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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE FLEXIBLE INSTITUTIONALIZATION PROCESS OF PUMA CURRENCY IN SEVILLE, SPAIN

Georgina M. Gómez

Erasmus University, Rotterdam

Cristina Medina Prado

Andalusian Studies Centre Foundation

Department of the Presidency of the Andalusian Regional Government

ABSTRACT: Grassroots groups depend on dynamic and fluid interactions with high trust to retain their identity. At the same time, a stable structure and division of labour with rules and hierarchies is necessary to sustain their organisation and social influence. The study explores this organisational dilemma by drawing on the category of flexible institutionalisation. It enquires how actors experience this balancing act between spontaneous solidarity and hierarchical structures in the life of the collective. The study focuses on the PUMA complementary currency in Seville, which was the brainchild of a neighbourhood association, a degrowth group and the local community. Puma functioned as a mutual credit system with a passbook and later as a digital wallet. The research presents primary data collected in 2014, 2017 and 2019 and concludes that the institutionalisation of social innovations is purposefully incomplete and regulates spaces of spontaneity and caring to preserve solidarity and identity.

KEYWORDS: Complementary currencies, Spain, institutions, politics of caring, extension dilemma, social innovation

CORRESPONDING AUTHORS: Georgina M. Gómez, gomez@iss.nl

1. Setting the scene

Community currency systems, in the same way as other activists' and grassroots' groups, experience various tensions as they mature. A key pressure is to sustain their social influence in the longer term, which implies establishing rules of action and organising their interactions with other actors in business, government and civil society. They strive to reach internal agreements to add stability and predictability to what they do and how they do it in order to preserve their gains. At the same time, activism and contestation of the status quo rely on dynamic, flexible and fluid informal interactions with high trust that give meaning to grassroots' innovations. Some scholars argue that institutional consolidation undermines the solidarity and the motivations that drive the activism of civil society organisations (Bebbington et al., 2008a, Bebbington et al., 2008b, Mitlin et al., 2007, Islam, 2014). They suggest that a stable structure and a division of labour that often includes hierarchies stand against the grassroots' way of life, with their aspiration for transformation and bias towards spontaneity (Fowler, 1997, Biekart and Fowler, 2013). The institutionalisation of activists' groups hence seems to consolidate the collective while it also undermines their very essence (Fowler, 1997, Jansson and Sedaca, 2000).

Institutions are defined as "structured processes of interaction among individuals, relatively enduring and recognised as such" (Lawson, 2003: 182). Among other binding patterns of interaction, the organisers of community currency systems (CCS) discuss the terms on which their non-state means of payments exist and circulate. In turn, the design of a complementary currency system relies on a myriad of agreements about the appeal of the symbol, the rules on issuing, the actions to sustain cohesion, and its locally binding governance system. A comparison between the large number of communities that experiment with this scheme around the world and the small percentage of those that endure after a year underlines the tension between the enthusiasm of the origins and the challenge of longer-term institutionalisation (Blanc, 2011).

The present research aims at conceptualising the process of institutionalisation from below, because it is performed by members of the community for current and future members of the community. The process of building institutions from below could allow CCS to grow in scale and endure in time, but it can also erode the shared values that breed it. This article discusses the balancing act between the informality, flexibility and solidarity of CCS, on one hand, and the longer-term goal of achieving stability, order and social permanence, on the other. We ask in what ways grassroots' groups extend their

values to newcomers as these join the group with diverse interests and motivations. We also enquire how they preserve their internal solidarity as they establish more regulations and hierarchies.

For this analysis, we conducted a case study to gain depth into these social processes and we set the level of analysis at the meso level because we were not specifically interested in researching effects on or by the individual actors but their collective construction of rules around a complementary currency. We thus sought a case driven by an explicit contestation of the status quo as well as a longer-term plan to sustain a community currency. We chose a geographically constrained CCS, as opposed to one with virtual global existence, so we could observe the face to face negotiations among members. We chose a CCS that would also have transitioned from physical to digital. We decided to base our case study at the Puma CCS in the Spanish city of Seville because the debate we described was discussed explicitly and at length by its members.

The Puma complementary currency system was an offspring of a neighbourhood association founded to defend a historical building in the city of Seville in 2000. During the financial crisis in Spain around 2008, it merged with a group of degrowth activists. In March 2012 it organized a local currency with 20 participants to start what they described as “a more human and sustainable economy”. Eighteen months later Puma CCS turned a membership of 800 participants who would come from other areas of the city. The organisers had serious problems to manage an initiative of that scale that relied only on voluntary, personal and unwritten rules. The core group then declared what it termed a “hibernation period” in which they suspended the operation of the CCS and the acceptance of new members until a more formal structure was discussed and established. They saw that institutionalisation had become pivotal for the survival and growth of the network while they also recognized that the basis of the collective was the person to person, spontaneous or informal interactions. Moreover, Puma transitioned to a digital currency in 2017, although this did not introduce major changes in their operations. The CCS was discontinued in 2019, at least formally.

We obtained consented access to all the documents, reports and minutes elaborated by Puma, as well as authorisation to participate in its meetings and interview its members. We collected primary data via interviews and participatory observation between May and November 2014, when we attended several hours of meetings. Later we kept in touch with Puma and attended their biannual meetings. We revisited the initiative in 2017, when the physical notes transitioned to a digital platform, and in late 2019 when they collectively decided to stop the circulation of the currency. Over these years, the

scheme grew in organizational complexity as well as in professionalism, adopting a pragmatic project and simultaneously remaining informal and encouraging personal autonomy. It is precisely the coexistence of these elements, institutionalization and flexibility, that represent a particularly interesting case to research. We describe the theoretical dilemma in the second section of this paper and the origins of Puma in the third one. The fourth section explains the institutionalisation process and the fifth one focuses on the politics of affections. We conclude by revisiting the concept of flexible institutionalisation and advancing its theorisation.

2. Social construction of institutions

This research departs from the conception of CCS as a grassroots' innovation, a notion introduced by Seyfang and Smith (2007) as part of the new research agenda for sustainable development. Grassroots' innovations are spaces for social experimentation and learning that sometimes manage to consolidate and disseminate. The authors focus on "community level action" that takes many forms, but are generally defined as "networks of activists and organisations generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development" (Seyfang and Smith, 2007: 585). The authors explain that grassroots innovations, including complementary currency systems, take many "institutional forms" (ibid, p. 591) in terms of their organisation, resource base, governance system, ideology and the social need they aim to address. They argue that many of these innovations seek to grow and achieve social influence in the longer run.

We will argue that the bottom up institutionalisation process in such communities takes the form of "flexible institutionalization", a concept first introduced by Hans Pruijt (2003) in his study of a squat collective in the Netherlands. The notion of flexible institutionalisation was coined to capture the tensions in reconciling the claims from a part of the group that aimed to establish stable rules and find a more favourable integration in society versus another more radical part of the collective that preferred to maintain spontaneity, informality and disruption of the status quo without envisioning specific longer term planning. The mobilisation starts by building networks, when activists are able to attract participants and gather resources to coordinate collective action (Prujt, 2007: 5115). Community and grassroots collectives such as Puma similarly begin with group contestations of the status quo that motivate collective action but often derive into other paths. While Pruijt does not delve into the dimensions or implications of the

concept of flexible institutionalisation, we found that the notion facilitates the understanding of the problem we described above.

Grassroots' groups also engage the existent institutions that structure interactions between individuals, including those in a formal or written way, such as legal regulations, and in informal or unwritten form, such as culture, norms, or discourses. They are guided by common purposes to resist already institutionalised and formal counterparts such the government, but they also interact with them. Several scholars (Campbell, 2004, Gómez, 2019, Cleaver, 2002) elaborated on this process of "bricolage" as a path to create new institutions from below by leveraging on the old ones. The term was first used by (Levi Strauss, 1962: 16) to explain how agents recombine elements in their institutional repertoire "with devious means" and deal with obstacles with "some extraneous movement". Some authors claim that institutionalization occurs at the end of the life cycle of social movements (Castells, 1983) and as a consequence of changes in their action repertoire like more routinized and less spontaneous methods that replace disruption (Kriesi, 1995), which suggests an identity loss. Other authors (Tarrow and Tollefson, 1994, Membretti, 2007) have argued that in contemporary social movements institutionalization does not necessarily imply that the creative and disruptive zeal of a movement is in decline. On the contrary, they maintain that it is possible to engage in a process of flexible institutionalisation with only partial structuring and in which a radical wing continues to produce disruption.

Pruijt (2003) considered that towards the end of an institutional construction process, there are two predominant ways of integration into the mainstream social structure: co-optation and institutionalization. Co-optation is "the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence" (Pruijt 2003:134) while institutionalisation occurs when "a movement is channelled into a stable pattern based on formalized rules and laws" (Pruijt 2003:134). In this second variant, expected behaviour is rather clear and sanctions for non-compliance are in place. The author distinguishes between "terminal institutionalisation", where convention and routines replace creative disruption, and "flexible institutionalization", where conventional tactics coexist or complement the disruptive ones. Therefore, bottom up institutionalisation is essentially a contradictory process of continuous tension between a flexible and a creative part of the organisation that values the creative disruption of social movements and pressures to achieve higher degrees of formalisation that would enable it to participate in existing institutions such

as the state, to legitimate its actions, and to gain access to a wider range of resources and alliances.

Local communities create their own money in the understanding that money is a socially-constructed institution that is “attached to a variety of social relations” (Seyfang and Pearson, 2000: 236). The introduction of a complementary currency seeks to reinvent social and economic life according to different values in which competition, individual accumulation and money scarcity would be replaced by other values, such as “sharing, solidarity, equality and fraternity” (Latouche, 2009: 94). Complementary currencies are sometimes conceived as local resistance projects (Gomez and de Wit, 2015, North, 1999, North, 2007) because they are a down to earth practical way to challenge the “capitalist existence” through day-to-day economic practices that do not re-create the relations that prevail outside (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Complementary currency systems hence represent a small scale and localized resistance to the mainstream power relations (micro-political).

This view combines a Foucauldian understanding of money as a “local system of domination”, Scott’s “micro-political resistances” (Scott, 1976, Scott, 1990) and Pickerill and Chatterton (2006) concept of “autonomous geography”. As a system of domination, money has its own modes of power and local practices, whereby subjects reconstruct themselves and their economic life through the money that they create (North, 2007: 28). James C. Scott (1976) argued that every system of domination has its own ritual of subordination, so micro-politics are “everyday forms of resistance” designed to mitigate specific forms of domination at a local level. A micro-political analysis of social action around money engages also with the concept of “autonomy from the grassroots” as organizing principle (Credland et al., 2003: 107). In theory, CCS members are moved by a desire for freedom, self-organisation and mutual aid that comes from a rejection of an economic and political system where “lives are manufactured for us, instead of being the outcome of our choices and desires” (Credland et al., 2003: 109). Pickerill and Chatterton (2006: 730) refer to autonomous geographies to define “those spaces where there is a questioning of the laws and social norms of society and a creative desire to constitute non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity, and citizenship”. Chatterton (2005: 547) elaborates that collective autonomy “simultaneously refuses and proposes, destroys and creates”.

3. The start of Puma

In recent years complementary currency systems (CCS) have been developed in different countries as strategic tools to foster more sustainable local economies (Seyfang and Pearson, 2000, Gomez and Helmsing, 2008, Fare, 2013). Puma promoters were inspired by their emancipatory potential to build a more autonomous and ecological alternative to the mainstream economy. Puma is one of the experiences of non-state monetary systems that has been implemented in the last decades around the world and represented the convergence of several groups of actors.

In Seville, Pumarejo is a traditionally working class area situated in the northern old part of the city. Lloveras (2014) suggested that during the 40 years that Franco's regime lasted, authorities saw Pumarejo as a focal point for political dissidence, so they opted for a deliberate strategy of abandonment and repression of their radical political culture. The area gradually became a pocket of crime, resulting in the stigmatization of the neighbourhood as a dangerous area associated to homelessness, prostitution, and drugs (Lloveras 2014:156). However, in the late 1990s Pumarejo became the target for speculative practices in the property market that forced the eviction of traditional working-class residents and attracted higher income households (Rodríguez and Verdugo, 2010). Social struggle against gentrification emerged when local authorities announced an ambitious plan for the regeneration of the area.

The Pumarejo Palace was a magnificent building whose origins date back to the 18th century and did not escape speculative practices. In 1975 the house was inherited by four brothers who neglected the property and in 2001 they were approached by a hotel chain willing to purchase 50% of the property to open a boutique hotel (Hornillo, 2005). The rumour spread and the community started to organise itself to protect the building and its residents (Hornillo, 2005). Already in 2000 the local residents created the Neighbours' Association in Defence of the Pumarejo Palace (NADPP) (Lloveras 2014:176) to defend the rights of the tenants to live in decent conditions in the building as well as to preserve the artisans and commercial uses of the ground floor (Lloveras 2014:175). The association combined public protests with producing a large body of research on the heritage of the Palace to achieve the administrative legal protection of the building. In 2003 the building was declared monument of architectural and cultural interest by the city and this declaration was a turning point for the NADPP (Lloveras 2014:175). Two years later the local government expropriated the building arguing that the owners were not preserving it properly and in 2011 the use of the common spaces was transferred to an offspring of the NADPP, the Casa Pumarejo Association, for a period of 15 years

(Hornillo. 2005). In collaboration with a museum and the Andalusian Historical Heritage Institute, rehabilitation plans were prepared.

Image 1. View of Pumarejo Palace



Source: Fieldwork 2014

After this significant gain, the NADPP entered a deep internal debate. The involvement of some members in the struggle had become a full-time occupation that left them little time to secure a livelihood (Lloveras 2014:182). According to a former member of NADPP, a proposal was made to collect and distribute a small symbolic number of Euros as a reward for the commitment of the most involved individuals (Personal interview A1). This was a step forward in caring for each other and as a symbol of the solidarity prevalent among the members. However, some members argued that Pumarejo Palace could become a source of income and a community meeting place at the same time.

At that stage of the discussion, another association, the Degrowth Seville group, suggested launching a complementary currency system. There was a lively Degrowth Seville network in the city that aimed at connecting and promoting local initiatives in various areas. Degrowth originated as a social movement in France in 2001, Italy in 2004, and Spain in 2006 (D'Alisa et al., 2013: 215). Its principles are defined as “a collective and deliberative process aimed at the equitable downscaling of the overall capacity to produce and consume and of the role of markets and commercial exchanges as a central organising principle of human lives” (Schneider et al., 2010: 1, Sekulova et al., 2013). In Seville, the Degrowth group was hosted in the Pumarejo Palace and attracted activists around agroecology, alternative medicine, and food security. Degrowth Seville participated in the discussions about “giving back” to volunteers and proposed a CCS to support

members economically while enhancing social cohesion at the same time. The discussion was enriched by evidence from Argentina, where the community currency systems supported poor households to diversify income sources and improve their livelihoods (Gomez, 2010).

The Puma currency was hence the brainchild of three different groups, namely degrowth activists, NADPP members and a growing number of residents who were being hit by the financial crisis around 2010. Many residents were suffering the effects of unemployment and underemployment and were attracted to Puma CCS as a functional device to complement their income. In general, in the south of Spain the landscape of community currencies changed dramatically with that crisis. In 2008 there was only one CCS in the region of Andalusia (Zoquito, in the province of Cadiz) and in June 2014 there were five groups only in the city area of Seville (Puma, La Oliva, El Chabir, La Jara and El Alcor), as shown in Map 1.

The establishment of Puma implied making rules to facilitate members' interactions. For instance, it was decided that Puma would operate as a mutual credit system. New members would open an account with zero balance and would announce the goods and services they could offer as well as what they wanted to obtain. In a mutual credit system like Puma, the sum of all accounts in the network is always zero, while individual balances will be negative or positive. Software matched the balances of buyers and sellers (<https://www.community-exchange.org/home/>) and made this information available to all. Members also agreed to place a flexible limit of 100 Pumas as the maximum debt that a debtor can have. Instead of speaking of "debt", the organisers spoke of "commitment" towards the community, meaning that the community trusts that its members will provide goods and services to repay the debt. It is an interest-free system, so there is no incentive to hoard Pumas. Although Puma was linked to the euro, prices varied widely because they were negotiated freely between the parties involved.

Map 1. Community currencies in Spain (April 2012)



Source: (Gisbert Quero, 2010)

Exchanges were recorded on a paper passbook and these would be transferred to consolidated records for the whole group. However, members often forgot to report their transactions and balances but the group trusted that no member would go above the established limit (Speck and González Palanco, 2019). For convenience, the passbook was replaced by an application on smartphones in 2017 which transferred exchanges automatically. The history of Puma is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Chronology of Puma

Initial stage: negotiation, cooperation and network formation	Oct. 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop about community currencies in Pumarejo - First steps and strategic decisions about the nature and objectives of the currency. - Creation of the 'steering group' with 20 members.
	Jan. 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Puma CCS launched as a pilot project. A small group of members begin making exchanges. -Functioning improvements are made. -First market on Pumarejo square.
	March 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Public launch -1st Mercapuma is celebrated

Consolidation of the institutional structure	Jan. 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Number of members grows rapidly and producers and local business become part of the currency. -New working groups are created. -High level of public exposure (conferences, radio and TV programs, workshops, etc.). - Supply Centre is created (commitment to provide ecological, local and handcraft food in Pumas) -Creation of the 'community care' working group.
	May 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Organisation of the National meeting of local currencies.
	Sep 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Funding of external projects: pumafunding (€/Pumas). -Deploying skills to promote new local currencies in the areas of Seville -Puma reaches 800 members.
Reflecting action stage	Nov 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Declaration of hibernation process. - Ban on new memberships. -Reflection in working groups. -Redefinition of 'giving back' practices. -Dynamization group is created.
New designed institution	Jul. 2014- Sep 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -New members are accepted only if they participate and are committed to the project. -New welcoming process is introduced, placing more emphasis on trust and solidarity than practicalities of the currency. -Puma CCS renewed interest in funding external projects. -New synergies among 'new' promoters and 'original' promoters are created through collective learning.
New designed institution	November 2016 to January 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Transition from passbook to application in smartphones that works on Community Exchange Software (CES) -Not all members complied in practice

Transition to other initiatives	2019	<p>-The General Assembly voted to deactivate PUMA, to stop organising the markets and to close the supply centre. At the end of 2019, three members signed the act that ends the CCS</p> <p>-Exchange groups continue functioning informally and some members still use PUMA as a currency among themselves but keep no formal records</p> <p>-Several other social groups were formed, such as environmental consultancies and La Transicionera, https://latransicionera.net/.</p>
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Source: compiled by the authors

4. The extension dilemma

While the organisers of PUMA were seeking a way to complement their income, they also wished to reach out to the “common people” in the Pumarejo neighbourhood to benefit them in the same way. They assumed that a CCS would equip neighbours with a tool to make a living while engaging them with an anti-capitalist daily practice. The neighbourhood economy could thus “serve the immediate needs of the community” (Díaz, 2014) and at the same time it could construct an autonomous geography in the sense of Pickerill and Chatterton (2006). Membership was open and everyone with time or skills was welcome, including people from other areas of Seville. This inclusiveness to reach out to broader groups was reflected in the welcoming sessions, the use of Facebook and Twitter, and a monthly radio program.

The organizational model was based on a weekly general assembly, in which decision making was deliberative and spontaneous. During this stage, Puma operated on three principles: horizontal personal relationships (rejection of hierarchy), informality (lack of fixed roles) and governance by assembly (search for consensus). One of the founding members reaffirmed: “Puma is a completely horizontal organisation. It is completely open to everyone, so we do not have kings or presidents. We all command here” (quoted in radio show La Farsa Monea, Gonzalez and Hoop (2012).

The organisers conceived Puma as a political tool for building a countercultural alternative space that operated under specific economic and social rules. The notion of micro-political resistance conceptualized by Scott (Scott, 1990) came to life in Seville’s Puma. A Puma member expressed: “Puma is a type of money made by and for the community

that gives us power at a personal level and as a community make our own decisions over the thing we want to change” (Díaz, 2014). The first aspect is related to the capacity of Puma to strengthen community ties through human economic relations “because through Puma you meet people from your neighbourhood, when you purchase a good or a service from another user within the scheme, you interact from a different set of values: trust, cooperation and solidarity” (Díaz, 2014). The second aspect is related to the localization of economic activity, “to encourage that the wealth we create stays in the neighbourhood”. In turn, Puma members place a great importance on being able to change habits such as purchasing food “out of the established capitalist system of supermarkets, where products are full of chemicals” (Personal interview A7) while another member confirmed that “with Puma currency you are supporting local producers so they can live without being exploited. The benefits don’t go to someone you don’t know” (Personal interview A8).

Puma represented a collective journey for local autonomy, that members described as one of taking distance from a world that “serves the very specific interests of economic and political elites” (Díaz, 2014). Hardt and Negri (2009: 212) characterized such periods in terms of “disengagement, or desertion and exodus” from the capitalist system. During the first years of activity, Puma was not only successful in attracting users but also in keeping them active. Expansion was gradual and depended mainly on dissemination by word of mouth through relatives, friends and Pumarejo neighbours. The small group of people that launched Puma shared a common vision and history, so trust was high, coupled with the conviction in the advantages on their local economy. Between March 2012 and December 2013, a total of 4.643 exchanges were made and 11.515 Euros and 42975 Pumas were exchanged. Membership soared to 800 households in only six months.

At the same time, the expansion challenged Puma because the increasing numbers of newcomers had different levels of motivation, interests and understandings of the initiative. The new members were primarily driven by an income-generation motivation. They saw the CCS as a palliative to the economic crisis and were not committed to a global degrowth strategy as the initial members were. Similar problems of scaling up have been researched in other social economy initiatives. When a group expands, goals and actions become less coherent, while managerial and coordination problems arise in a process called the “extension dilemma” (Jasper, 2004: 7). Puma has not escaped this “dilemma”. It was launched as a “network of trust”, according to the description of the members (Personal interview A2), but the rapid growth of membership put at risk this

identity as well as the future sustainability of Puma. The embryonic group grew in both numbers and complexity because individuals from different backgrounds and areas of the city started to join. The organisers were confident in transferring the values and practices of Puma and said that “we’re building a network of trust, and precisely in this kind of network it is not necessary to put restrictions because everything flows” (González and Hoop 2012). A few months later, the same respondent expressed her concerns at the growth of the initiative: “I have my doubts that we are transmitting the objectives of the currency” (quoted in La farsa monea radio show, by González and Hoop, 2013). During fieldwork we could not find any new members that could explain to us the meaning of degrowth or its relation to a complementary currency system. At the level of the management of the scheme, the group remained coherent because the organisational tasks were carried out by the original group. There was a similar fragmentation in the case of the *Redes de Trueque* in Argentina which marked a vertical contradiction between the members and of the leaders (Gomez and de Wit, 2015).

In the same way as common values and identities started to diversify, the scaling up of Puma also made decision-making more cumbersome. The principle that “we all command here” was becoming impractical and a more complex and decentralized organisational structure became necessary. The initial stage of Puma as an informal group in which everyone did everything ended and gave rise to a formal division of labour. Working groups were organised with differentiated competences, marking a transition from spontaneous decision-making to a stable formal organisation with tasks and responsibilities. A “Steering Group” was set up to carry out the tasks of coordination and organisation of Puma. Working groups functioned autonomously, held separate meetings and had their own targets, so coordinating practices were designed to ensure that all members of the network were aware of the progress made by the different working groups. These included social media (e.g. general email-lists) as well as scheduled face to face meetings (e.g. general assemblies). The definition of this governance structure was an important step towards the institutionalisation of Puma and the management of what Jasper (2004) termed the extension dilemma. New rules were designed to promote higher commitment, enhance member’s mobilisation and protect the trust and solidarity that were present in the initial stages of Puma.

However, it was not enough and in September 2013, a group of members of the Steering group began to voice concerns that ideas and practices in Puma were not being subjected to enough critical scrutiny. A key objective of the scheme was to provide healthy and affordable food for the community but those who joined the currency looking for

affordable food and sources of income in the recession were often viewed as opportunistic and not understanding the “true” values of the currency around degrowth discourses. An internal document stated that, “inertia and creative improvisation has pushed us forward without really knowing where we are going to or why” (González and Hoop 2013). In addition, feelings of exhaustion became common among the organisers and were attributed to the increase in the workload.

In November 2013, the organisers launched a process of reflective action that they termed “hibernation process”. The first task was to map the situation of every working group and collect feedback on the way on them. The original desire to create an open and inclusive community changed with the hibernation period, which resulted in a downscaling of the initiative. For example, the rules and practices of the initiation process changed to restrict membership. Greater importance was placed on transmitting the values of Puma and enhancing its “structural cohesion”, so all members were expected to contribute to the administrative functions of the scheme.

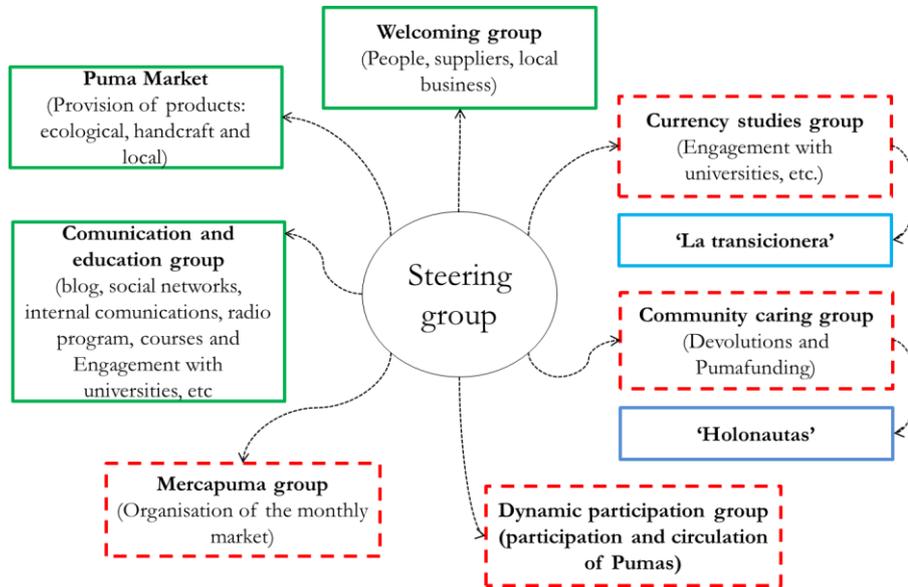
An additional level of closure was obtained indirectly with the introduction of the digital wallet, which restricted the use of Puma to younger and more educated users. “You need to have a certain cell phone and have the capacity to manage certain technologies”, as an organiser expressed. The digitalisation of payments in Puma also reduced the need to organise physical markets regularly, which made members trade face to face with each other. By enabling transactions on-line, the digitalisation of Puma created a larger distance among members and the perception that community can exist without regular local contacts to sustain it.

Decision making processes took place in working groups and general assemblies were less frequent (once a month at most). Some groups furthered their reliance on rules and agreements while the Steering Group remained highly informal and its members, almost exclusively belonging to the founding group, adjusted their degrees of involvement as needed. Puma became “more project-oriented”, introducing two degrees of involvement: members who carried out the main tasks (“hard core”) and those who occasionally worked on a project (“periphery”). New working groups were created (e.g. the mobilisation group), others adapted their tasks (e.g. the welcoming group) and two were eliminated (currency studies group and community caring groups). Graph 1 describes the changes in the working groups that followed the hibernation period: in red we identify the groups that were eliminated, in green the groups that were renamed or adapted their tasks and in blue the groups that became separate entities outside the boundaries of Puma for-profit basis. The new organisation was described as a “network-like flexible

structure with a high degree of fragmentation". A new member of the Steering group expressed that, "self-organization implies that you are free to get involved and fill the space you desire, while others are free to leave. If someone wants to go, then others will gradually take more responsibility" (Personal interview A7).

In short, the extension dilemma (Jasper 2004:7) was overcome with a de-growth perspective: Puma "rescaled down" the CCS to return to the original ideas and reduce the number of users. According to the participants, the goal was to create a community of mutual care in which the complementary currency would occupy the role of a tool to support diverse degrowth projects. However, observation during fieldwork suggests that desires to create a more exclusive space to maintain the countercultural essence of the currency was turning Puma into a closed "activist hub" with homogenous class, race and cultural identities (middle class, white, sub-cultural). While this strategy may increase coherence and sustainability in the long run, it was also reducing the dynamism and diversity of those involved. As far as we could observe, it was failing to engage "the common people" to perform degrowth practices in their everyday lives as a mechanism of micro-political resistance. A member confessed to us that, "sometimes I doubt that the reality of the Pumarejo Palace is the reality of the neighbourhood" (Personal interview A2). Puma has incorporated the extension dilemma in its structure and institutionalised modalities to preserve a core identity of contentious politics.

Graph 1. Working groups in 2013 and 2016



Source: Compiled by authors

5. Solidarity and the politics of caring

As a result of fifteen years of autonomous neighbourhood politics against gentrification, the Pumarejo community developed “the politics of affections”. As conceptualized by Jeffrey Juris (2008), “affective solidarity” differs from the traditionally confrontational way of doing micro-political resistance (Scott, 1976). The practice of affections belongs in an autonomous geography and includes economic solidarity and caring for each other. In that line, a Puma member expressed, “the currency has just made visible many invisible practices of care that were already taking place within NADPP. If someone said that she did not have enough money to pay for electricity this month, we would collect money to help” (Personal interview A1).

The collective sense of support and solidarity was synthesized in the shared notion that “Alone we go nowhere; affection keeps us together” (González and Hoop 2013). NADPP activists pointed out that interpersonal relationships of affection have been vital for sustaining many years of activism and building solidarity around the leitmotiv that “Affection is revolutionary”. This statement was a graffiti that appeared on one of the front walls of the Pumarejo. We asked NADPP activists what this statement meant. One answered that, “affection is revolutionary. It is another way to build (...). It is to care for

others, to give a hug, sharing with others what has happened to you, because you are part of this community. It is a peaceful way, without attacking others. This often confuses militants". (Personal interview A1)

Calling for a new order based on "affections" has resulted in a different notion of citizenship within the Puma community. At the entrance of the palace there is also a commemorative notice placed when the building was reopened as community centre with the inscription: "on May 8th, 2004 this community centre was inaugurated to host the power of the neighbours of El Pumarejo and for the use and enjoyment of the *cuidanía*" (translated as "*caringzanship*"). The term "*caringzanship*", according to internal documents of Puma, refers to a kind of citizenship that is guided by the ethics of care which implies a conscious effort to care for each other and to care for what is around them. Puma extended the notion of "autonomous politics of place" coined by Chatterton (2005) to promoting sharing, economic solidarity and care. In line with the concept of social cohesion developed by Moody and White (2003), spontaneous caring practices function as a mechanism to deepen trust and promote 'affective solidarity' (Juris 2008:65).

In the case of Puma, the scheme had gradually established rules around rewards to make visible individuals' contributions. Giving visibility and rewarding voluntary work for the wellbeing of the community was a crucial concern for NADPP activists when the Puma currency was introduced. Members then agreed to create a formal mechanism so that people involved in organisational tasks could receive a symbolic monetary reward of Pumas in compensation for their voluntary work (the "*devoluciones del común*" or distributions from the commons, in English). These practices are in line with eco-feminist theoretical developments that have been incorporated to degrowth in relation to reproductive labour (Dobscha, 1993, Dobscha and Ozanne, 2001). The distributions from the commons operated by encouraging Puma members to fill in a self-evaluation form about their contributions to caring for the community every three months. Members were asked to rate such contributions as sporadic, intermittent and continuous, so they would obtain 20, 50 and 100 pumas per semester, respectively.

The hibernation period introduced a new compensation mechanism because there were disagreements among members, who argued that the system was unable to reflect well enough the amount of work done for the community. After January 2014 each working group made a collective reflection and decided on the rewards, instead of being an individual self-evaluation, but during fieldwork in July 2014 it was clear that only the Supply Centre Group carried out this collective reflection about compensations. In other

words, despite the great emphasis of Puma in creating formal mechanisms to make work visible, these were not enforced across the organisation because members generally preferred spontaneous caring practices. A member underlined: “I think that people experienced it in a contradictory way. There are those who want to place a value on everything because otherwise that work remains invisible or undervalued and there are others who feel it is wrong to place a monetary value on everything. They think that if they want to do something for this person, why do they have to give a number to that?” (Personal interview 8).

So, while Puma structured social time and spaces to foster solidarity among members, most caring practices retained their informal and spontaneous character that resist formal regulation via institutions. Many members suggested that they needed the collective support of other members to feel appreciated and strengthen the feeling that “you are not alone” (Personal interview A5). For example, the “*Taller de costura*” was a sewing workshop that took place every Thursday afternoon. The original objective was to learn a skill but also to provide emotional support to one of the old residents of the Pumarejo Palace, who was the main instructor. The space gradually became a collective ritual where members met in a room called “Bajo 5” and brought coffee and cookies to share with other members. We observed little sewing in the workshop and a lot of laughter. The space is referred as a non-hierarchical forum in which activists express how they felt that day, shared inter-generational wisdom, remembered past collective actions or looked for counselling, even on family matters. A member said: “The other day one of the members brought me a dress that she wanted to get fixed. I did it without any obligation and fixing her dress is a symbolic reward for the work she does for the community. I don’t need anything else.” (Personal interview A1). Informal solidarity appeared as a crucial part of the social relations of community and provided social cohesion to sustain the vision of an autonomous geography.

Such informal “caring practices” are the “glue” in social horizontal networks in which members put together their personal political beliefs (Juris 2008:65). A sophisticated understanding of the “politics of affection” developed in the Pumarejo Association was transferred to the Puma CCS members. Informal affective solidarity played a crucial role in keeping the interest in the movement and making members feel part of a collective. “It’s like a small family”, a member expressed (Personal interview A5). The notion of “politics of affections”, as referred by Juris (2008), is seen as a force to mobilize structures and gather resources in collective action. At the same time, Puma functioned as a currency, although a complementary one, so practices of care have been adapted to a

combination of a capitalist logic with the concern to maintaining solidarity and the project of contentious politics. Informal practices of caring were perceived as pillars within this project and were summarized in the words that, “affection is revolutionary” at the entrance of the Pumarejo Palace.

Interesting enough, the Puma currency does not circulate any more since 2019 but the organisers were hesitant to terminate it formally (Interview A9 in 2020). The various social media sites do not mention the end of the currency and some exchange groups continue operating informally. In a mutual credit system, all balances should be cleared against each other back to nil, but this has not been done; the accounts in the Community Exchange System CES and the digital wallets have not been cancelled either. “Besides sporadic transactions that we do not monitor, Puma is still alive in the social relations that it has generated”, one of the organisers assured (Interview A9). Indeed, the sewing workshop, which was identified as a key practice of spontaneous caring, continues to meet every Thursday as we enter 2020. The hardcore members were determinant: “It was a wonderful love relation. Together we created the currency and together we killed it”.

6. Conclusions: Flexible Institutionalisation as balancing act

Activists’ and grassroots’ groups depend on dynamic and fluid interactions with high trust to retain their identity but when they aim at persisting in time and expanding their social influence, they also require stable rules and regulations to structure their interactions. This research analysed that tension by drawing on the concept of flexible institutionalisation coined by Pruijt (2007). The tension between institutionalisation and spontaneous interactions has been tackled in the literature on social movements and grassroots innovations but it has rarely been discussed in dialogue with empirical data. It is unclear which one takes precedence over the other. For example, authors such as Castells (1983) argued that institutionalisation implies identity loss, while Tarrow and Tollefson (1994) claim that institutionalization is not incompatible with the original values of contentious collective action. However, they suggest that different types of grassroots and social innovations prioritise either side of the tension. This research conducted a case study of the complementary currency Puma in the Spanish city of Seville with primary data collection in 2014, 2017 and 2019, when Puma was discontinued at least formally.

The research found that actors in Puma were acutely aware of their balancing act within this tension and experienced it daily in their organisational life. They incorporated it in their discussions and common spaces in attempts to preserve an identity of spontaneity while giving predictability to their initiative. On the one hand, members structured hierarchies, alliances with other actors and mechanisms of exclusion. Institutionalization advanced in gradual steps of organizational consolidation, illustrated by the attempt to standardise the compensations of the commons, the division of labour in working groups with hierarchies, the formalisation of governance structures and the regulation of stable spaces for different types of interactions. On the other hand, members discussed repeatedly their intention to maintain the autonomous and informal character of the organisation and embedded this desire in caring practices, which were non-formalized interpersonal actions of spontaneous solidarity. Affections created new relational paths among members and were perceived as an essential identity element of the currency system.

The category of affective solidarity (Juris 2008) was critical to understand the ways in which Puma members kept the affinity of a collective identity and sustained the construction of their alternative local economic scheme. In spaces where spontaneous action prevails, agents displayed the politics of caring and rejected or ignored attempts towards regulation. In the opposite extreme, some rules were discussed, agreed and introduced to structure solidarity and identity formation. In between, there was a variety of combinations, such as spaces that were specifically regulated to remain informal and others in which formal rules were preferred but were enforced loosely. Puma showed that organisations can retain the way of life of the grassroots for a considerable time without moving towards further formalisation. After all, affections are revolutionary, as proclaimed at the entrance of the Pumarejo Palace.

In short, this study concluded that the process of institutionalisation of social innovations such as Puma is purposefully left incomplete. Although retaining substantial flexibility, social innovations can be institutionalised from below in the sense that they configure stable and formal rules to regulate community actions. Attempts can be made to regulate solidarity, but some spaces simply resist any institutionalisation. In Puma, spontaneity and caring prevailed as mechanisms to preserve identity and social cohesion. Institutionalisation is hence characterised as flexible because there are many areas for spontaneous, creative and fluid interaction within structures and which support of these structures. In other words, institutionalisation and social cohesion are interdependent because they require each other to endure.

Puma also had to face the extension dilemma as conceptualised by Jasper (2004). The initiative scaled up in membership and attracted numerous newcomers with different interests and levels of commitment. Newcomers renewed the energy and the creativeness of the group, but they also increased heterogeneity in values and cohesiveness. In a project of contentious politics, the tensions between sticking to the values of core group versus its expansion to more heterogeneous segments of the population had important implications. The organisers saw this tension as the key development that started the demise of the Puma currency, and their inability to extend the same core principles of solidarity to the new members. The values of the hardcore members eventually decided to deactivate the currency, at least formally, but other initiatives derived from it. The organisers considered the currency not an end but a means to achieve a more autonomous future.

7. Appendix 1. Interviewees' profile

Interview Id	Interviewee gender	Involved mainly with
A1	Female	Steering group/Administration
A2	Female	Steering group/Supply center
A3	Female	Steering group/Caring practices
A4	Male	Steering group/Welcoming
A5	Female	Local producer/health
A6	Male	Local producer /food
A7	Male	Local producer/food
A8	Female	Local producer/food
A9	Male	Steering group/Administration

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AUTHORS' INFORMATION:

Georgina M. Gómez, Associate professor in Institutions and Local Development at Erasmus University Rotterdam. Phd in Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague. President of the Research Association on Monetary Innovation and Complementary Currency Systems (Ramics.org). Editorial Board of the International Journal of Community Currency Research (IJCCR). She studies social innovation and niche economies, including complementary currency systems.

Cristina Medina Prado holds a MA in Development Studies, International Institute of Social Studies, University Erasmus of Rotterdam and a Master in Business Administration and Management (MBA), ESIC Business School. Her research interest focuses on social innovation, covering complementary currency systems from an institutional perspective. She currently works at the Andalusian Studies Centre Foundation (CENTRA) a research centre, attached the President's Office of the Andalusian Regional Government in Spain.