



#31 | Building Possibilities

beauty and complexity of neighborhood management

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Illustrated by Antonio Copete

One of the social initiatives that has been established in the landscape of our city in recent decades has been the creation of urban gardens. If we walk through Miraflores Park we find what were the first of these leisure gardens. Any resident who is currently cultivating will tell us that, although there is a Gardeners' Association, Huerta las Moreras, which organises the day-to-day running of the gardens, the current official management is in the hands of the Seville City Council, through an external service company to which it was awarded two years ago.

But how were these gardens created and how have they functioned since their creation, back in 1991, until 2016? What social processes were necessary to generate and consolidate this citizen initiative that has been implemented by thousands of schoolchildren over these 25 years and that today has 175 plots of gardens for families and organizations?

A look back to the 1980s can clarify these questions and can lead to a socio-political analysis of how the relationship between citizens and their environment has been transformed in terms of the conception of their capacity as neighbours to intervene in it and transform it. In the Huerta las Moreras there was direct intervention, w | ↑ there was still no official window for any "Area of citizen participation" but rather such participation was exercised *in situ* , by our own right, by our own means, by

complexity involved in the neighbourhood management of a protest project that in turn generates jobs and the framework that these social and economic relations weave throughout the process.

We want some gardens, let's get to work

The Huerta las Moreras Program began its journey in 1991. To understand how this neighborhood birth took place, we have to go back to Pino Montano, a working-class neighborhood built like so many neighborhoods in the north of Seville on the old orchards that supplied the city.

It was built on the land surrounding the Casillas farm, close to the Miraflores estate that gives its name to the park. Those of us who spent our childhood and youth in Pino Montano and San Diego knew the current land of Miraflores Park (86 hectares, today divided by the S30) as agricultural land cultivated in the Pino Montano area and full of rubble dumps and mounds in the San Diego area; land already expropriated and municipal property, destined to be a park. Its construction was already planned in the 1963 PGOU, which would cover the need for green areas, so forgotten in the rapid and disorderly urban growth of these new neighborhoods. But the park, in the 80s, was still not built. In this context, the Pro-Parque Educativo Miraflores Committee was created in 1983, with the help of residents from different associative movements, APAs (currently AMPAs), union movements, etc., who clearly saw the need to organize so that the park could begin to be built, but above all, they clearly saw that said construction had to be done taking into account what the residents wanted, how they wanted it and why.

And they started where it was logical to start: investigating what the terrain of the future park was like. Thus they discovered that in the abandoned Miraflores estate and surrounding buildings there were important archaeological remains, witnesses of this rural past.

heritage in the historic centre of the city, but also our peripheral territory offered us its own baggage and treasures.

The next step was to make this heritage known, especially in the surrounding neighbourhoods, to make visible the wealth and at the same time the abandonment of the estate, the delay of the PGOU in the construction of the park and, all of this, to connect it with the needs of the population. One of the lines of action around the years 1985-86 was the approach to the San Diego neighbourhood, its Residents' Association Andalucía and its collective of young environmentalists Aire Libre. The lands near San Diego, belonging to the future park, were dumps and were not cultivated, so the abandonment and municipal neglect were more visible. The demand for the park in this area was urgent.

The protest and informational actions of this first stage took the form of multiple talks in neighbourhoods and educational centres, conferences, publications and parades that gradually expanded the network of neighbourhoods that were sensitive and involved in the process.

From these initial stages of research and dissemination, we move on to proposals and the design of specific intervention programs: not only is it claimed that we want an educational park, but we move on to devising and designing specific proposals *for the neighborhood*. From this vision of the environment as a living heritage, as a resource for development, two major projects promoted by the Pro-Educational Park Committee are generated: the Miraflores workshop school and the Huerta las Moreras program.

In the dissemination campaigns, very clear messages began to be transmitted through rhymes, for example, through a song by the blind, a theatrical performance used in the informative-recreational parades of that period: "Our young people unemployed and the farm abandoned? WORKSHOP SCHOOL NOW!". The

to stop in the 2014-15 academic year.

From saying to doing there was not much distance.

The agricultural past of the area, the conviction of the need to intervene directly on the land, the clear vision of using the environment as an educational tool, the presence of representatives of various AMPAs in the Committee, the participation of young activists and environmentalists from the San Diego neighborhood, the desire of many retired people in the area, many of them from the rural world, to recover their connection with the land; these were all more than sufficient premises for the creation of school gardens and leisure gardens.

And, as in many of the social transformations that have been consolidated, the appropriation of the idea and the land by the local residents was the initial driving force. Both the Miraflores estate and the Casa de las Moreras and the almost three hectares surrounding both were occupied by members of the Pro-Park Committee, by the AMPAs of the Pino Montano and San Diego schools, by grandparents who wanted to farm, by boys and girls from the schools and by unemployed young people who wanted to work. The first day we entered the Mudejar tower, many of us went home with all the flea bites in the world, the ones you can expect when entering an abandoned farmhouse, but we were more itchy with the emotion of empowerment, that invigorating itch of fair and meaningful actions: since the City Council does not rehabilitate it, we started to do it ourselves.

These first days of intervention were key to the start of the project. We turned the Casa de las Moreras into the headquarters of the Committee, in a collective cleaning and whitewashing day that brought together neighbours of all ages, actively participating in the adaptation of the House for its new historical function. | ↑

At the same time, the “Huerta Las Moreras Program” was drafted, with the didactic design proposed by the Committee:



- Leisure gardens: gradual distribution of plots to individuals, families, entities and groups for agroecological production intended for self-consumption.
- Educational itineraries: routes through Miraflores Park to showcase its heritage and natural wealth, offered to educational centres and entities.
- Nature classroom: holding environmental education workshops.

This project was initially presented to the Macarena district, which provided the first grants and an initial team of professionals (who began to be paid as monitors), to organize and carry out the entire program.

But to be honest, it was not these small and inconstant subsidies that made it possible for the project to get off the ground, but the level of personal involvement of both the neighbourhood and the first paid people, who were not just technicians, but were also neighbours participating in the project and co-creators of it. And also the wide network of neighbourhood resources that was used, such as direct contact with farmers from nearby orchards, who came with their tractor to plow the land for free to lay out the first plots.

Later, the City Council assumed the existence and consolidation of the orchards within the design of the park (although the management of these is always in the hands of the Committee) and, together with the first interventions of the workshop school, the park began to be built in the area of San Diego and, years later, in the area of Pino Montano.

Those of us who participated in this collective creation learned that direct citizen intervention in the environment can open the doors to subsequent municipal involvement, that we can propose initiatives and carry them out, and that the engine of true social change is always ignited by real and concrete responses to the needs detected.



The complexity of neighborhood management



to manage them. For 25 uninterrupted years, until 2016, the Pro-Park Committee has reinvented and managed the project, receiving the corresponding subsidy and paying the people who worked (as educators or technicians) in the school gardens, leisure gardens and other related projects.

The process, logically, went through different phases throughout this time. From the initial subsidy of the Macarena district, it moved to the Citizen Participation Area. And the intervention projects initially designed were transformed, giving rise to other initiatives such as the creation of the greenhouse and the organic shop within the leisure gardens. The Potato Tasting, the tutor gardener programme (adults who collaborated with the school gardens) and a long etcetera of educational initiatives were consolidated.

The difficulties began to become apparent when, following the crisis, subsidies began to decrease but projects and staff continued to function.

The fatigue of so many years of management and the fear of having unpaid salaries led the Pro-Park Committee to delegate management. It retired from this responsibility in 2016 and management was passed on to the City Council, which hired an external service company with its own staff. The school garden project disappeared and the new technical team was currently in charge of managing all the leisure gardens in Seville. The crisis generated between the Committee and the old and veteran team of workers of the program, who were no longer the co-creator of the project since 1994, makes clear the difficulty of this type of process, in which a neighborhood entity, with a demanding and socio-educational character, becomes at the same time the manager of a project that generates jobs and receives public money.



This experience, repeated in other groups and associations in our city, can serve as a reflection and analysis tool, as a collective learning tool for new social processes. We



- Could it have been done differently?
- How do the communication channels between the driving committee and the technical team work?
- Has the internal constitution of the Committee been transformed and recycled over the years to ensure the necessary generational change and the new support needed to avoid deterioration?
- Could other formulas have been proposed in response to the economic difficulties that arose, for example, the creation of a workers' cooperative?
- How can we ensure the stability and dignity of the technical team when the jobs generated do not have a stable economic base?
- What are the differences between the employment relationship of a technician who works for the administration and that of a technician who works with a local protest group?
- How does receiving public money affect the actions and processes of a neighbourhood group? Does it make them less critical for fear of losing financial support or the smooth running of negotiations?
- How are decisions made in collective processes?
- Could new forms of citizen management be investigated to prevent projects so deeply rooted in society from being left in the hands of people who are not familiar with the context and are outside the neighbourhood connections that created them?
- Can the neighborhood that has provided the jobs be perceived as the bosses of the technical team?
- Would some kind of co-management between the City Council and the Committee be possible?

Complex, but there it is

In 1983, the dream of building an educational park began, and thanks to the efforts of the local people, it is here. Every citizen process that produces visible results provides us with clues for our current realities, just as its difficulties and crises can also invite us to constructive reflections to continue inventing the city and the social relations that we want.



SELF-CONSUMPTION

NEIGHBORHOODS NEIGHBORHOOD

MANAGEMENT

URBAN GARDENS

MIRAFLORES PARK

Supports us



Autonomía Sur, Andalusian Cooperative Society of Social Interest, is a collective social economy project that was founded in 2005. Our daily work consists of:

- legal advice and representation of individuals and groups of workers.
- advising individuals and social economy entities (self-employed, cooperatives, associations, foundations, etc.).
- the study and preparation of technical documents (evaluation of public policies, employment, territory, etc.).
- the design and development of training activities.

We defend labour rights, analyse reality and promote new democratic, social and sustainable economic formulas. And all of this with two objectives: to provide a transformative perspective to the construction of Andalusian civil society and to strictly prevent our work from serving practices that are openly contradictory to our values and ethical and social principles.



El Topo. The most widely read tavern newspaper in Seville.

