





The vision of the neighbours' associations on their community function and the degree of integration in other actions in the territory. A case study from their self-assessment

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ENG Abstract. During the end of Franco's regime and the first years of democracy in Spain, neighbourhood associations (NA) acquired a fundamental role in community political and social action, leading the demand for improvements in peripheral neighbourhoods (Castells, 2001; Gutiérrez, 2016). Currently, these associations have lost some of their strength, coinciding with a crisis of the traditional model of participation (Alberich, 2022). This research focuses on an area of Palma (Balearic Islands-Spain) prioritised by the Social Services to implement a community intervention project. Using qualitative methods such as focus groups and semi-structured interviews, the aim is to identify the current state of the NA in this area, to find out about their social role, whether there is an existing network of associations, the level to which they are integrated into it and whether they maintain a traditional community approach. The results show the vision of the NA about their role in the community, the attitude of the citizens, their participation and the relationship of the NA with the institutions and other community agents. Different degrees of integration in the new community context appear; in which the diversity of collectives, interests and ways of participation may be an opportunity to recover their protagonism or, on the contrary, further weaken their role, due to the inability to adapt to current changes.

Keywords: Neighbourhood associations, community development, citizen participation, social capital.

ES La visión de las asociaciones de vecinos y vecinas sobre su función comunitaria y el grado de integración en otras acciones del territorio. Un estudio de caso desde su autovaloración

Resumen. Durante el final del franquismo y los primeros años de democracia en España, las asociaciones de vecinos/as (AAVV) adquirieron un papel fundamental en la acción política y social comunitaria, liderando la reivindicación de mejoras en los barrios de la periferia (Castells, 2001; Gutiérrez, 2016). Actualmente, estas asociaciones han perdido parte de su fuerza, coincidiendo con una crisis del modelo tradicional de participación (Alberich, 2022). Esta investigación se focaliza en una zona de Palma (Islas Baleares-España) priorizada por los Servicios Sociales para implementar un proyecto de intervención comunitaria. Desde métodos cualitativos como el grupo de discusión y la entrevista semiestructurada, se pretende identificar el estado en el que se encuentran actualmente las AAVV en ese territorio, conocer su rol social, si existe tejido asociativo, el grado con el que se encuentran integradas en éste y si mantienen un enfoque comunitario tradicional. Los resultados muestran la visión de las AAVV sobre su papel en la comunidad, la actitud de la ciudadanía, su participación y la relación de las AAVV con las instituciones y otros agentes comunitarios. Aparecen diferentes grados de integración en el nuevo contexto comunitario; en el que la diversidad de colectivos, intereses y formas de participación pueden ser una oportunidad para recuperar su protagonismo o, por el contrario, debilitar más aún su papel, debido a la incapacidad de adaptarse a los cambios actuales.

Palabras clave: Asociaciones de vecinos, desarrollo comunitario, participación ciudadana, capital social

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1. Introduction

This work corresponds to a case study on the community role of neighbourhood associations (NA) in an area of Palma (Balearic Islands). The theoretical foundation presents a historical overview of the NAs in Spain, their situation in the Balearic Islands and, finally, in the local space and the object of study that we intend to address. This overview is justified by the common presence of some key elements that accompany the process of decline of some of these associations and the current new community scenario, which is much more socially and culturally diversified.

Law 191/1964 of 24 December 1964 on Associations¹ allowed for the creation of the NA, but they did not acquire significant weight in the social life of the neighbourhoods until the end of the Franco regime and the beginning of the democratic transition². In this period, it is worth highlighting Article 22 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978, which relates the neighbourhood association movement to the processes of citizen participation and democracy and, subsequently, Organic Law 1/2002, of 22 March, regulating the Right of Association³, which will represent a new regulation, extending the recognition of associations in social life.

In its beginnings, the movement gained strength in the peripheral neighbourhoods of cities experiencing a significant demographic increase (Castells, 2001; Gutiérrez, 2016). The NA became a front for demands, challenging local policies, achieving great social achievements and becoming an agent of community development (Gail, 1979). This became widespread also in the peripheries and small, less industrialised cities (Gómez, 2017). The main demands focused on the deficiencies suffered by working-class neighbourhoods, the promotion of social life and the vindication of citizenship rights (Castells, 2001). Circumstances in which social work professionals also played a prominent role, supporting or leading initiatives and denouncing unresolved social needs (Oliver, Alves & Matos, 2022).

After this period, the NA went into crisis, coinciding with the political stability of democracy, new regulations on citizen participation and new problems to be tackled, although these associations will not be able to lead new mobilisations and the participatory scenario will diversify (Alberich, 2003). Another key element could be related to a reduction in the participatory awareness of citizens through associations (Alberich, 2022). This sectorisation has been the subject of debate when analysing the destructuring of the social network (Cano & García, 2012) and the performance of technical resources, favouring fragmented and interconnected community actions (Marchioni, 2004; Marchioni & Vecina, 2014).

In liquid modernity, the individualisation and diversification of problems favours the diversity of distinct movements to fight for sectorialised interests (Bauman, 2003). Social participation has declined, although it reappears at key moments that break with the supposed participatory apathy (Alberich, 2022). We have examples such as the 15M movements, the Mareas in Spain, the Arab Spring in Middle Eastern countries or the *Occupy Wall Street* movement in New York, with an extension to other countries around the world, in which citizens from different sectors and ideologies end up occupying public spaces (Puerta del Sol in Madrid, or Tahrir Square in Cairo). A phenomenon in which digital social networks show their capacity for mobilisation (Calhoun, 2013; Toret, 2015 & Alberich, 2022). These actions have a broad socio-political impact (Romanos, 2016).

Globalisation has led to the displacement of millions of people (281 million people migrated in 2020). Its impact is felt in vulnerable neighbourhoods, where there is a need for a social network capable of developing actions to address the social problems that affect them. The settlement processes of the migrant population at the destination present difficulties (Herrera, Alvarado & Herrera, 2018). Policies must be effective in solving local problems generated by these phenomena (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). This fact is one more component in the evolution of cities and the new challenges to respond to in the local space, in which global transformations are also having an effect. Alongside these socio-demographic changes, movements of protest and rejection towards the entry of minorities have arisen, sometimes led by more traditional NA, although changes towards inclusive, tolerant and open positions towards community reception are now on the horizon (Ruef & Kwon, 2016).

2. The role of residents' associations in the new community context. The case of Palma

Focusing on the context of the Balearic Islands, in 2002 the Ibiza Congress was held in the Balearic Islands, in which 300 associations participated. The conclusions highlighted the social importance of these associations, but also the crisis situation they were experiencing. Their proposals for improvement included: promoting training, creating spaces for debate and reflection between entities to share good practices and experiences, and promoting the generation of associative networks to jointly complement each other and be more effective in the actions carried out (Alcázar, Parrón & Ferrer, 2009).

Local policies need a strong associative network to integrate and lead the development of communities. The NA have an important role to play in collaborating with institutions and denouncing the social difficulties of the population. Although these associations are not always representative of all vulnerable groups, in order to make their demands heard (Auerbach, 2017), the contributions of a small number of people can also be

¹ Official State Gazette, No. 311, 28 December 1964.

² Francisco Franco died on 20 November 1975, but there was a period of transition to democracy, which came into force on 29 December 1978.

³ Boletín Oficial del Estado, No. 73, 22 March 2002.

significant in improving the living conditions of the population (Kim, 2022). The lack of operationalisation of NA is also manifested in the shortcomings of their own management and organisational capacity (Li, Wen & Cooper, 2019).

The question that arises is whether the NA have been able to adapt to these changes and whether they continue to play a leading role in neighbourhood demands and local community action. In Palma, initiatives have arisen in which the NA have acquired an important role, for example, in the case of developing projects to favour the integration and inclusion of immigrants (Vecina, 2013) or other neighbourhood movements, constituted as platforms, achieving success in their demands and a decisive role in the policies to be developed in a territory, rectifying urban planning, an example being the Platform "Al Molinar Port Petit"⁴. The NA have also emerged strongly in the face of processes of touristification and gentrification (Cabeza, Dubon, Garau, Morell & Picornell, 2017) and may possibly spread the mobilisation to other areas of the city (Última Hora, 2022). Initiatives that appear in cities with touristified and/or gentrified areas in Madrid, Barcelona, Lisbon... giving way to a new citizens' movement, in which the NA have once again acquired an important weight (Gil & Sequera, 2018; Sequera & Nofre, 2018, 2019).

Beyond these initiatives linked to processes of gentrification and touristification, we look at the more peripheral neighbourhoods of Palma, where these phenomena have not yet appeared, to find out what place the traditional NA occupy in the social and community dynamics and whether they remain in a situation of crisis, with little capacity to respond to the new social challenges they face in processes of social vulnerability and multiculturalism. Palma has experienced significant demographic growth, in 2000 it had 333,925 inhabitants, of which 6.35% were born in other countries; while in 2021, out of 419,366, 25.09% are of foreign origin (IBESTAT, 2021).

Today's problems, in a more diversified world, cannot be tackled unilaterally; they require the coordination, collaboration and protagonism of social diversity. This is a strategy that NA should adopt if they want to play a significant community role (Correa, 2015). The responsiveness of these associations depends on generating links with technical resources, political representatives, local leaders and other community actors (Li, et al, 2019) and community social work has an important role to play in driving these initiatives (Fantova, 2019).

This paper analyses the role of NA in the community context, focusing on a case study, under the following hypotheses:

1. The NA consider their social and ethical responsibility, with the problems and needs of the neighbourhood, as its reason for being of their existence. However, from their point of view, there is a gap between this consideration and that of the general public.
2. The community network constitutes the fundamental ecosystem for the NA to recover their protagonism and capacity for action. To this end, it is essential for the NA to participate in collaborative spaces, accepting social diversity and seeking consensus.

3. Methodology

The selected neighbourhoods correspond to the Community Social Services Center in Area East: Son Cladera, la Indioteria, Mare de Déu de Lluc, Son Rutlan, Rafal Nou, el Vivero, Rafal Vell – Son Fortesa Nord. This territory is located to the northeast of the second ring of the city's expansion, designed in the 1943 Urban Development Plan (Alomar, 2020). Urban development began in the 1960s (Área de Servicios Sociales, Inmigración y Participación Ciudadana, 2013). Most of the buildings are made up of low-quality social housing with few services, favouring a process of residential segregation with respect to the rest of the city. These neighbourhoods are among those with the highest indicators of social inequality (Carbonero, Horrach, Mascaró & Santiago, 2001).

An area, of the 9 into which the social services are administratively divided, ranked second in terms of demographic increase between 2004 and 2016, 16.6%, and among the 4 with an increase of more than 105% in foreign population, mainly of non-EU origin⁵. Third in terms of under-education rate, with 25.1% compared to the city average of 19.6% (the neighbourhoods of Mare de Déu de Lluc and Rafal Nou, with 39.3% and 30.4%, respectively). The area has the fifth highest rate of Social Services files, with 4.6%. The area is also home to neighbourhoods with the lowest cadastral value of housing, a fact that favours the concentration of people with lower socio-economic status and greater social needs. The area is home to some of Palma's most vulnerable neighbourhoods, with Mare de Déu de Lluc being the fourth most vulnerable in the city in all the indicators considered (Área de Benestar i Drets Socials, 2017). The Social Services of Palma City Council have set up a community programme in this area, implemented by the *Societat Cooperativa d'Iniciativa Social i Formació Ocupacional Jovent* (Área de Servicios Sociales, Inmigración y Participación Ciudadana, 2021). Guided by the methodological principles of community social work present in manuals of the discipline and its reference to citizen participation, as an element of value in the proposals of this line of intervention (Marchioni, 2004, Barbero and Cortés, 2005; Marchioni and Vecina, 2014; Marín and Martínez, 2020; Pastor, 2021). A commitment to social justice from the scientific-technical impulse of social work in communities (Hernández-Echegaray, 2019) and the integration of different professionals in a project that

⁴ A communication portal of the association and the process developed can be consulted at the following link: <https://es-la.facebook.com/almolinarportpetit/>

⁵ Whose origin is outside the European Union.

favours the optimisation of resources and social interventions (Fantova, 2019), with the possibility of inspiring transferable practices to other territories (Gradaille and Caballo, 2016).

The research is framed within a descriptive design referring to the reality of the NA, with the intention of approaching an explanatory one, by considering the causal relationships in the internal and external dynamics of the NA. Following a combination of supplementary articulation (Calleja & Viedma, 2005), two qualitative techniques were applied: the focus group discussion (FG) and the semi-structured interview. The aim was to: 1) to encourage the creation of a diverse and consensual discourse on the role of the NA and the community context in which they are located, for which the focus group discussion allowed us to deepen, contextualize the information and generate debate (Nimba, Wilson, Derrick, & Mukherjee, 2017); while the interview provided depth on certain topics and new information. 2) To obtain results that can be used by the community intervention team to encourage participation and inclusion of NA (Krueger, 1991; Krueger & Casey, 2015).

The FG has been developed with the consensus of the community team, with the following script: 1) the internal situation of the NA, 2) the degree of citizen participation in community initiatives, 3) the relationship with the Administration and political positions and 4) the interaction with other actors and community initiatives, together with the description of the social network of each territory and the initiatives that are developed.

Once the FG had been carried out, it was decided to go into some aspects in greater depth with the use of a semi-structured interview. The script used in the interviews coincided with the topics of the FG.

After a first thematic categorization, a second emergent one has been developed (Flick, 2018). The discourse analysis techniques could be framed within a mixed strategy, combining qualitative content analysis, in terms of the comparison, contrast and contradictions that arise in the different contributions, and critical discourse analysis, used in moments of greater depth in the analysis (Ballestín & Fàbregues, 2018), a critical analysis, in order to identify ideological positions and symbolic power (Van Dijk, 2003). The aim is to appreciate the way in which the subjects position themselves with respect to their way of representing reality from a position of symbolic power, as representatives of the NA, and the way in which they construct this social structure (Calleja & Viedma, 2005). The QSR Nvivo, 12 software was used to categorize and analyze the discursive content.

Between five and ten participants are recommended for the focus group, depending on the particularities of the object of study, and support staff may be available for recording, observation and collaboration (Hennink, 2014). A purposive sample was chosen, contacting the participants indirectly, through the community team in the area and other collaborators, thus avoiding the prior influence of the researcher. The criterion for the selection of the participants was their membership of the board of directors of the NA of the neighbourhoods under study. A total of 18 people from the NAs (10 women and 8 men) aged between 45 and 66 years old⁶.

Table 1. Sample DGs and interviews

Technique	NA / neighbourhood of influence	People	Others for observation and support functions
GD1 (6)	La Indioteria	2	1 social educator, Social Services Primary Care Centre. 2 members of the community team (1 coor. + 1 pedagogue).
	Mare de Déu de Lluc and Son Rullan	2	
	El Vivero	1	
	Rafal Nou	1	
GD2 (6)	Son Cladera	2	1 student in Social Education (observer and support)
	Rafal Vell-Son Fortesa	2	
	Rafal Nou	2	
Interviews (6)	(Interview 1) Son Cladera	1	
	(Interview 2) La Indioteria	1	
	(Interview 3) Rafal Vell - Son Forteza	1	
	(Interview 4) Mare de Déu de Lluc and Son Rullan	1	
	(Interview 5) El Vivero	1	
	(Interview 6) Rafal Nou	1	
Total: 18 participants		FG: 12 persons; interviews: 6 persons	

4. Results

They have been classified into four thematic blocks: a) the NA as a characteristic entity in the past and present and the relationship with the rest of the citizenry; b) citizen participation; c) the relationship with the Administration and its representatives; e) openness and collaboration with other entities and services.

4.1. NA, their reason for being and the gap between NA and citizenship

A discourse based on the contradictions faced by the NA appears. Their vision is torn between how important a neighbourhood association can be for a territory and the loss of support and influence over what happens

⁶ The years of experience of the participants have not been considered, as this does not correspond to a variable to be considered in the study, which seeks the positioning of the NA and not of individuals.

in it. They value their role very positively, they are clear that they are interlocutors with the local administration, as well as representing the citizens, being an element in the framework of democratic relations. They even affirm that knowing the protocols for referring and following up neighbourhood demands is an important help for municipal management. They think that without the entities, the neighbourhoods would be more abandoned, the street furniture would be in need of repair and many of the demands, needs and problems they refer would go unattended. They consider that they are the “eyes” of the council in the daily life of their neighbourhood. “The NA channel many requests, demands and problems that arise in the neighbourhoods to the administration. Knowing where to refer requests helps to avoid saturating 010” (FG1).

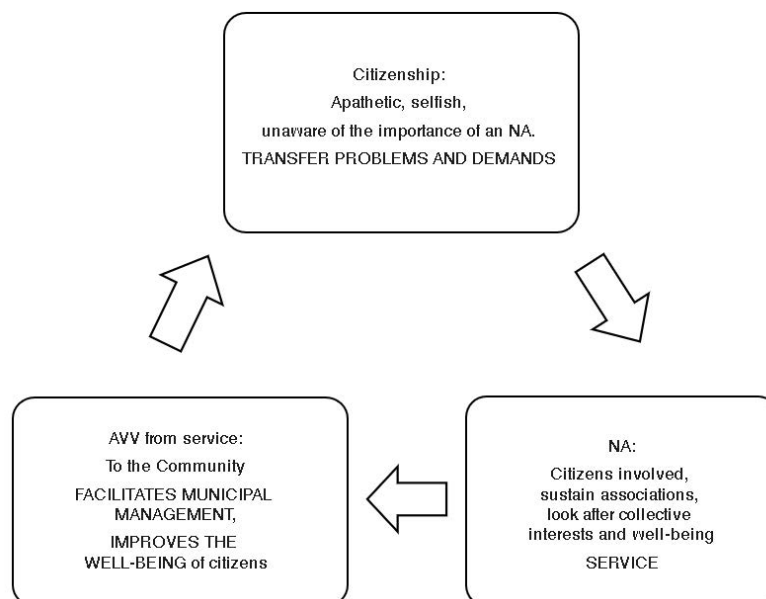
They consider that a very significant gap has opened up between the public and the NA. The analysis of this situation identifies different causes for the lack of awareness within the territory of the work they do. Not only do they refer to apathy, comfort and an increase in individualism, but also to the fact that people are less and less aware of the importance of associations and their lack of knowledge about them. “People don’t make visible the activities they don’t use, so they are not aware of the extent of what is done by the NA.” (FG2)

They believe that apathy is a consequence of the citizens’ habit of having others solve their problems. They consider a possible cause to be the paternalism of the administration in the face of needs and actions to satisfy them, despite the fact that many of these are not resolved and become entrenched as social demands. Another element, to which they refer, has a historical component regarding the citizens’ struggle in the past. They point out that the shortages were notable and this fact favoured the union of neighbours to demand solutions from the Administration. “It was a struggle to claim our rights” (FG1).

Recurring to a past time, as a melancholic reference to the present that they would like, “The neighbourhood movement is not what it used to be, it has lost support from neighbours and strength”. (interview 1), is a resource underlying the difficulties of linking up with the population, beyond specific moments, above all of a festive nature or in the face of demands made mainly by individuals, although they refer to collective problems. “A lot was achieved, but those were different times and different people. People used to get involved and fight (...) now they contact us to solve their problems while they are at home, on the sofa watching TV”. (FG1).

They recognize that the situation and the context at the beginning of democracy were very different, as was the situation in the peripheral neighbourhoods, with many shortages and buildings of dubious quality. “It was necessary to have NA to organize and fight to reduce the shortages that existed. Streets needed to be paved, health centers needed to be built, etc. But now many of those things are already covered.” (FG2)

Figure 1. Relational triad represented in the discourse of citizens involved in NA



Source: Own elaboration

The associations’ boards of directors are elected by their members to represent them and to have freedom in the management and development of their activities. The group has a positive view of its role and is satisfied with the voluntary work that is carried out. It considers that it is an important action, a selfless help directed towards the neighbourhood, so that people have more well-being. “... doing things for your neighbourhood and attending to people’s needs (...) making improvements for the neighbourhood, we do it because we know that our action improves the wellbeing of the neighbours.” (FG1). A positive discourse that clashes with the view of how they consider their role is seen by citizens. They complain about opinions that question their honesty in management and the lack of social recognition of their work. “It is a very ungrateful job, with no recognition from the people of the neighbourhood. They only see the parties, they are not aware of the other things that are done (...). It is common for people to criticize what we do...” (FG2).

The discourse presents a rhetorical framework around three elements: the citizens of the territory who transfer their demands and the responsibility to respond to the NA, the association managed by an active

and involved citizenry, and the service provided by the entity. Each with a very different role and attitude towards the common good. The first requests, claims and demands; the second acts, but its work is not understood (figure 1).

4.2. Citizen participation

The pessimistic discourse reaches a very high level here. A contrast is made, combining two positively valued elements, such as: a) the presentation of the associations and their community and democratic importance; b) the attitude and involvement of the people who make up the board and lead the action; with the vision they have of citizen participation in general, the need for it to be real and effective and a reality marked by apathy, ignorance and lack of awareness of the possibilities of a community with active citizenship.

There is talk of low participation, linked to leisure consumption, but not even when it is educational “What people like is the party for the sake of the party, nothing about children taking part in an activity because it is educational, I don’t think they even think about that.” (FG2). Citizenship is seen as something far removed from the community action of the associations. It seems that older people are the most participative, but at the same time they prevent innovation in activities or other strategies that would facilitate opening to other sectors of the population. “Participation is mainly concentrated among older people and sometimes there is resistance to being able to make certain changes, especially with regard to certain types of initiatives. (interview 3)

Associations end up being entities located in a territory that act, on most occasions, as a switchboard for collecting and channelling defects, demands and complaints to the administration. They see the lack of participation as a problem that is difficult to solve, a consequence of the way of life and the values of today’s society.

People are apathetic, they see everything from their couch, they want everything to be fixed, they want there to be no problems, but they don’t want to mobilise (...). Neighbours make demands, but the NAs are left alone fighting for the needs and interests that, at the end of the day, belong to everyone, those who make the demand are the first to disappear. (FG1)

Most of the time, they do not raise a self-criticism that allows them to identify elements of improvement and strategies that connect them with the current reality and its social diversity. Only when they refer to young people, but they do not know how to reach this group, they approach it from an assimilationist position, considering that it is young people who should approach the association and become part of it. “It is difficult to get young people to join the NA and this is a problem because there is a lack of generational change, also because it is evident that you don’t reach young people, they don’t approach the association.” (FG2)

Socio-educational activities are highly valued and help to make community action visible. A socio-cultural animation strategy to promote cohesion and social capital, healthy leisure, social relations and the psychosocial component that is generated (Soler, Calvo & Trilla, 2021) “... the festivals make the neighbourhood and the workshops educate, apart from the demands that are addressed to the town council, they are our reason for being, to energise people, to make them have a good time and, as I say, to make the neighbourhood”. (FG1). The problem of the lack of participation becomes latent again, when an attempt is made to set up an educational offer, there seems to be no response, although strategies that achieve greater success also appear in the group. “Activities are more successful when they are aimed at specific groups and target groups. For example, when working with school children”. (FG1)

They see how the offer is not taken up by families: “...they take their children to participate in activities and often they are not aware that it is not a childcare service, but a socio-educational option that is being offered to them” (FG2). “Socio-educational activities aim to make the neighbourhood a welcoming and educational place for children and families, but those who need it most are the ones who are least aware of it.” (FG1)

4.3. Relationship with the Public Administration

In this case, they do not refer to their task of referring neighbourhood problems to the municipal authorities, but rather to the barrier that the administration poses for the development of associations in their community action. As the main stumbling block, they refer to the Law on Subsidies and the procedures for applying for and justifying subsidies. The complexity of the procedures, for people who are not experts, means that, on occasions, they end up giving up applying for financial aid because of the knowledge and effort required.

To present projects and get them approved by the city council, you have to have a master’s degree or a doctorate. You can’t ask people from the neighbourhood, often with hardly any education, to draw up the projects they ask for, for that you need permanent technical support. This is a law of subsidies made more for companies than for associations. (interview 6)

Although the administration provides advice on how to formalize applications, the problem is also the excessive use of technical terms, not at all adapted to the type of associations for which they are intended. “The problem is that they use very technical words, which are not at all adapted to the type of associations for which they are intended. The problem is that they use very technical words.” (FG1)

The NA do not intend to be dependent on the Public Administration in order to carry out their work. Although subsidies can be an important aid, they have enough experience in how to obtain financial resources

independently. "There are ways of obtaining financial resources, for example, by managing the bar during the fiestas, and in this way, they can obtain a percentage of the profits". (interview 5)

Another of the issues they refer to is a feeling of being used by political representatives, not only for electioneering purposes, but also when collecting information about the needs of the neighbourhoods and their proposals. If these are not realized, they are left with a feeling of frustration towards the citizens. They believe in the role of the NA, but most of the time they feel that they are not listened to in practice, or that they are relegated to the role of informers.

Politicians make promises to the NA for the neighbourhoods and then do not keep them, this is disillusioning, frustrating and discourages us from continuing to work (...) if you are not going to do it, at least let us know, say something, but do not leave us like this, because people ask and you don't know what to say... (FG1).

4.4. Collaboration with other organisations and services

The interlocutors describe the degree of the associative network in their territory and their relationship with it. There are different situations that can be classified into levels, ranging from a lacking context (level 1) to that of a high level of NA network and integration (level 5): Level 1 (little network and difficulties): "You can't count on anyone, before there was interest, things were organised, but now, you have to stretch yourself alone (...) there is little and what there is dead, everything is problems, they criticize you, but nobody does anything, there is no union". (FG2)

Level 2 (dispersed entities, occasional joint actions): "In the summer I visit the other associations and, well, we organize the parties (...) so they participate". (interview 3). "The rest of the year, each association is dedicated to its own people..." (interview 5) "...I prefer not to talk about immigrants, they don't participate, they don't integrate... they do their own thing. (FG1)

Level 3 (technical community space, passive and dependent NA): "... we attend when the people from Social Services call us, we share our problems, we help where we can (...) the parties are our business, they never attend..." (among1)

Level 4 (strong network, but partially integrated NA):

...we took advantage of our participation in the roundtable to announce that we are going to apply for subsidies (...). Ideally, the NA together with other entities in the neighbourhood would work on a common project (...) but we don't always go in the same direction, although we are agreeing on some projects... (FG1).

Level 5 (strong tissue, NA as an additional agent):

Having a platform or coordinator in the neighbourhood is an advantage, because there are many people involved in community action. In La Indioteria everything is done together, from the festivals to helping the elderly at the Club... there are problems, but many things are done and they are successful (FG1).

By interrelating the analysis of the previous sections with this one, a scale can be established according to the degree of relationship with other actors and the potential of the association. The information gathered shows an unequal and gradual scenario of community relations, with a direct relationship between the way in which the challenge of participation is faced by the NA and the existence and development of a social and technical network in the territory. This is also influenced by the internal situation in the NA itself, a key conditioning factor for its members to be able to take on the work derived from management and the relationship with other community actors.

Table 1 presents information on the situation of the community network and participation in each territory, together with the conclusions reached from the analysis of the situation of each NA. It is possible to observe, by levels, the existence of the community network, the situation of the entities, their integration in this network and the results in terms of their capacity to respond to community needs and challenges.

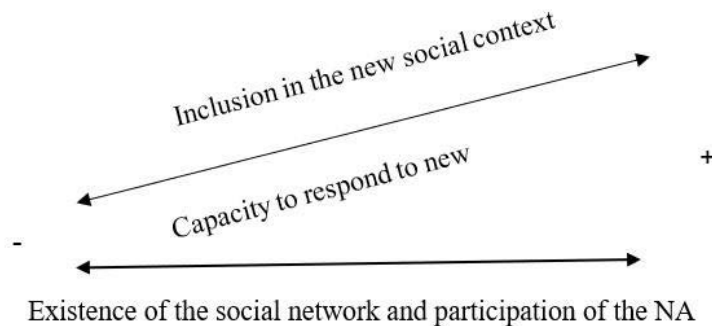
There are major differences between neighbourhoods, whether or not they have these relationship spaces. Entities located in areas with a social network show strategies that allow them to join forces and work in collaboration, in order to provide a joint response to the needs of their territory.

Table 1. Situation of the community network, of the NA and their capacity for action

Territory	Situation of the network and citizen participation	Situation VPA	Integration into the network	Results	Adaptive level
La Indioteria	Strong community network led by citizens. With high participation.	High capacity for action.	High integration in the network.	Participation in joint actions on a stable and lasting basis.	5
Mare de Déu de Lluc-Son Rutlan	Strong community network, led by technicians. Participation in concrete actions.	High capacity for action, but low citizen support.	Participation in relationship spaces, beginning to direct their action towards a shared analysis of needs.	Timely participation, redirection from individual to shared actions.	4
Rafal Vell, el Vivero, Son Fortesa Nord	Entities and services active, but connected on a timely basis	Stability, tendency to traditional and permanent action over time.	One-off coordination.	Joint actions at specific times.	2
Son Cladera	Relationship space led by technicians	Weakness to develop prolonged actions.	Participation by way of representation.	Low responsiveness to community needs, aimed at urgent and <i>ad hoc</i> actions.	3
Rafal Nou	Non-existence of network. Weak entities and sustainability problems.	Weakness, board changes and prioritisation of internal organisation.	There is hardly any point contact due to weak and non-existent tissue.	More difficulties in meeting EU challenges.	1

The increase in the inclusion of the NA in the new social scenarios and their capacity for community response is possibly related to the existence of a social network in the territory and whether these entities maintain their capacity for management, action and participation in these collaborative spaces. The joint analysis of the data can be represented in figure 2, which shows a baseline indicating the degree of development of the associative network in the territory, whether the NA is part of it and the level of its inclusion in the context. A scale of 1- 5 has been established to quantify the position of each AVV (identified by the name of the territory).

Figure 2. Adaptive capacity of the NA according to the social network in the territory



Level of openness and flexibility of collaborative response with other actors in the new context				
1	2	3	4	5
Rafal Nou	Rafal Vell, el Vivero, Son Fortesa Nord	Son Cladera	Mare de Déu de Lluc, Son Rutlan	La Indioteria

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Discussion

The NA are fundamental elements in the interlocution between citizens and the Public Administration. This is significant, as there tends to be a communication barrier between the two actors. Associations play an important role in this relationship, favouring two-way communication channels (Auerbach, 2017). It has been possible to verify the assumption of this role by the NA, but this bidirectionality does not always exist. At least, it does not occur in a participatory way, but rather as a collection point for demands. This fact weakens the capacity for mobilization, given the lack of responses, as these entities do not have a significant population base to support their negotiating weight.

One might wonder about the methodologies used to encourage participation, and even to measure the degree of actual participation of NA in community processes. Dawodu *et al*, (2021) raise the question of what

types of indicators are appropriate for measuring actual participation, arguing that the most effective are those in which citizens are part of the whole process. Therefore, these strategies are significant and lead to the question of the type of openness that NA can have when developing participatory diagnoses and the inclusion of citizens in the different community processes. Seeking forms of real protagonism and an increase in citizen involvement (Marchioni, 2020).

At this point, it is worth asking what level of participation the NA expect from citizens. They state that they rarely go beyond a level of participation that goes beyond information, consultation and, in the least cases, informative bidirectionality, understood as feedback and communication with political representatives and the Public Administration, in which action based on their contributions is guaranteed (Sintomer *et al*, 2008; Manes, 2021). Nor do they seem to have clear strategies for increasing the participation of other sectors of the population, such as youth, or what role they should assume.

The dynamics of the city lead to a segregation of gentrified neighbourhoods (Cabeza, *et al*, 2017), but it does not seem that those studied will tend towards this situation in the near future, although they do present positive indicators of vulnerability and only one of them has a strong social network to develop a broad participatory action. This may reduce their effectiveness in addressing the needs, old and new challenges that may arise (Cano & García, 2012; Correa, 2015; Auerbach, 2017; Li *et al*, 2019). This seems to be the key to being able to integrate into current social and participatory dynamics, in which the diversification of population sectors and social interests (Alberich, 2003; Bauman, 2003) require inclusive actions aimed at the collective good, based on the consensus of the actions to be developed (Correa, 2015). Therefore, they are elements to be taken into account in the design and development of community programs.

6. Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper, we discussed the historical evolution of the NA in Spain, with a significant weight in its beginnings, leading a social movement of vindication and subsequent decline. In this study, this history carries weight in the collective memory of the associations. It is a comparative rhetoric that tends to be presented as evidence of their current situation. A consequence of the lack of awareness in today's society, which individualises and disarticulates the traditional citizens' movement. This causal relationship has repercussions on the NA, which are incapable of making their role more flexible and adapting to a new reality, which is much more diversified, socially, economically, politically... This perceived gap, which coincides with reality, confirms the first hypothesis about the distance between the NA and citizens. This view is based on the opinion that this separation stems from the different civic responsibility between the two, with the former being the guarantor of this condition. It would be worth analyzing the degree of civic responsibility of citizens and their perception of associations as a significant entity in which to associate in order to defend common interests. It seems that at the heart of this question is the lack of representativeness of associations for most of the population, an actor that adopts other means of participation, such as social networks (Romanos, 2016).

With regard to the second hypothesis, the results show a gradation in the capacity to adapt to the new social reality, depending on whether or not the NA are connected to a community social network. The information gathered shows that in those territories where not only is there no network, but where the rest of the entities have disappeared or are very weak, the NA are in a worse situation, acting with survival strategies based on models from the past. Depending on the progress in capacity of the rest of the entities, the situation of the residents' associations is also improving. Figure 2 is a key representation of this fact. The capacity to increase community response becomes evident when the organisations join forces and take joint action. It is in this relational space that the traditional NA can adapt to the new social reality and take on the leading role that corresponds to them, together with the rest of the actors.

This study highlights the role of associations in a territory, the importance of involving all actors in community processes, under an ethical view of community social work (Cuenca & Román, 2023). Giving a voice to all actors strengthens these dynamics, the approach to the NA gives the opportunity to establish alliances, seek collaboration strategies and optimize interventions. It is a matter of building bridges to increase the social capital of a neighbourhood, relying on the associations of organized citizens. An action with greater possibilities of establishing new synergies in which each actor can play a role, mutually strengthen each other, and act for the common good shared with the rest.

The shortcomings of the research are highlighted by the fact that it deals with a specific case and specific actors, although the aim was to approach these associations in order to understand their vision of their role in the community.

The focus groups and interviews made it possible to identify key elements for analyzing and describing the situation of the NA, based on their discourse. One of the shortcomings highlighted was the fact that only the contributions and views of the NA were taken into account, which limits the analysis to their social representation of the current situation. An approach to citizens and other community actors would allow for a more in-depth analysis of this issue and for new proposals for action to promote social cohesion from all positions.

New lines of research could be aimed at completing this analysis, extending the sample to other community actors, in order to find out the degree of inclusion of the NA, as seen from the point of view of other community actors. Another line of research could focus on gentrified and/or touristified areas, to find out the situation of the NA and the role they play. An approach to find out about their strategies, whether they act alone or with other agents and the forms these collaborations take.

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