

# The Catalan Integral Cooperative

*an organizational study of  
a post-capitalist cooperative*

**P2P** Foundation



**Robin Hood**  
Mixed Asset Management Cooperative



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*by George Dafermos*

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1 URL: <http://www.robinhoodcoop.org>

# 1. Introduction

The Cooperativa Integral Catalana (CIC) is one of the most interesting cooperative projects which have sprung up during the age of crisis in Europe. First of all, it is notable on account of its *revolutionary* character: the main objective of the CIC is nothing less than to build an alternative economy in Catalonia capable of satisfying the needs of the local community more effectively than the existing system, thereby creating the conditions for the transition to a post-capitalist mode of organization of social and economic life.

To fulfil the purpose it has set itself, the CIC is engaged in an impressive spectrum of activities: although it was formed just seven years ago, it has already been actively involved in developing infrastructures as diverse as barter markets, a network of common stores, an alternative currency called ‘eco’, a ‘Cooperative Social Fund’ for financing community projects and a ‘basic income programme’ for remunerating its members for their work. By setting up such structures, the CIC aspires to be an organizational platform for the development of a self-sufficient economy that is autonomous from the State and the capitalist market.



The CIC moto: ‘social transformation from below through self-management, self-organization and networking’

In view of its radical character, it is not surprising that the CIC has attracted the attention of the popular and radical press, which praise it as a promising prototype of the counter-structures that the so-called milieu of the social and solidarity economy is building in order to antagonize the dominant economic system.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, these reports, though interesting, have a serious limitation: they do not go into much depth in their description of the CIC and therefore do not provide a thorough overview of its activities and mode of organization. In consideration, however, of the possibility that CIC’s cooperative model holds lessons that extend well beyond the Catalan context, my colleagues from the *P2P Foundation/Commons Transition* and I could not help feeling that the case of the CIC merits further study to elucidate the way it is organized. With that in mind, we decided to contact the CIC with the purpose of organizing a ‘field-trip’ in Catalonia in order to study the cooperative close up. In this way, a few months later in March 2016 we came to Catalonia to carry out a field-study, whose findings are documented in the pages of this report.

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2 See, for example, Schneider, N. (2015) 'On the Lam with Bank Robber Enric Duran'. *Vice* (Apr. 7), at <https://www.vice.com/read/be-the-bank-you-want-to-see-in-the-world-0000626-v22n4>

## 2. Studying the CIC: A note on our methodology

This report is based on a field-research of an ethnographic character, using the method of participant observation from March until May 2016.

For the purpose of this research project, I arrived in Barcelona on March 2016, following consultation with some core members of the CIC with whom my colleague from the P2P Foundation, Stacco Troncoso and I had discussed, in general terms, the rationale and the aims of the research during the previous three months.

For the entire period of my stay in Barcelona, I had the luck to be hosted at the building of *AureaSocial*, which is in a way the headquarters of the CIC in the city. Being there was extremely helpful for the research, as I was in daily contact with the many members of the cooperative who work at the building, practically living with them for two months.

As the cooperative is organized in committees, the first thing I did to collect information was to interview members of all its committees. I talked to people from all the committees that are currently active, who willingly provided me with whatever information I needed to understand what they do and how their activities are organized. Luckily for me, it was equally easy to observe some of them at work – such as the *Reception Committee* or the *Committee of Economic Management*, as their workplace is based at *AureaSocial* where many of their members come on a daily basis. Others I had the opportunity to follow in the ‘field’, as when I followed the *CAC* team with its van in order to see with my own eyes the network of self-managed pantries that the CIC has linked together across the entire Catalonia.

Naturally, as the activities of the cooperative are not confined to Barcelona, but extend across the entire Catalonia, the field-research included several visits to various places in Catalonia: I attended several assemblies and meetings of local exchange groups and visited the autonomous projects related to the CIC (the so-called ‘autonomous projects of collective initiative’) in various cities and towns in Catalonia, where I had extensive discussions with their members.

Last, though I do not believe that such a thing as an ‘objective observer’ exists, I feel obliged to confess my deep sympathy for the CIC. One of my strongest motivations for carrying out this field-research was to find out more about the work of the CIC in Catalonia and explore how that experience could be fruitfully transferred to other places.<sup>3</sup> I hope this report will be useful to those who are interested in learning more about what the CIC does and how it is organized, encouraging them to reflect critically upon how a new generation of cooperative projects like the CIC might change the world for the better.

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3 Inspired by the CIC and its principles, initiatives to set up ‘integral cooperatives’ have been formed in countries as far away as Argentina, attempting to adapt the ‘CIC model’ to their local context: an indicative example is the ‘Heraklion Integral Cooperative’ in the author’s home-town of Heraklion in Greece (see <http://cooperativas.gr>).

### 3. The CIC in a nutshell

#### The historical, ideological and political context

The Catalan Integral Cooperative was founded in Catalonia in May 2010 at an assembly of local activists. It is, as its name implies, a *cooperative* project focused on Catalonia.<sup>4</sup> It has a strongly activist and anti-capitalist character, as it is animated by the principles of the ‘integral revolution’, which means it aspires to the radical transformation of all facets of social and economic life.<sup>5</sup> With this goal in mind, it has launched a series of initiatives and projects around the development (at the local level) of a cooperative economy and a cooperative public system, in which basic needs like food and health care are not commodities but social goods everyone has access to.



*Enric Duran (Source: Wikipedia.org)*

The first time one hears the name of the CIC is usually in connection with the exploits of its charismatic leader, Enric Duran. Duran, a Catalan hacktivist involved in the local anti-globalization movement, entered the public spotlight in 2008 when he went public with his story of how he had tricked the Spanish banks into giving him loans of about half a million euros, which he gave away to various activist projects. For Duran, who never had any intention of returning that money, it was a conscious act of expropriation that he planned with the aim of inspiring others to join the struggle against the capitalist banking system. As was to be expected, his story attracted a lot of media attention and Duran, who earned the

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4 Catalonia is well-known for its strong independence movement. We should not forget that most Catalans consider Catalonia a distinct national entity, with its own language, history and national identity. They are characterized by a culture of resistance, considering themselves an enslaved nation. To put it bluntly, they view the Spanish state and its government as an apparatus of domination and oppression. Thus, not expecting any assistance from the official Spanish state, they are firm in their conviction that they need to rely on their own strength for the development of their local economy. That is why Catalonia has such a long history of self-organization, which, to a large extent, accounts for the rich tradition this place has in cooperative projects. In this sense, CIC is a characteristically Catalan project: it is animated by the principle of self-organization, combined with a strong anti-statist sentiment and a cooperative culture with deep local roots.

5 URL: <http://integrarevolucio.net/en/>

sympathy of many fellow activists, soon became known as the ‘Robin Hood of the banks’. Emboldened by the success of this action, he and some like-minded activists soon began to work on a new project around the creation of cooperative structures for the transition to post-capitalism. The idea was outlined in a newspaper they distributed in 350,000 copies all over Spain in March 2009, which propagandized the development of ‘integral cooperatives’.<sup>6</sup> This call resonated with the feelings of many Catalan activists, triggering a wave of molecular processes in the milieu of social movements, which led to the collective founding of the CIC in May 2010.

A year later the ‘indignados’ began to occupy the squares in Spain. The emergence of the 15M movement in Catalonia found the CIC ‘prepared to battle’ and so many of its members threw themselves into the struggle against the ‘politics of austerity’. At the same time, because of the active participation of its activists in the collective processes of the movement, the CIC emerged much stronger through it, attracting a lot of new members. As Nathan Schneider says, “when the 15M movement, a precursor to Occupy Wall Street, installed itself in city squares across Spain to rail against austerity and corruption, protesters swelled the CIC’s ranks”.<sup>7</sup> As a result, although the ‘Movement of the Squares’ subsided, CIC’s participation in it left an important legacy, as many of the defining characteristics of the movement live through the cooperative, such as the activist character, the aim of building an alternative economic system and the primacy of the principles of self-management, inclusivity and direct-democracy in the decision-making process.

During all this time, Duran played a leading role in shaping the CIC: not only was he the one who, more decisively than anyone else, defined its vision, but he also recruited new members, organized its committees and spearheaded the development of new CIC initiatives and projects. However, in 2013 in order not to go to prison, he was forced to go underground and leave the country.<sup>8</sup> Since then, he has concentrated his efforts on a new project called ‘FairCoop’,<sup>9</sup> thus placing the responsibility for the organization and operation of the cooperative in the hands of the committees it is made up of.

## Committees

The easiest way one could describe the internal organization of the CIC is as a collection of about a dozen committees, each one with its own field of responsibility. For example, the *Economic Management Committee*, as its name implies, is responsible for the economic management of the cooperative, the *Legal Committee* is entrusted with legal matters, the *IT Committee* deals with the IT infrastructure and so on. In consequence of this division of labour, committees work largely autonomously from each other. To coordinate their activities, the cooperative holds assemblies (the so-called ‘permanent assemblies’ which are held once a month), where committee members make decisions collectively based on consensus. In line with the principles of cooperativist and anti-authoritarian organization, these assemblies serve to collectivize the managerial process, thereby ensuring its participative and inclusive

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6 The spanish version is accessible online at [https://cooperativa.cat/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/02podemos\\_cast.pdf](https://cooperativa.cat/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/02podemos_cast.pdf)

7 Schneider, op. cit.

8 For those who wish to delve more deeply into the story of Duran, a very interesting ‘portrait’ can be found in Schneider, op. cit.

9 FairCoop (<http://fair.coop>) is animated by the same ideological principles and values as the CIC. Most importantly, it provides services and ‘tools’ that are very similar to those offered by the CIC in Catalonia. For example, like the CIC, it has developed an electronic marketplace where FairCoop members can sell the products they make (<https://fair.coop/fairmarket/>). What, however, clearly differentiates FairCoop from the CIC is its ‘focus’: whereas the geographical epicentre of CIC’s activities is Catalonia, FairCoop is an international project with members from all over the world, rather than from Catalonia alone.



character.<sup>10</sup> That is, in a nutshell, the way the CIC is organized: the ‘core’ of the organization is made up of a dozen committees which coordinate their activities collectively and anti-hierarchically through frequently-held assemblies.

From close up, the first thing that stands out about committee members is how they are not motivated by reasons of financial or professional advancement. On the contrary, the character of participation in the committees is clearly activist: committee members do not consider themselves to be working members of a conventional cooperative. For them, the CIC is not just a cooperative, but an activist project in which they are heavily involved. However, in contrast to activist projects manned by unwaged volunteers, the activists of CIC committees receive a kind of salary from the cooperative, known as ‘basic income’, which has the purpose of liberating them from the need to make a living by working somewhere else, thus allowing them to commit themselves full-time to their work at the CIC.<sup>11</sup> An interesting feature of that form of remuneration is that it is made up of both euros and ‘ecos’, that is, the alternative currency used by the forty or so local exchange networks that exist in Catalonia (we will discuss the *eco* and the local exchange networks in more detail in the context of CIC’s economic ecosystem in chapter 6).<sup>12</sup>

## Self-employed members

The CIC has a plethora of members outside its ‘core’. First of all, it has about six hundred ‘self-employed members’ (the so-called ‘auto-ocupados’), who use the legal and economic ‘tools’ of the cooperative.<sup>13</sup> They are mostly independent professionals and small producers (both individuals and collectives) who operate informally without having any legal hypostasis. In Spain, as a general rule, people who start a small business or set themselves up in private practice register with the Tax and Social Security Office as ‘autónomos’. The cost of becoming an ‘autónomo’, however, is prohibitive for a large number of people, given that they have to pay a minimum of around €250 a month.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, for many, the cost of this system precludes the possibility of operating formally. To them, the CIC offers a practical solution: the CIC has set up a series of legal entities, whose legal form its self-employed members can use in order to issue invoices. Legally speaking, therefore, auto-ocupados are not members of the CIC, but members of those organizations. In exchange for this service, auto-ocupados have to pay a (minimum) membership fee of €75 every three months.<sup>15</sup> Unlike ‘core members’, however, few of them tend to get involved in CIC’s organizational matters.

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10 In addition to the ‘permanent assemblies’, the CIC organizes ‘assembly days’ (the so-called ‘jornades assembleàries’) in the Catalan countryside, where its members have the opportunity to discuss important issues in a more relaxed and natural environment.

11 That was not however the case during the first years of the CIC. In the beginning all committee members were strictly volunteers: the ‘basic income programme’ was launched a few years later.

12 Interestingly enough, the amount of basic income received by committee members is not the same for everyone, but is determined in agreement between each member and the Committee of Coordination and Economic Management. To put it simply, members can ask for whatever amount of basic income they think they need to be able to work full-time. However, none of them currently receives more than 765 euros and 135 ecos per month.

13 See CIC (*undated*) ‘Self Employment’, at <https://cooperativa.cat/en/economic-system/social-currency/>

14 As Sebastián Reyna, the President of the Union of Professional and Working Self-employed People (UPTA) in Spain, explains: “autónomos pay a minimum flat rate of around €250 a month...these costs can appear prohibitive given that they have to be paid every month, no matter what you earn...even if you don't have any work” (Reyna quoted in Mills, G. (2013) ‘Think hard before going self-employed in Spain’, *The Local*, Jun. 24, at <https://www.thelocal.es/20130624/think-carefully-before-you-register-as-self-employed>)

15 The exact amount of the fee depends on the sum total of all the invoices issued (every three months) by a member, which means that the cost of the fee may rise considerably.

In that sense, auto-ocupados are peripheral members, who do not participate in the collective processes of the CIC.

Oddly enough, although it has legally set up several other companies to accommodate the needs of its self-employed members, the CIC itself does not have a legal form, which means that “officially, there’s no such thing as the CIC”.<sup>16</sup> The advantage of operating in this way is that it makes the CIC more flexible vis-à-vis the State and its control mechanisms.

## Territorial and economic network

Aside from self-employed members, the CIC has more than two and a half thousand members through the ‘**local exchange network**’ (which will be discussed extensively in the context of CIC’s economic ecosystem in chapter 6) that it launched in 2010. This, together with the rest of the local exchange networks operating in Catalonia, forms a crucial component of CIC’s territorial network and of the economic system that it proposes as an alternative to the dominant market.

Alongside this ecosystem of local exchange groups, CIC’s territorial and economic network encompasses the **consumer groups** that are responsible for the daily operation and management of twenty ‘pantries’ (the so-called ‘reposts’) across Catalonia. These local consumer groups are connected to each other through CIC’s *Catalan Supply Center (CAC)*, which is the CIC committee coordinating the transportation and delivery of products from the producers to the pantries. We will discuss how this network of pantries is organized in more detail in the next chapter.

Last, CIC’s territorial network includes several so-called ‘**autonomous projects of collective initiative**’. These are basically projects in which the CIC has been involved or is collaborating with. To better understand their organization and how they are related to the CIC, we will look at the most prominent of them in chapter 5.

But first, let us take a closer look at the ‘core’ of CIC to explore in more detail what its committees do.

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16 Schneider, op. cit.

## 4. The organizational core: The CIC Committees

At the present time, the organizational core of the CIC consists of ten committees. In order to understand the breadth of the activities they perform and how they are organized, we shall now look at them in more detail.

### Coordination Committee

The *Coordination Committee* deals with the internal organization of the cooperative, focusing on the coordination and evaluation of the work of its committees and working groups. An important part of its work is the formulation of the agenda of the so-called ‘permanent assemblies’ (which are held once a month and constitute the main decision-making organ of the cooperative) based on the topics for discussion submitted by the members of the other committees.

The committee is made up of three main members and two collaborators (a facilitator and a psychologist), who meet once a week at the building of *AureaSocial* in Barcelona (which is discussed in the context of the so-called *Autonomous Projects of Collective Initiative* in the next chapter). For its economic sustainability, the committee relies on the ‘basic income’ its members receive from the CIC.

### Reception Committee

The *Reception Committee* is responsible for the induction process of new CIC members. This process consists, in the first place, in providing guidance and advice to people who contact the CIC asking for information about the cooperative and the services it offers its members. For that purpose, they are invited to attend an info-event (known as ‘*acollida*’) organized by the committee once a week (usually every Friday) at the building of *AureaSocial* in Barcelona, where they are familiarized with the activities of the cooperative as well as with the legal and economic tools it provides to its members. Those who are still interested in becoming members of the cooperative are invited to a personal interview where they can discuss more extensively their needs with committee members and the way in which they wish to participate in the cooperative.

In addition to the guiding role it performs through the aforementioned ‘*acollida* process’, the committee's activities include the capacitation of CIC members, the promotion and networking of affiliated projects in Catalonia as well as the development of relations of collaboration and mutual aid with collectives and projects in other countries.

The committee is made up of eight members, six of whom are based in Barcelona. For the purpose of work coordination, its members meet once or twice a week (usually at *AureaSocial*), whereas decisions are made collectively (based on consensus) at the committee's assembly, which takes place once a month. For its economic sustainability, the committee relies on the ‘basic income’ received by its members.

### Communication Committee

The *Communication Committee* is responsible for managing matters of communication related to the cooperative. In specific, it is responsible for the public promotion of CIC's activities as well as for handling the requests for information submitted by its network and the broader community. In parallel, (like the *Reception Committee*) it serves as a channel of

communication between the cooperative and other collectivities. In the context of its priorities, the committee emphasizes the importance of empowering actors in the CIC network and enriching their skills, so that communication-related activities (such as filming events and developing promotional material) can be performed by any member of the cooperative without the direct involvement of the committee's core members.

Presently, the committee is made up of three members, who meet once a month at the building of AureaSocial. For its sustainability, the committee relies on the 'basic income' received by its members.

## IT Committee

The *IT Committee* is responsible for the development and maintenance of CIC's information-technology infrastructure, including its mail server, its websites and social networks as well as specialized IT tools, such as the [GestioCI](#) invoice processing software used by the Committee of Economic Management and 'self-employed members' of the cooperative for the purpose of managing invoices and bills.<sup>17</sup>

The committee is made up of seven persons, four of whom are currently very active. Email is the primary means of communication among committee members, who meet twice a week at the building of AureaSocial in Barcelona in order to coordinate their work. For its sustainability, the committee relies on the 'basic income' received by its members.

## Common Spaces Committee

The *Common Spaces Committee*, which is made up of five people, is responsible for the so-called 'common spaces' of the cooperative, that is, buildings and houses used by the cooperative and its members as a shared resource. For its sustainability, the committee relies on the 'basic income' its members receive from the cooperative. Presently, the only infrastructure the committee is responsible for is the building of *AureaSocial* in Barcelona (which is discussed in the next chapter on *Autonomous Projects of Collective Initiative*).

## Productive Projects Committee

The activities of the *Productive Projects Committee*, which has two members, centre on facilitating the process of 'self-employment' and the exchange of knowledge and skills. To this end, the committee is responsible for the operation of CIC's 'jobs portal' (called *Feina Cooperativa*) aimed at facilitating job seekers to match their skills to jobs posted by productive projects associated with the CIC.<sup>18</sup> In parallel, it runs *Mercat Cooperatiu*, an online directory of self-managed and cooperative projects in Catalonia, which accept 'social currency' (i.e. ecos) in exchange for the products and services they offer.<sup>19</sup>

## Economic Management Committee

As its name implies, the *Comissió de Gestió Econòmica* is entrusted with the economic management of the cooperative. At the same time, it is the CIC committee which is responsible for the induction process of new 'self-employed members' (the so-called 'auto-

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17 The committee's work is characterized by a strong commitment to the (digital) commons, as all the tools it develops are freely available as free/open source software.

18 URL: <http://feina.cooperativa.cat>

19 URL: <http://mercat.cooperativa.cat>

ocupados'), familiarizing them with the legal and economic tools that the CIC provides them with and helping them circumnavigate the social and economic structure of CIC's cooperative network. The committee is made up of six core members (five of whom are occupied on a full-time basis) headquartered at the building of *AureaSocial* in Barcelona and four more members based in other parts of Catalonia.



*The Office of the Committee of Economic Management at AureaSocial. Photo by Daniel Molina (Source: Schneider 2015)*

CIC has two main sources of expenses: the 'basic income' received by the members of its committees and the funding it provides for affiliated projects. In order to cover these expenses, like any other cooperative, CIC relies on **members' fees**: the fees collected from the six hundred active 'auto-ocupados' (who are required to pay a fee of a *minimum* of €75 every three months) account for about 50% of CIC's income. The remaining 50% of its income comes from the so-called practice of '**economic disobedience**': that is, the tax refunds received by the cooperative for every invoice self-employed members make (using one of the legal forms through which the CIC operates). Donations from sympathizers represent an additional – though presently insignificant – income stream.

## Legal Committee

The *Legal Committee* is responsible for managing legal matters related to the cooperative. In parallel, it provides CIC members with legal assistance, which they can pay for by using either social currency (i.e. ecos) or euros. Crucially, the committee places a great deal of importance on delivering this legal service in such a way as to empower recipients, helping them understand the legal process and the technicalities involved in their cases.

The committee is currently made up of two lawyers based at the building of *AureaSocial* in Barcelona. For its sustainability, the committee relies (a) on the fees it collects from its

clients, that is, CIC members to whom it provides legal assistance and (b) on the ‘basic income’ its members receive from the cooperative.

## The Catalan Supply Centre

The *Central d'Abastiment Catalana (CAC)*, which means ‘Catalan Supply Centre’, is one of the most active CIC committees.<sup>20</sup> It was formed in 2012 with the aim of creating a logistics network for the transportation and delivery of the products of small producers, who are ‘self-employed’ CIC members, across the entire Catalonia. In effect, it is a ‘public service’ that CIC offers to small producers and consumer-prosumer groups in Catalonia.

The main infrastructure of the network are the so-called ‘**rebosts**’, that is, the *self-managed pantries* that the CIC has set up all over Catalonia – twenty of them, to be exact – which constitute the ‘cell’ of the organizational structure of the network. Each one of them is run autonomously by a local consumer group that wishes to have access to local products as well as products made (by producers associated with the CIC) in other parts of Catalonia through the list of products provided by the CAC (which currently includes more than a thousand products). The way in which the supply chain is organized is as follows: the products go from the seventy producers that currently supply the network to the two principal rebosts in L’Arn and Villafranca and then are distributed by the CAC vans to the local rebosts, where from the local consumer groups collect them.



*CAC member Vadó and the CAC van*

The CAC is made up of a team of four persons, half of whom are working full-time. This team is responsible for coordinating the network of rebosts through CAC’s online platform, which the rebosts use in order to choose the products they want and submit their orders.<sup>21</sup> The payment for the orders can be made in euros or by using the social currency eco. In this way,

20 URL: <http://cooperativa.cat/en/catalan-supply-center/>

21 URL: <https://cac.cooperativa.cat>

the CAC platform servers as the ‘instrument’ that enables the coordination of consumption and production in such a distributed environment.

In addition to performing a coordinating role through its online platform, the CAC is also responsible for the transportation and delivery of products from the producers to the local rebosts. In this task, it is assisted by five-six more persons, who use their own vehicles to transport and deliver products to some areas of the network. To cover their expenses, these collaborators receive 21 cents for every kilometre they make.

For its sustainability, the CAC relies on income from two main sources: first, it collects 5% of the price of every product, as well as 18 cents for every kilo it delivers. At the same time, the CAC members receive a ‘basic income’ from the CIC.

For organizational matters, the CAC team has three meetings per month, which often have the character of an assembly. However, the place where they are held is not fixed: each meeting is held in a different rebost in order to facilitate the interaction between the ‘coordinating organ’ and the ‘nuclei of local self-management’, as the CIC calls the consumer groups that are responsible for the operation of each rebost. For the future, CAC’s plans focus on strengthening the links between rebosts and producers so that payments can be made directly by the rebosts to the producers without the intermediation of the CAC.

## Network of Science, Technique and Technology

The *Xarxa de Ciència, Tècnica i Tecnologia (XCTIT)*, which means ‘Network of Science, Technique and Technology’, is the committee responsible for the development of tools and machines adapted to the needs of productive projects in CIC's cooperative network.<sup>22</sup> The driving force of XCTIT is its conviction that the machines developed by the industry are not appropriate for the needs of commons-oriented projects, which they imprison into a relation of dependence with capitalist firms. By contrast, XCTIT develops solutions – which exemplify the principles of open design, appropriate technology and the integral revolution – geared to the needs of small cooperative projects. In this way, XCTIT serves as a ‘vehicle’ for the re-appropriation of science, technique and technology by the *new* cooperative movement.

Presently, XCTIT's activities focus on the development of various prototypes – mostly of agricultural tools and machines – and the organization of training workshops for the purpose of knowledge sharing. XCTIT is also engaged in the licensing of the technology artefacts developed by the committee and its collaborators. Its last undertaking is an open design license called ‘XCTIT-GPL’,<sup>23</sup> which gives end-users the right to modify and redistribute XCTIT-GPL-licensed technologies, thereby protecting legally the free sharing of knowledge.

The committee is made up of five core members (working full-time) and about twenty collaborators who are actively involved in its activities. For the coordination of the group and

22 URL: <http://xctit.replicat.net>

23 URL: <http://xctit.replicat.net/licencia-xctit-gpl/>

**Trencadora d'ametlles**

**PROTOTIP**  
EN CERCA DE FIANÇAMENT

**Objectius per un autoabastiment integral**

Impulsar la fabricació i col·lectivització de maquinària agrícola. Enxanar a petits productors, recuperant i promoure l'ús comunitari de la maquinària. Autofabricar una trencadora dimensionada al volum de la nostra producció d'ametlles, fomentant la producció a escala, fent sostenible la vida a pagès, replicable, eficient, modular, lliure, artesana, pagessa i comunitària, que ens permeti millorar qualitativa i quantitativament l'accés a l'ametlla. Articulant una xarxa d'abastiment amb mitjans propis que ajudin al petit productor.

**Eina per ajudar als productors d'ametlles**

L'actual agroindústria capitalista es basa en la centralització, l'obtenció del màxim benefici i el control de la producció. Grans productors obliguen als petits a abandonar, vendre les terres o vendre la producció com a mercaderia a intermediaris locals que exporten a l'altra punta del món aquests fruits secs. "Cooperatives" i empreses que compren tones d'ametlla, monopolitzant el control sobre l'ametlla com a aliment, els preus i les relacions comercials, fent insostenible l'abastiment local, de confiança i la producció a escala comunitària.

**XCTIT**  
TÈCNIC I TECNOLÒGIC  
PER AGRÍCOLES

Oficina Xarxa de Ciència,  
Tècnica i Tecnologia  
<http://xctit.cooperativa.cat>  
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Cooperativa  
Pirineu  
Patalana

One of the XCTIT prototypes

decision-making, XCTIT has an assembly once a week at Can Fugarolas, where its workshop has been hosted since 2014.



*XCTIT's workshop at Can Fugarolas (Source: Replicat.net)*

*Can Fugarolas*<sup>24</sup> is not just a building. It is a collectively-managed space of 4.000m<sup>2</sup> in the seaside town of Mataró (near Barcelona) in Catalonia, which is host to the activities of about a dozen collectivities like XCTIT. For the payment of the rent, which is a thousand euros per month, each collectivity contributes according to how much space it occupies inside the building as well as based on the character of its activities – whether or nor they are profit-oriented and ‘eco-friendly’. For XCTIT, in specific, the rent of the space occupied by its workshop is a hundred euros per month.

Until recently, the activity of the committee was supported by the ‘basic income’ of four hundred ‘monetary units’ received by each of its members. However, in the context of CIC's strategy of decentralization, the *permanent assembly* which was held in Barcelona in May 2016 decided to discontinue the provision of basic income to the XCTIT, thereby turning it from a committee into a financially autonomous project. Consequently, in order to ensure its sustainability, from now on XCTIT plans to rely on the following two sources of income: first, it collects 20% of the revenue from the workshops organized by other groups and collectivities at XCTIT's space inside Can Fugarolas.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, it aspires to complement its income through [replicat.net](https://www.replicat.net), which it recently launched as an e-shop for the prototypes developed by XCTIT and its collaborators.<sup>26</sup>

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24 URL: <https://www.canfugarolas.org>

25 So far this income has been used to fund projects in XCTIT's network, such as Faboratory and Can Cuadres.

26 XCTIT collects 2% of the revenue from the sales of prototypes developed by its collaborators.



## 5. Autonomous projects of collective initiative

An interesting element in the organizational canvas of the CIC are the so-called ‘*autonomous projects of collective initiative*’ (PAICs).<sup>27</sup> These are cooperative projects the CIC is connected with through a relation of collaboration, solidarity and mutual aid on the basis of common values and principles. In most cases, they are projects in which CIC members have been actively involved from the early stages, thereby creating a bond between them and the CIC. As Enric Duran explains, “there’s an ongoing reciprocity [between PAICs and the CIC] as the efforts taken by the whole [CIC] are key to making these PAICs possible, allocating various kinds of resources to make them a reality. PAICs normally also respond to the strategic objectives of the CIC itself”.<sup>28</sup> However, even though the term PAIC itself implies that they are autonomous (from CIC in terms of their management), in fact some of these projects are embedded into the organizational structure of the CIC. In order to understand how these projects are organized and how they are related to CIC, we will look at the five most prominent of them: *AureaSocial*, *CASX*, *SOM Pujarnol*, *Calafou* and *MaCUS*. The former two (*AureaSocial* and *CASX*) are run by the CIC, whereas the others (*Calafou*, *MaCUS* and *SOM Pujarnol*) are fully autonomous with regard to their management and daily operation.

### AureaSocial

*AureaSocial* is the informal ‘headquarters’ of the CIC in Barcelona, a 1400m<sup>2</sup> building at the heart of the city, whose daily operation is entrusted to the *Common Spaces Committee*.<sup>29</sup>



*The AureaSocial reception dimly illuminated, a few minutes before closing down for the night*

27 <http://cooperativa.cat/en/territorial-network/autonomous-projects-of-collective-initiative-apci/>

28 Shareable (2014) ‘Spanish Robin Hood Enric Duran on Capitalism and "Integral Revolution"’, at <http://www.shareable.net/blog/spanish-robin-hood-enric-duran-on-capitalism-and-integral-revolution>

29 URL: <http://www.aureasocial.org>

The story of the building is quite interesting: the building belongs to a company, which resorted to leasing it to the CIC (in exchange for a symbolic rent) when it went bankrupt six years ago, thereby obstructing the legal process of seizure and foreclosure by the bank. This is, in short, the ‘strategy’ that has allowed the CIC to appropriate this space. Launched in 2010 as one of CIC’s so-called ‘autonomous projects of collective initiative’, AureaSocial is now a space used for a multitude of activities: such as for many of the work meetings and assemblies of the CIC committees; for public talks, seminars, conferences and films as well as for all sorts of workshops (anything from workshops about how to improve one’s humour to vegan cooking).<sup>30</sup> The space hosts the office of the *Committee of Economic Management*, a free public library, a gift shop for clothes and the central pantry of the CAC in Barcelona. Furthermore, it operates as a *co-op working space*: the rooms on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor are used during the day by psychologists and physiotherapists for their professional activities, generating a monthly income of about two thousand so-called ‘monetary units’, which means that users can pay for the rooms they use either in euros or ‘ecos’. This income is then used by the *Committee of Economic Management* to cover various needs of the cooperative, such as the provision of the ‘basic income’ received by committee members or the payment of utility bills for AureaSocial. To ensure that nobody is excluded from making use of the working spaces, an alternative way by which users can pay for the rooms is by contributing their labour: for example, by working at the reception or helping to clean up the building.



*AureaSocial's entrance*

## CASX

The *Cooperativa d'Autofinançament Social en Xarxa (CASX)*<sup>31</sup> – which means ‘Cooperative of Social and Network Self-financing’ – is a savings, donations and project funding cooperative, which was set up with the purpose of providing funding for projects that are aligned with the principles of the CIC and the integral revolution, as “the deposits made to CASX are used to finance self-managed individual or collective projects aiming at the

<sup>30</sup> The calendar of public activities at AureaSocial is accessible online at <https://teamup.com/ks2721d89e700255bc>

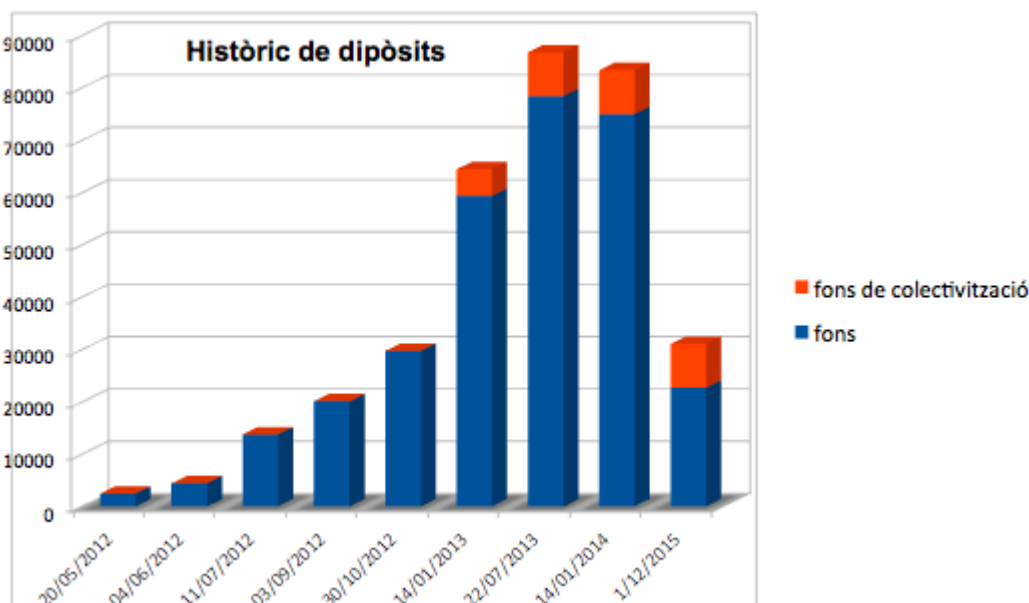
<sup>31</sup> URL: <http://www.casx.cat>

common good”.<sup>32</sup> To this end, since 2013 CASX has provided €59.329 of funding to eighteen projects.



*The CASX logo*

Launched by CIC in 2012 as an ‘autonomous project of collective initiative’, CASX has been operating legally as a co-op since 2013, using the legal form of Xarxa d'Autogestio Social SCCL, which is one of the ‘legal tools’ the CIC offers to its member-projects. Presently, CASX has 155 members, of which many represent other cooperatives and collectivities. The membership fee for individual projects is €15 and €51 for collective projects. Taking into account the activist character of the project as well as the fact that deposits to CASX are interest-free, it is truly remarkable that the total amount of deposits made in the last four years exceeds €250.000 (for a more detailed analysis, see graph below).



*CASX deposits over time (Source: CASX presentation at the permanent assembly of the CIC, 2015)*

The members of CASX make decisions based on consensus through its assembly, which takes place once a month at AureaSocial.<sup>33</sup> However, the CASX assembly is not fully autonomous, as many of its decisions must be approved by the permanent assembly of the CIC before they can be implemented. Close, for obvious reasons, is also the collaboration between CASX and the *Committee of Economic Management*. For its daily operation, CASX

<sup>32</sup> CIC (undated) ‘Auto-financing’, at <http://cooperativa.cat/en/economic-system/auto-financing/>

<sup>33</sup> In case that consensus is not possible among CASX members as to whether a project should be funded or not, the members supporting the funding proposal can do so by using their personal CASX deposits.

relies on two CIC members, who receive a basic income of 140 ‘monetary units’ (which, in their case, amount to 120 euros and 20 ecos) per month.

The operation of CASX has been suspended since the beginning of 2016 in order to re-engineer its organization around a deposits and funding model based exclusively on ecos, which is slated to roll out when CASX resumes its operation in the coming months. Alongside the implementation of the new business model, CASX's main goal for the future is the decentralization of its model through its local reproduction “so that every neighborhood, town or city can start generating their own CASX assembly, redirecting the resources of their local members to local projects”.<sup>34</sup>

## SOM Pujarnol

*SOM Pujarnol*<sup>35</sup> is a group of people animated by the principles of the integral revolution and agro-ecology, who live and work in a thousand-year-old tower (known as the tower of Pujarnol in Banyoles) in the Catalan province of Pla de l'Estany. It was launched about four years ago as an ‘autonomous project of collective initiative’ of the CIC, with the aim of exemplifying a humane and environmentally sustainable model of living in the Catalan countryside.



*The tower of Pujarnol at night (Source: SOM Pujarnol)*

The tower and the seventy acres of land surrounding it belong to a Foundation, which has leased it to the CIC for a period of fifteen years in exchange for a thousand euros per month, with the proviso that the cooperativa will repair those parts of the tower which have suffered the wear and tear of time. That is, besides, the main reason why the rent of a 600 m<sup>2</sup> tower is that low, as the ones responsible for its restoration are the members of the group living here, which is presently made up of nine persons, including two children.

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34 CIC (undated) ‘Auto-financing’, at <http://cooperativa.cat/en/economic-system/auto-financing/>

35 URL: <https://www.facebook.com/people/Som-Pujarnol/100010861595073>

For the purpose of decision-making, the group has an assembly once a week, in which its members make decisions about the management of the project based on consensus. As for routine tasks, such as cooking and cleaning up common spaces, they are assigned through a system of job rotation, so that all members participate equally in carrying them out.



*The ‘wheel’ used by SOM Pujarnol members for the purpose of job rotation  
(Photo by Luis David Arias Castaño)*

SOM Pujarnol's relationship with the CIC is not a relation of economic dependency, but one of collaboration based on common principles,<sup>36</sup> as SOM Pujarnol no longer receives any financial support from the cooperative. Thus, for the economic viability of the project, SOM Pujarnol depends on income from three main sources: it produces and sells products – such as falafel, sauces (e.g. ketchup), veggie burgers and humus – through the local eco-network in Girona and CIC's Catalan Supply Center (CAC); it organizes events, such as jam sessions on Fridays; and it provides ‘bed & breakfast’ accommodation for travellers who wish to spend a few days at the tower.

<sup>36</sup> As a characteristic example of that relationship, SOM Pujarnol performs the function of the CIC committee that is responsible for the recruitment and induction of new CIC members (the so-called ‘Acollida Comisi3n’) in the province of Garrotxa.



*Music night at SOM Pujarnol (Source: SOM Pujarnol)*

## Calafou

One of CIC's most emblematic 'autonomous projects of collective initiative' is *Calafou*,<sup>37</sup> the self-proclaimed 'post-capitalist colony' which settled in 2011 in the ruins of an abandoned industrial village in the Catalan county of l'Anoia, about 65km away from Barcelona.



*The entrance to the Calafou colony (Source: calafou.org)*

The colony was set up with the participation of several heavily-involved CIC members with the aim of becoming a collectivist model for living and organizing the productive

<sup>37</sup> URL: <https://calafou.org>

activities of a small community based on the principles of self-management, ecology and sustainability. At the same time, it represents an example of the form that former industrial villages could assume in a post-capitalist era.



*Calafou's post-apocalyptic aesthetics (Source: calafou.org)*

The first thing one is struck by when visiting Calafou is the aesthetics of the space, which gives the impression of a Mad Max-like post-apocalyptic scene, as many of the buildings of the village remain abandoned and half-dilapidated. In reality, however, Calafou is anything but abandoned: at the moment, the colony accommodates a multitude of productive activities and community infrastructures, including a carpentry, a mechanical workshop, a botanical garden, a community kitchen, a biolab, a hacklab, a soap production lab, a professional music studio, a guest-house for visitors, a social centre with a free shop, as well as a plethora of other productive projects.<sup>38</sup>



*The Calafou hacklab (Source: calafou.org)*

<sup>38</sup> For an overview of the productive projects hosted by Calafou, see <https://calafou.org/en/content/projects-0>

As far as its property regime is concerned, the village was handed over by its owner to Calafou members based on the following agreement: the ‘colonists’ gave him a security deposit of €70.000 and committed themselves to paying a monthly rent of €2.500 for the next ten years. Presently, the colony, which has twenty-seven houses (of 60m<sup>2</sup> each), is inhabited by twenty-two people. For the collective management of housing, Calafou members have set up a **housing cooperative**, which grants them as tenants only the right to use the space they inhabit. In that way, as tenants do not have the right to re-sell or lease their rights of use to others, the land and the houses of the village remain the unalienable property of the housing cooperative. Thus, based on the above agreement, tenants pay €175 per month for each house.



*A bird's-eye view of the village (Source: calafou.org)*

According to some of its members, one of Calafou's most significant accomplishments is its consensus-oriented assembly, which is held every Sunday for the purpose of making decisions as well as for the coordination of daily tasks like cleaning up common spaces, which are self-selected on a voluntary basis by ‘Calafou-ers’. However, the assembly character is not always the same, as its thematology alternates between ‘political’ (for discussion of political issues), ‘managerial’ (for management issues) and ‘monographic’ based on presentations made by Calafou's working groups.<sup>39</sup>

For its economic sustainability, Calafou depends on three main sources of income: first, the revenues of the housing cooperative (based on the rent paid by residents); second, the contribution made by Calafou's productive projects;<sup>40</sup> and third, the significant income generated by the various cultural events taking place at the village (like conferences, concerts and festivals).

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39 Although Calafou has quite a few working groups, all of which have direct input into the assembly process, the presentations at ‘monographic’ assemblies are made only by the four most important ones (i.e. the working groups on economics, communication, renovation-restoration and productive projects).

40 Productive projects have to pay a monthly rent of €1 for every square metre of space they occupy at Calafou.



## MaCUS

*MaCUS*<sup>41</sup> (which stands for ‘Màquines collectivitzades d'us social’, that is, ‘machines collectivized for social use’) is another ‘autonomous project of collective initiative’, which began in 2012 with the aim of becoming a cooperative lab in Barcelona where both traditional machines and new technologies are used for collaborative research, development and production. The two-floor building in the area of Sant Martí, where MaCUS is based, occupies 600m<sup>2</sup> and is host to the activities of a close-knit group of modern as well as traditional craftsmen engaged in making wooden furniture, clothes and herbal medicine, fixing bicycles and repairing home electronics as well as photography, sculpture and digital music production.



*MaCUS members having a break in the carpentry (Source: MaCUS)*

The business model of MaCUS is based on renting out space inside the building to collectivity members where they can set up their workshop. The rent is €10 per square metre and is inclusive of water, electricity, internet and telephone. This income is then used to pay for the building's utility bills (about €200-300 per month) and its rent, which amounts to €1.833 per month. To strengthen the project's economic viability, a business model that MaCUS members are currently experimenting with focuses on the development of prototypes with the aim of selling them to third parties, providing thus the collectivity with an additional revenue stream.

For managerial issues, MaCUS members have a monthly assembly where they make decisions in a direct-democratic fashion (based on consensus). Within the collectivity, organization is horizontal and anti-hierarchical: the equality of the members is ensured by the fact that those who rent space inside the building are at the same time members of the collectivity managing MaCUS and as such they can participate fully as equals in decision making.

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41 URL: <https://www.facebook.com/MaCUS-527463237312344/>



*A 3D-printer developed by one of the members (Source: MaCUS)*



*The MaCUS basement (Source: MaCUS)*

The relationship between CIC and MaCUS is also quite interesting. MaCUS was launched upon the initiative of the CIC and initially depended upon its financial support for the payment of its rent. However, the income generated by renting out space inside the building

to collectivity members has allowed MaCUS to evolve into an economically self-sustainable project, which has no need of any external financial aid. Besides, that is the goal of all 'autonomous projects of collective initiative': to become economically self-sustainable so that they don't need the financial support of the CIC.

### Concluding remarks: A project with a network or a network of projects?

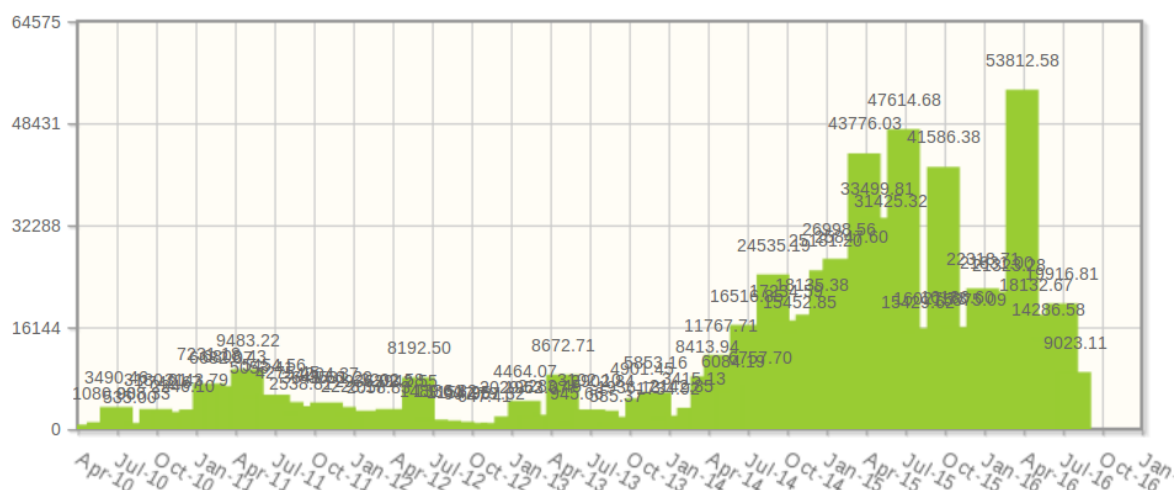
As we have seen, PAICs differ from one another with regard to their degree of managerial autonomy: projects like CASX and AureaSocial are run by the organizational core of the CIC, whereas others, like Calafou and MaCUS, operate entirely autonomously from it. Their only common characteristic is they are all cooperative projects connected with the CIC. In fact, from the point of view of administratively autonomous PAICs like Calafou and MaCUS, the CIC is but one of the projects making up a broader cooperative network based on common values and principles. That actually is more in line with the vision of the CIC for the development of a network of self-managed projects in Catalonia, in which its role is that of providing support services and tools, akin to traditional service cooperatives. And that is very important: the CIC never tried to create a centrally controlled network of projects; on the contrary, its goal has always been the creation of an organizationally decentralized network of projects connected by the same principles, which support each other by sharing resources and capabilities. It makes, then, more sense to view PAICS as autonomous projects in a cooperative network which the CIC reinforces with support tools and services, rather than as projects run by the CIC.

## 6. CIC’s economic ecosystem: Local exchange networks and social currencies

A characteristic of healthy social movements is that they create the structures and the tools that are most appropriate to their needs and goals. The economic model of the CIC, which aspires to “bring together all the basic elements of an economy such as production, consumption, funding and a local currency”,<sup>42</sup> is paradigmatic of this empirical axiom.

The ‘kernel’ of this economic model are the so-called **local exchange networks** (or *local exchange groups*), which are usually made up of tens or hundreds of members who exchange products and services by using their own digital currencies. In essence, each exchange network constitutes a self-organized marketplace for the local community in which its members can buy and sell locally-available products and services. The payment can take the form of barter exchange or if that is not possible, it can be made by means of the **local currency** used by each exchange network. Transactions made by using these local currencies are based on the principle of *mutual credit*, which means that when a transaction between two parties occurs, one's account is credited, the other's debited. From a technical point of view, keeping track of transactions and of members' credit and debit balances is done through online platforms known as *community exchange systems*. These constitute the tool with which the members of exchange networks manage their accounts, as well as a marketplace for buying and selling locally-available products and services.

In Catalonia, in specific, there are more than forty local exchange networks known as ‘eco-networks’ (‘ecoxarxes’ in Catalan) because of the local Catalan currency ‘eco’, some variant of which they all use.<sup>43</sup> Eco’s ‘birth’ in Catalonia can be traced back to 2009 – about a year before the formation of the CIC in 2010 – when the eco-networks of Tarragona and Montseny introduced their own alternative currency (CIC 2015, Flores 2015).



Total amount of transactions per month in CIC’s eco-network (Source: IntegralCES)

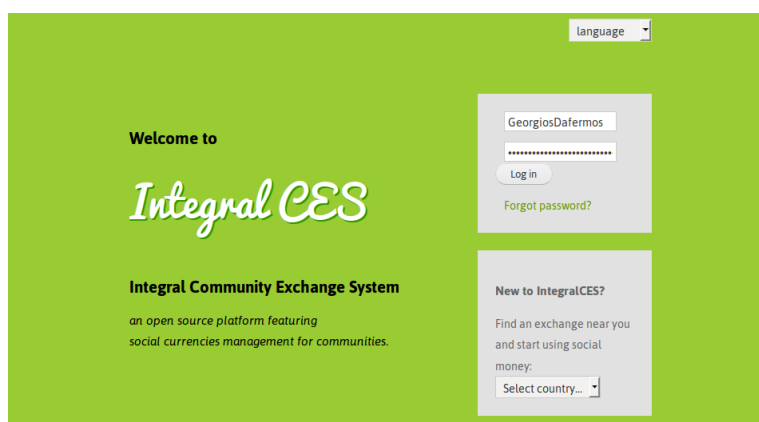
Although their size differs substantially, some eco-networks have thousands of members: indicatively, the eco-network launched by CIC in 2010 has 2.634 members.<sup>44</sup> From a

42 CIC (undated) ‘What’s CIC?’, at <http://cooperativa.cat/en/4390-2/>

43 URL: <http://ecoxarxes.cat/ecoxarxes/>

44 URL: <https://integralces.net/el/ces/bank/exchange/otherexchanges/COOP/statistics> (accessed on April 24, 2017)

technical point of view, the operation of about half of the eco-networks is based on the Community Exchange System (CES),<sup>45</sup> while the rest have ‘migrated’ to the *IntegralCES* platform,<sup>46</sup> which was developed upon the initiative of the CIC and several eco-networks as a modified version of CES that is adapted to their local needs.



*The IntegralCES website*

Despite the fact that eco-networks represent an autonomous local structure, they are not cut off from each other: first of all, the software platforms they rely on for their operation make it possible for members of different eco-networks to engage in transactions. Secondly, though each eco-network has its own autonomous assembly, they are all connected through the institutions of meta-governance evolved by the community of eco-networks, such as the ‘Space for the coordination of social currencies’ (*Espai de coordinació de monedes socials*)<sup>47</sup> and the so-called ‘*Bioregional assemblies*’ of the South and the North of Catalonia,<sup>48</sup> which serve as an informally-organized coordinating organ for eco-networks across the Catalan territory.



*Bioregional assembly in Ultramort in May 2016. Photo by Luis Camargo*  
(<https://bioregionalnordcic.blogspot.gr/2016/04/album-de-fotos-de-lassemblea-duitramort.html>)

45 URL: <https://www.community-exchange.org>

46 URL: <http://integralces.net>

47 URL: <http://www.monedasocial.cat>

48 URL: <https://bioregionalnordcic.blogspot.gr> and <http://bioregiosud.cooperativa.cat>

These are the outlines of the economic ecosystem in which the CIC is embedded and which it proposes as a tool for the transition to the post-capitalist society it envisions: a horizontally organized network of self-managed exchange networks with their own community currencies.

## 7. The development of a cooperative public system

In the context of its strategic aim for the development of a cooperative economy, it is the conviction of the CIC that the goods required for satisfying the basic needs of society should be freely accessible social goods, rather than commodities. For that reason, since its formation in 2010 the CIC has launched several initiatives aimed at the development of a **cooperative public system**, proposing to displace the centrally-managed state apparatus of public services with a truly cooperative model for organizing the provision of social goods such as health, food, education, energy, housing and transport.<sup>49</sup> In specific, it has set up initiatives encompassing the fields of alimentation, education,<sup>50</sup> health,<sup>51</sup> housing,<sup>52</sup> science & technology and transport.<sup>53</sup>

Of all those initiatives, by far the most successful is the one focused on food. Through the *Catalan Supply Center (CAC)* it set up in 2012, the CIC has successfully created a fully-functional logistics network for the transportation and delivery of (organic and biological) food produced by small producers all over Catalonia. Another important ‘public service’ that the CIC provides to small productive projects in its locality is that performed by CIC’s *Network of Science, Technique and Technology (XCTIT)* in the field of science and technology: by developing technologies and machines adapted to the particular needs of small producers and distributing them under ‘copyleft’ licenses which ensure that anyone can freely use and replicate them, the XCTIT practically democratizes access to tools which would have been otherwise beyond the reach of most small projects.

However, with the exception of the CAC and the XCTIT, most of the ‘components’ of the ‘cooperative public system’ envisioned by the CIC are still at an embryonic stage of development. The reason why these have not been further developed is manifold: in some cases, that is because the provision of public services by the State is, to a large degree, satisfactory for most people – as in the case of the health system in Catalonia – thus rendering the local self-organization of alternative services and infrastructures less imperative. Similarly, it is reasonable to assume that a factor holding back the development of CIC’s efforts in the field of transport is the huge success of various online ‘car sharing’ platforms, which apparently constitute a functional alternative for covering the needs of people without their own means of transport. The most important, however, of all the factors that account for the existing scale of development of CIC’s ‘cooperative public system’ has to do with the practice of *self-organization* itself. We should not forget that the CIC is, above all, an activist project based on the principle of self-organization: by contrast to traditional organizations which expand and scale-up their productive activities by employing more personnel, the CIC relies on the voluntary participation of the community. That means that the degree to which its strategic goals are actively pursued does not depend on managerial initiative, but on the extent of community participation. From that point of view, one should not hold the CIC accountable for the hitherto limited implementation of the ‘cooperative public system’. To achieve its goals, what the CIC does – much like any other activist project – is expend a continuous effort to communicate its strategic vision and goals with the local community in order to mobilize community actors to participate in the project and take it upon themselves to implement those goals.

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49 CIC (*undated*) ‘Cooperative public system’, at <http://cooperativa.cat/en/cooperative-public-system/>

50 For CIC’s ‘Office of Education’, see <https://cooperativa.cat/en/cooperative-public-system/6014-2/>

51 For CIC’s ‘Cooperative Public Health System’, see <https://cooperativa.cat/en/cooperative-public-system/health/>

52 For CIC’s ‘Office of Housing’, see <http://www.habitatgesocial.cat> and <https://cooperativa.cat/en/cooperative-public-system/housing/>

53 For CIC’s ‘Office of Transport’, see <https://cooperativa.cat/sistema-public-cooperatiu-2/oficina-de-transport/>

## 8. Open cooperativism

One of the most constructive critiques levelled against the cooperative movement in recent years focuses on the parsimonious participation of cooperative organizations in the production of the so-called ‘Commons’, that is, goods that are accessible to all members of society.<sup>54</sup> The problem is that “cooperatives that work within the capitalist marketplace tend to gradually adopt competitive mentalities, and even when they do not, they chiefly operate for the benefit of their own members. They usually have to rely on the patent and copyright system to protect their collective ownership and may often self-enclose around their local or national membership”.<sup>55</sup> The CIC is exactly the opposite of such cooperatives: in fact, one of the reasons setting the CIC apart from traditional cooperatives is its commitment to the Commons. Unlike most cooperatives, the CIC develops structures and tools, which are not reserved just for its members, but are accessible to everyone. For example, the alternative currency ‘eco’ (in its various forms) is used not only by the local exchange groups in Catalonia, but even in countries like Argentina, Brazil, France and Greece. The same applies to the IntegralCES platform, which can be used freely by any local exchange group around the world. Even more specialized tools, such as the ‘GestioGI’ invoice processing software which the CIC developed for its own internal use, are freely available on the Internet as free/open source software. That means anyone can download them and use them, without any obligation to become a member of the CIC. Similarly, the machines and agricultural tools developed by CIC’s *XCTIT* for the needs of the productive projects in CIC’s network in Catalonia are freely reproducible: their design information is freely available, giving anyone the ability to build them on their own and customize them according to their needs. In fact, even the model of CIC’s organization and operation is ‘open-source’ in the sense that the CIC actively encourages the development of autonomous projects aimed at reproducing its model in other places.

The same commitment to the Commons is reflected in CIC’s strategic goal for the development of a cooperative public system, in which health, food, education and housing are social goods that everyone has access to. Its efforts in that direction might have been partially fruitful so far, but this does not belittle their importance. Above all, it offers an example as well as a vision for the development of cooperatives which aim to benefit not only their fee-paying members, but the broader local community as well by providing it with free access to public benefit infrastructures.

However, this call for engagement with common goods should not be interpreted as a moral imperative or obligation. The motivation of cooperatives should not be philanthropy or altruism alone. As the Brazilian activist and philosopher Euclides Mance argues, common goods constitute strategic tools for the autonomy of cooperatives. A well-known example is how free software (like the Linux operating system) and open design technologies (like the agricultural machines for small producers developed by CIC’s *XCTIT*) can be used by cooperatives as ‘instruments of liberation’ to extricate themselves from a relationship of dependence on capitalist firms like Microsoft.<sup>56</sup> In fact, that is precisely the reason why the

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54 See, for example, Bauwens, M. & Kostakis, V. (2014) ‘From the Communism of Capital to Capital for the Commons: Towards an Open Co-operativism’. *TripleC* 12(1), at <http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/561>

55 Pazaitis, A., Kostakis, V. & Bauwens, M. (2017). ‘Digital Economy and the Rise of Open Cooperativism: The Case of the Enspiral Network’. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research* 23(2), at <http://journals.sagepub.com/eprint/cQtJrUauKHrIGGYmMZtq/full>

56 Mance, E. & Stallman, R. (2013) *Personal Declaration of Richard Stallman and Euclides Mance*, at <https://stallman.org/solidarity-economy.html>



CIC places such importance on the use and development of free and open technology tools, as they ensure the technological sovereignty of the cooperative economy movement.

## 9. Summing up...

The CIC is without doubt an unconventional cooperative. It was created in the age of crisis by Catalan activists as an antisystemic strategy for the development of counter-structures from the bottom up. One would have to look very hard to find another cooperative, whose primary goal is not the provision of some service to its members, but the ‘creative destruction’ of the capitalist system.

As we have seen in chapter 4, the organizational core of the CIC is made up of ten committees, which cover a wide spectrum of activities. About half of them deal with the internal management and operation of the cooperative, while the rest focus on the provision of services and ‘tools’ as diverse as (a) legal assistance, (b) organizing the logistics in a Catalan-wide network of pantries run by local consumer groups, (c) providing funding (through CASX) to projects animated by the same ideological principles and (d) making tools and machines adapted to the needs of the productive projects in CIC’s network (like the agricultural tools for small farmers that have been developed by the *XCTIT*).

An interesting element in the organizational canvas of the CIC are the autonomous projects it collaborates with. As we remarked in chapter 5, although they are characterized by varying degrees of managerial autonomy, what is particularly important about them is the fact that they form a local network of productive projects animated by the same principles and values as the CIC, with which they collaborate in the context of the empowerment of the local cooperative economy.

Alongside these autonomous projects, the economic and territorial network of the CIC (which we discussed in chapter 6) encompasses a vibrant ecosystem of local exchange groups which are active in Catalonia. Based on direct exchange and the use of alternative community currencies, the way in which this ecosystem operates represents the model of the *autonomous public market* envisioned by the CIC as a means of satisfying the needs of the local community. That is, in short, the model proposed by the CIC for the transition to a post-capitalist economy: a local cooperative economy made up of a network of autonomous productive projects with common principles, which, in collaboration with local consumer groups and exchange networks, is able to provide the members of the community with the goods they need.