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NEWS

PROJECT

Yes We Rent! - Leveraging vacant private property to build up a cooperative affordable housing scheme

📍 Mataró, Spain

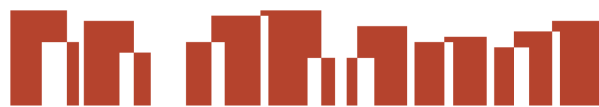
TOPIC

Housing

EDIT 10 MARCH 2021
BY NILS SCHEFFLER

A day to remember: 18.2.21, Mataró has a new offspring – the tenant housing cooperative BlocCooperatiu!

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B L O C C O O P E R A T I U
REHABILITEM EL MÓN DEL LLOGUER

On 18th of February 2021, the notary LOPEZ & ALBIOL formally approved Mataró's new tenants housing cooperative 'BlocCooperatiu'. Dedicated residents of Mataró with the support of Mataró's City Council and the Fundació Unió Cooperadors found the cooperative in a one-year process – besides all the pandemic constraints. The cooperative will become an important tool in the city's strategy to provide an alternative supply of affordable rental flats to households with problems in the rental market. Individuals and policy makers in the affordable housing sector should watch closely the development of the cooperative.

Why

When you walk through Mataró, a city of 127,000 inhabitants 34 km north-east of Barcelona at the Costa del Maresme, you might not realize it at first sight, but the city has more than 2.800 private empty flats. At the same time an increasing number of the inhabitants are overburdened by the rental housing cost or they have little access to the rental market, in particular younger people. Since 2015, rental prices in Mataró have been growing by 27%. The expenses for rent can be significantly over a 1/3 of the monthly income. Moreover, there is a dramatic shortage of affordable housing in the city. The city's social housing sector is totally incommensurate to demand. It comprises just 265 units while 1400 households are currently on the waiting list.

The solution

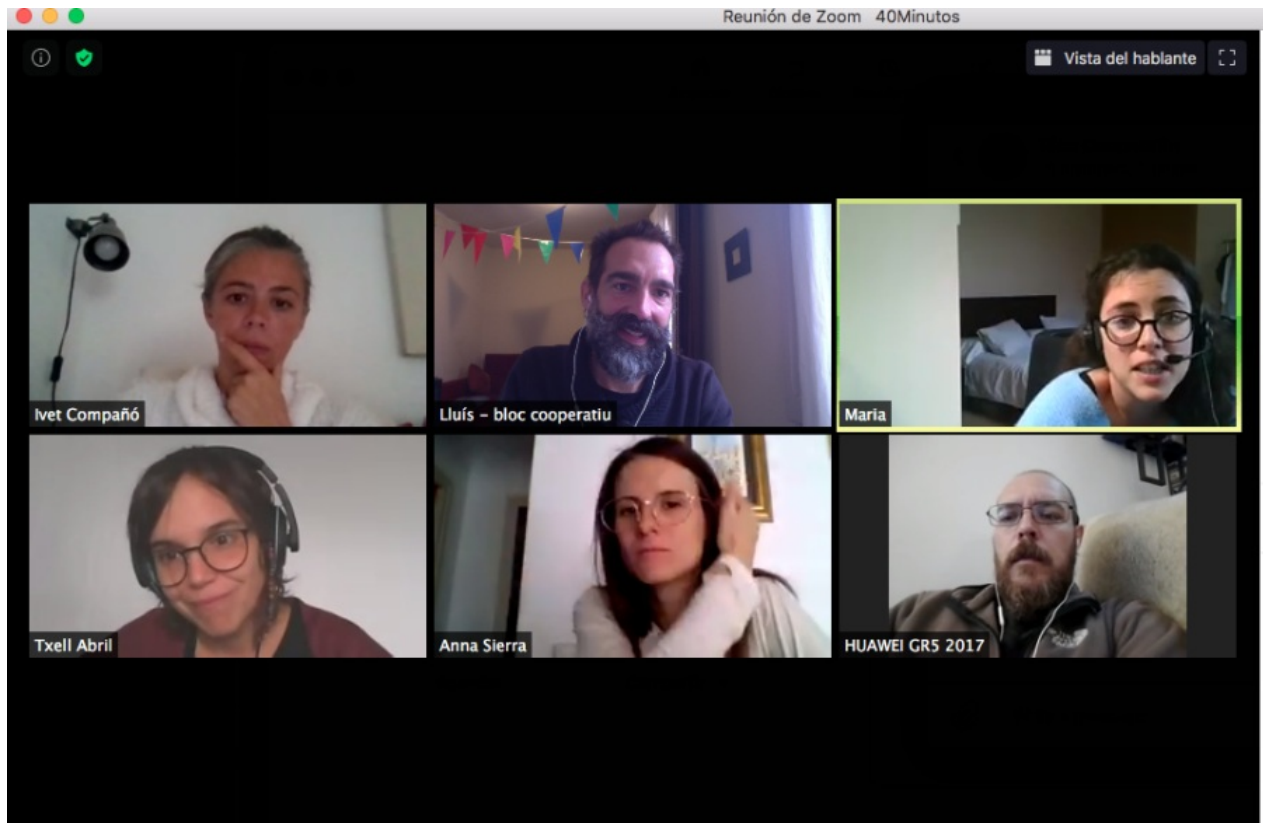
The city's solution is to mobilise the vacant flats for the affordable rental housing market for households with problems renting a flat at an affordable price. For this they have set up a support and incentive scheme for owners to let their vacant flats to a housing cooperative at a rent below the average market rent. The cooperative will be in charge of attracting and managing further empty private flats for its members and continue with the support and incentive scheme installed by the city. The hope is to create a new dynamic between tenants and owners governed by the values of the social and solidarity economy and by this to transform the rental housing market in Mataró to provide rental flats for a fair price.

The purpose of the cooperative is to provide its members with access to decent housing at an affordable price, to advise

and train in tenure issues and access to housing and to facilitate its members with services in the flats managed by the cooperative that can improve their living conditions in the different stages of their lives.

How it started

But there was a “tiny” problem to this solution: There was no such cooperative in sight! To initiate such a cooperative the city of Mataró, after a PR campaign, invited interested citizens in affordable rents in Mataró to an information evening on 17th of February 2021. At this meeting the idea of the cooperative was presented and the participants invited to prepare and constitute this cooperative. Quickly, around 10 dedicated residents of Mataró in age between 24 and 45 came together to take up the initiative to set up such a cooperative. Their motivation was that instead of just complaining about the situation, they wanted to take action and be part of the solution. The biggest challenge was to develop the cooperative from scratch with no previous reference in which they could mirror themselves and track their progress.



Having a new idea is a seed that needs to grow and become tangible over the time. In this way ideas are great; but when you put it into practice you start to see all the difficulties and unanswered questions.

Anna Sierra and Lluís Ferrer, founding members of BlocCooperatiu

... and further developed

Driving Group

Just about a week later after the information evening, on 26th of February 2020 about 20 interested people, supported by the [Fundació Unió Cooperadors](#), came together to set up a 'Driving Group' to design, create and promote the cooperative. In this endeavour they were advised by the [Colectivo Ronda](#), a cooperative of lawyers, and by the department of Social Economy of the [TecnoCampus Mataró-Maresme](#).

Working groups

Within two weeks-time the 'Driving Group' set up of four working groups:

- Internal and external communication
- Strategy

- Statutes
- Internal Regulations

The working groups worked independently of each other, at their own pace. The coordination between the groups took place through the Driving group. As the Corona pandemic restrictions started in March, the working groups could no longer meet physically. So, without knowing each other well, they had to organise and work together virtually. But this worked better than expected. They use instant messengers, social networks and meet weekly in video-conferences, distributing tasks and discussing interim results and issues.

Training courses

An important support was the organisation of three training courses on cooperativism in the summer 2020 for the founding members of the cooperative by TecnoCampus. The 1st course was about key concepts of cooperativism and governance models. The 2nd course was about organizational facilitation and the 3rd about models and economic aspects of housing cooperatives.

Documents and topics prepared

In preparation for the establishment of the cooperative, the working groups drafted with the support of the [Colectivo Ronda](#), [TecnoCampus](#) and the [Fundació Unió Cooperadors](#) four important documents:

1. The cooperative we want
2. The social statutes of the cooperative
3. The internal regulations of the cooperative
4. The business plan

In the document 'The cooperative we want' the members collected questions they had with regards to the implementation and functioning of the cooperative and defined together answers as guidelines for the further process. In the 'Social statutes' the official mission of the cooperative, the regulations towards the members, the economic regime and the functional organization and management of the cooperative are constituted. In addition, for internal regulations, the 'Internal regulations of the cooperative' contains further clarifying statements about the cooperative. In the 'Business plan' the economic and business model of the cooperative is laid out.

One important experience from the process so far is: to constitute a cooperative takes time, in particular as the people do this voluntarily in their free time. So it is important to give them the time they need, to provide them with technical and organization support and not to restrict them too much with administrative hierarchies.

Outlook to 2021

The next crucial task will be to involve the future members of the cooperative – owners and tenants – and carefully manage their different interests, hopes and goals in a transparent and democratic process. This will be key to make the cooperative work and come alive. There are already 120 people on the "waiting list" to join the cooperative. Now all that "remains" is to find and acquire the vacant flats for the cooperative, mobilising their owners to become part of the housing market transforming cooperative. "An easy challenge", as Anna Sierra and Lluís Ferrer say – founding members of the cooperative, "as we are confident and strongly believe in the potential and success of the cooperative. Our team involved is hardworking, full of energy and we have a positive mindset for what is to come."

If you would like to know more about the cooperative, get in touch with Anna Sierra Amat (asierra.amat@gmail.com) or Lluís Ferrer (grupimpulsor2020@gmail.com), founding members of the cooperative.



We want to be a cooperative that owners and tenants feel they belong to, that shares their values and will back them in what is to come.

Anna Sierra and Lluís Ferrer, founding members of BlocCooperatiu

Affordable housing cooperative Co-housing Housing Housing

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