is the initiative organised: What are its structure and decision-making processes? How do you work together within the initiative?
- c. What activities does the initiative do?
 - i. How do you divide responsibilities within the initiative and who is responsible for what?
- d. Who participates in the initiative? What kind of different options are there for participating?
 - i. Who uses the space the initiative provides and how do people using the space relate to initiative members?
 - ii. What is the relationship with the rest of the neighborhood? How is it incorporated into community structures in the neighborhood? What impact do you think has the initiative had on the neighborhood?
- e. If applicable: You are part of the Mans al verd progra In how far does this impact your work in the initiative?
 - i. Are you in contact with people from the administrations? Do you receive support? To what extent do you exchange with them?

2) Personal questions

- a. Who are you? Why do you participate in the initiative?
- b. What do you do in within the initiative?
- c. Do you have specific goals for the initiative? Which ones do you feel have you achieved and which not (yet)?
- d. What have you learned from your activity in the initiative?
 - i. Has your involvement in the initiative impacted the way you think about certain things/changed your opinions? Has it had an impact on you in any other way?
- e. If you can say so: What do you feel has your personal impact been within and through the initiative?
- f. Would you like to do anything differently in the future? What are aspects of the initiative that you view critically?
- g. How do you feel about the collaboration with the administration?
- h. In one sentence: How would you describe your feelings toward the project/initiative?

Appendix B

Code and sub-codes
Historical development
(1) Self-understanding/ideology
Organizational structure
Organizational challenges
Relationship with administration/governance authorities
Decision making
Participants/members
Relationship with neighborhood and other organizations
Activities and space makeup
(Personal) learnings
Positive developments
Challenges
Personal role
Personal motivation
(Personal) meaning of the space