

Barcelona (2001/2002)

Barcelona EU summit 16 March 2002

Why did we mobilize and what were our objectives?

In March 2002, the EU heads of state met in Barcelona for a summit, whose central theme was the liberalization of the energy sector. The majority of the protests against the summit were organized under the name 'Campaign against the Europe of Capital and War.'

This was not an organic protest. Actually, very few collectives based in BCN had been working specifically on EU construction issues, but the summit acted as an energizer and catalyst for mobilisation. Apparently born as a 'reaction' to the summit, the campaign was an excuse to present a 'glocal' (global/local) critique. This formed a central thread running through the mobilisation, geared towards exposing the capitalist model of Europe.

The diverse goals and objectives of the mobilisation can be summarised as follows:

- To disseminate a radical critique of the EU. (At the time most of the population viewed the EU with either passive support or resigned indifference.)
- To expose the how command centres like the EU relate to local realities: they bypass local frameworks, but at the same time profoundly affect them.
- To delegitimise and upset the 'normal and democratic' development of the summit
- To denounce the security measures that lead to the fortification of Barcelona.
- To continue the chain of protests against the EU which have taken place across Europe since 1996.
- To create political space, autonomous from the institutional left, that is not marginalized but loud, large and diverse.

How did we mobilise?

The Protests:

15th March:

Day of decentralised actions.

Over the course of the day there were thirty different actions: specific demonstrations, protest gatherings, sabotage actions, communication guerrillas, cultural events, peoples' kitchens, critical mass, banner drops, subvertising, and even a giant Anti-Euro Logo in the mountains that surround Barcelona.

16th March:

Morning: Forum of debate on 'the meeting of alternatives.' Previous days had seen a well-attended film festival.

Afternoon: Demonstration against the Europe of capital uniting between 250,000 and 400,000 people.

Evening: Self-organised open-air concert, with stands from different political collectives and musicians such as Manu Chao.

The Political Context

In order to understand how a mobilization organised in only three months became such a massive event, when it was not even the main EU meeting held during the Spanish presidency (this took place three months later in Seville) you have to understand the political context surrounding the protests.

Factors that worked in our favour:

- Catalunya has a long tradition of struggle and a complex and diffuse web of over 2000 collectives working around social change issues.
- A recent history of united political platforms: against the 1999 military parade; opposing the 2001 World Bank conference (which was cancelled in response to the mobilisations); the campaign for the abolition of third world debt; the occupation of churches by refugees and their supporters against the immigration law; etc.
- A climate of growing mobilisations. In December there were big demonstrations against the immigration law, and already in the days before the summit the centre of Barcelona was overtaken at various times. In the weekend before the summit there was a Reclaim the Streets and a massive demonstration against the proposed rerouting of the River Ebro and the National Hydrological Plan uniting over 200,000 people. Furthermore, a little after the EU summit there was a State-wide general-strike.

It is also important to emphasise the inspiration generated by previous global protests.

Factors working against us:

- A deep-rooted structure of social mediation controlled by the institutionalised left with a significant capacity for co-opting struggles.
- Increasing criminalisation of dissent worldwide, worsened by Genoa and 9:11. This atmosphere of repression resulted in the moderation of protest that could be seen as confrontational. For example a decision was taken not to use blockade style tactics of the conference centre where the summit was taking place.
- The recent operation against the Barcelona 'command' of ETA, which resulted in various people from autonomous circles being framed by police.

All this and other variables generated a political landscape before the summit that can be understood as a platform split into 5 blocks (although these blocks were not rigidly defined):

1. The institutionalised left, social democrats and the Barcelona Social Forum (an impostor from the World Social Forum in Port Alegre)
2. The traditional radical left related to the European Social Forum
3. Autonomous political groups such as XCADE (Network of Citizens for the abolition of the External Debt) MRG (Global Resistance Movement) collectives from other circles - especially squatters of which some participated directly in the campaign meetings. Others did not take part in the formation of the campaign but did take part in actions in local neighbourhoods, a counter information newspaper, the legal commission and the organization of a concert.
4. People linked to the anarchist and squatting movement organised a separate action campaign, called 'Març Attack- the rich also cry.'
5. Independents who organised the platform of *Independents* against the

Europe of Capital.

The campaign against the Europe of capital was the product of an alliance between the traditional radical left and grassroots groups. The dialogue with other sectors of society occurred primarily through the self-organised grassroots groups, these were not only chosen as legitimate intermediaries by the most autonomous groups organising the campaign, but also by the social democratic elements. The first meetings of the campaign were a chance for the social democratic groups and radical groups to familiarize themselves with each other; at many times this alliance nearly split.

Which structures took place to facilitate the actions, the decision making and the flow of information?

The alliance made three concrete and non-negotiable agreements. If these were not adhered to it would have split the campaign.

1. Meetings were based on a consensus decision-making processes.
2. The working groups were open.
3. Respect and acceptance of diverse forms of protest. Not falling into the trap of condemning people who could be seen as violent. Viewing all actions in their own right as intrinsically valuable to the campaign, not defending some forms of action by contrasting them to others.

Meetings and Commissions

All of the structures put in place were a result of public meetings. The campaign was organized around a central assembly, which ended up in reality only making part of the decisions. Other areas of work such as: the days of decentralised actions; the counter information newspaper; and the concert on the 16th, were created by their own, highly autonomous meetings. This autonomy greatly enriched the protests, got more people involved, increased our collective intelligence and impeded the possibility of creating a homogenized and centralized control.

Communication Channels

From the beginning it was evident we had to overcome both of the conflicting assumptions that the 'powers that be' were presenting to society:

1. That the protests were organized by a violent marginalized minority
2. That the protests were a large, inoffensive, civil mass.

To deal with this we created a number of tools:

- **Altaveu.** A newspaper printed, before, during and after the protests (four editions in total). It articulated a voice from the social movements themselves, and was distributed for free in bars, metros, and local associations of all types.
- **A Communications Centre.** This fulfilled the task of the distributing materials and acted as the co-ordination centre for independent media and mainstream press. It's important to note that the policy of liaising with the mainstream press was in part motivated by the growth and size of the mobilisation. After the summit this crystallised into the creation of the Agencia de Noticias Liberinfo (Agency for Free Press – www.liberinfos.net)
- **Information leaflets.** Flyers with practical information with contacts for health, legal and action information. Also a map of Barcelona was distributed pinpointing the public actions of the 15th. These materials facilitated the involvement of people outside of the social movements.

Anti repression Political measures

It is important to emphasise the intensifying atmosphere of repression during these months. This made it necessary to have a concert after the big demonstration on the 16th to provide people with a central and secure place to go to. (Based on the experience of the demonstration against the World Bank in 2001, where the police took control of the centre of Barcelona and there were many people wandering around not knowing where to go)

We were looking for somewhere secure that could not be broken up by police. Manu Chao's proposal to have a concert was greeted with relief.

In fact many aspects of the campaign were organized on the defensive, against the possibility of repression. After the World Bank protests we decided that the same legal and communication groups would serve all the actions, whether they were part of the unitary campaign platform or not, to fight criminalisation at two main levels: in the media; and in the police stations and courts.

To what degree were the structures effective and to what degree were the objectives reached?

Successes:

- We did not fall into the separation between activists and inhabitants of Barcelona. The majority of the population did not perceive the protests as orchestrated by a distant minority. In contrast the summit was viewed as a remote bunker far removed from the people, and the source of daily hassle in the form of extreme security measures.
- To some extent we managed to shift the classic juxtaposition put forward by the media between 'radical minorities' and 'reformist majorities' (although they tried and at times they did achieve this). Hybridisation and contamination of the protests happened at many levels, but on the whole it was within the radical conceptual framework of a majority protest 'against the Europe of capital.'

In fact one of the reasons the demonstrations were successful was that there were no slogans and logos. When the demonstration took place, people did not gather under specific party banners leaving the Barcelona Social Forum (Institutional Left) alone. The protests managed to amalgamate a widespread, undefined and confused unhappiness under a common umbrella that was not so easily co-opted.

- The protests overcame the supposed incompatibility of local and global struggles. Practically all of the work was taken up by local collectives, which carried out a large amount of work on a daily level, but took advantage of the summit to give a global perspective to the local work.
- There were a lot more people on the streets than expected. In the press conference when someone said they hoped for 50,000 people to show up, they were accused of being too triumphalist: in the end there were nearly half a million.
- At the end of the campaign there were accusations that the organisers had negotiated an agreement with a government delegation: what the government delegation called the 'Barcelona model'. In reality there was considerable

repression of the mobilisations: with over 100 arrests, and cars stopped on the motorway before and after the demonstration. Police are still pressing charges using false statements. The only reason repression wasn't even harsher was due to the sheer size of the demonstrations on the 16th.

We defend another Barcelona model: one based on the almost obsessive avoidance of the distinction between 'good and bad' actions; pacifists and violent minorities. This only serves to increase repression. The focus was on the creation of bridges and avoiding the creation of blocks that could be easily identified as violent elements. For example, *nobody* involved in either the World Bank or the EU campaigns fell into the trap of condemning any violence other than that of the World Bank and the Europe of Traders.

What have been the results for the movement over time?

It is important to understand this campaign as part of a broader process; in reality we are still awaiting the lessons from the mobilisation of 2001/2002.

- Forms of direct action and/or symbolic action, language, imagery, horizontal, assembly based and self organized forms of organization, were ever more widespread and popularised, not only amongst organisations that were explicitly radical.
- New autonomous collectives were created.
- A widening and opening of social debates and discussions that began in the 1980s, on more structural, confrontational, holistic and cross-sectional levels.
- An extension of the culture of the spectacle of 'taking to the streets'.
- A permanent tension created between institutions and movements. We are no longer just a marginalized/violent minority opposing the system: we can also be a civic majority, '*a despolitizar*', depending on the context.
- A reinforcing of the image of prevailing power systems as autistic and anti-democratic, accentuated by Bush and Co. one year later.
- A seed for future mobilisations that took place in Barcelona against the war. Also a rise in the number of votes for the institutional left resulting in the co-opting of part of the potential of these large mobilisations. In the mobilisations against the war we were not able to recreate the broad social alliance that was created during the anti-EU protests. The institutional left was able to recover a large part of their influence 'on the streets'; even though they will never again be at the head of the demonstrations.
- Closing the gap between the loosely called 'anti-globalisation' groups and the squatting movement, despite some marked breakdowns in communication
- The subsequent creation by some of the radical traditional left groups of XMG (a network of global mobilization) which on one side gave some continuity to the dynamic of the movement in relation to the social forums and protests, but on the other hand have used little imagination in moving away from the standard anti-globalisation stamp, of mass mobilisations defined by the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. The majority of groups and practices from the campaign have not partaken in this space.

There have been three different conclusions drawn by autonomous, self-organised groups and spaces involved in the campaign:

1. For some it was a giving up of radical perspectives.
2. For others, it was a delicate moment in which we were threatened by repression but simultaneously were able to rear our heads and begin to

- consolidate the network that was already forming.
3. For some others it was, above all, one opportunity amongst many and it was used well to broaden and practice discourses that had been silenced and to bring together different witnesses and perspectives of the global movement.
- All of the three points of view are valid and correct.

How could we have improved things?

- Basing the conflict on concrete and realizable demands, to get over the problem of repetitive use of symbolic rhetoric, which dominated the campaign. The fear of repression and marginalization together with a lack of political analysis prevented us from finding ways of conflict based on real struggles: against Identity Numbers for foreigners; the decontamination of GMO fields; boycotting products connected to the war economy or European multinationals from the energy sector; the occupation of political and public institutions (posing concrete demands and symbols on the condition of leaving) linked with local or single issue-struggles struggles.
- Better structures for people who came from outside of Barcelona. Everyone was absorbed in the internal dynamic of local movements, which took a lot of time.
- Working more on combating the Europe of capital in our daily lives, and proposing daily, local and small actions accessible to everyone
- Understanding the political environment better. We lack(ed) the ability and capacity for analysis and we were not able to generate discourse based on this analysis.

To all this we should add a broader reflection based on what has happened in the last years, about the current validity and effectiveness of using counter protests. On one hand big events maintain the capacity to bring people together, but it is also evident that it no longer surprises those in power. In order to understand the situation we now find ourselves in we need to take into account two equally important perspectives: the local and global.

It falls on our friends in the UK to see the potential of a mobilisation against the G8 in 2005 in accordance to their local context and the international situation. We hope that you are able to do the groundwork so that we can kick ass as much as possible.

A big hug.

Folks from Barcelona

Barcelona Tremola

Introduction:

I lived in Barcelona in the run up to the June 2001 World Bank meeting that wasn't. I wasn't closely involved in mobilising for either event, however, I was close to the process, and to the tidal wave of repression that swept Barcelona in those months and I think there are important lessons to be learned. My perspective is very particular as a foreigner living in Catalunya; and as a radical, militant in the squat movement at that time. Locally in Barcelona the debates about these mobilisations are still fierce. I'm sure many people would disagree with my views, but I also hope that it contains some useful observations.

Barcelona in 2001:

The political context to the mobilisations against the World Bank in June 2001 is important. Spain is a draconian country, with brutal, quasi-fascist police who routinely torture people in custody. The state was (and still is) governed by Aznar's Partido Popular, a far-right party directly descended from the Franco regime. However, the impact of the radical history of the city; the Catalan independence movement - which has politicised many people - means Barcelona is one of the most progressive, liberal cities in Spain.

There is a powerful squat movement in the city. In early 2001 there was a network of around 150 squats – autonomous, self-organised houses and Social Centres, many of which had been squatted for several years. This network is made up of many (mostly young) people, many involved with the growing anti-capitalist, anti-globalisation movement. It was already quite an international scene, and a lot of foreign activists moved to Barcelona in the run up to June. There was a lot of excitement within the anti-capitalist movement that the World Bank would be meeting in Barcelona – how could they be so stupid? It was like they were coming to our home ground: we were going to thrash them!

Political divisions

Both the World Bank and the later anti-EU mobilisations saw the creation of separate 'autonomous' mobilisations (Barcelona Tremola and Març Attac – *'los ricos tambien lloran'*). These groups were highly critical of the *'plataformas'* (the unitary platforms made up of civil society organisations). Members of the Squat movement described the organisers of the main demonstrations as mainly:

“... 'leftist', social democratic and reformist groups, whose main preoccupation is how their demonstration will be reported on the telly, or what the bourgeois press says about them the next day.”

(Translated from a pamphlet produced in July 2001 to denounce police repression linked to the World Bank demonstrations)

As part of the Barcelona Tremola events there were days of debate and action entitled 'anti-citizenship', criticising the political philosophy of citizenship that was one of the main tenets of the more mainstream mobilisations.

In turn, the radical elements were attacked for their attachment to street violence as a mobilising tactic. Of course, I am biased, but let it not be forgotten that it is the threat posed by these groups that caused the World Bank to withdraw in the first place.

What is worth bearing in mind is that in order to create broad based platforms, it was necessary to tone down (or some would say abandon) radical principles and forms of action. I believe this was quite damaging to the more radical margins of the mobilisation, which were very much at the sharp end of repression surrounding the summits, but not really gaining strength from mobilisations based on a more reformist platform.

The organising process:

Groups began to mobilise in earnest early in 2001. These mobilisations were divided into two main processes, mobilisations for the event itself, and groups focussing on education in the run up to the event. The education work led to two months of events, discussions, and actions on different themes. Literally thousands took part in '*encuentros*', organised by the '*plataforma*', which were held in the streets.

As for mobilising for the event itself, a lot of it was based on that energy I described - feeling that we were going to thrash them. I don't doubt that if the World Bank *had* come to Barcelona, the response would have been massive.

The victory:

Victory came early. On 19th May 2001 the World Bank announced that they were cancelling their conference in Barcelona, after reviewing the security plans of Spanish police.

“A World Bank spokeswoman, Caroline Anstey, claimed that demonstrators had planned to turn Barcelona into a battleground with police. That meant, she added, that they had prevented the bank from debating one of the issues closest to their own hearts - ways of tackling poverty.”
(The Guardian 21st May 2001)

Rumours flew around “they’ve shat themselves, they’re not coming”. When it turned out to be true we jumped and screamed and celebrated. But once the elation had died down everyone felt a bit flat. Now what? They were still meeting in June. It was to be the most extreme example of the tendency to hold these summits in isolated, fortified bunkers: they held it over the Internet. It was decided that the mobilisations would go ahead anyway, but it was all a bit odd not having the focus of a conference to shut down...

On the Day (Sunday 24th June 2001)

I think there were several mobilisations really. Certainly what actually happened was that there was the mass, legalised demonstration, called by the '*plataforma*'. This was a coalition of civil-society groups. Then there were at least two autonomous mobilisations: a 'Reclaim the Streets' and an illegal anarchist demonstration called for 4pm on the Sunday afternoon.

The main demonstration was unexpectedly big, with around 30,000 people taking part. However, it was pretty depressing. Black block activists started trying to smash a major Spanish bank and so called 'anti-capitalist' reformists formed a human chain to protect the bank's windows (for f**k's sake!!) so the black block turned their attentions to bus stops and telephone boxes, and the whole thing descended into chaos. It was farcical and definitely not very revolutionary.

The only thing that spared us the excruciating process of denunciations of 'violent infiltrators' into a peaceful demonstration was police stupidity. They blatantly used police infiltrators as '*agent provocateurs*' to create violence (unnecessary as it was happening anyway!) and justify utterly indiscriminate police charges, shooting baton

rounds at tourists on the main street of the Ramblas, which completely overshadowed the window breaking activities of the Black Block.

In fact, in this case, I think that 'violent infiltrators' is exactly what the Black Block were. I understand that there was a long process of discussion within the unitary platform organising the demo about keeping it peaceful, which some members of the anarchist and squat movements took part in. However, on the day, people came just to break things: we were angry, we had been suffering extended harassment and repression and this was a small chance to kick back. I can understand why it happened, but I don't think it was especially helpful.

The anarchist demonstration on the Sunday afternoon was a total disaster. At the time when it was supposed to start Police were still attacking participants from the earlier demonstration in Plaça Catalunya, just 500 yards away. Some people tried to assemble for the anarchist demo but police charged into any groups that formed, forcing them into the wide streets of the Eixample where there was little hope for people to defend themselves against the police brutality.

Far more successful was the Reclaim the Streets which happened a week or so before the supposed date of the World Bank meeting. Completely autonomous from the '*plataforma*' process, a couple of thousand people took part in a roving carnival, with sound systems, samba, a mobile kitchen dishing out thousands of falafels, light hearted looting of shops we passed and basically no cops.

Repression

The repression surrounding the World Bank conference started months in advance. Both the Policia Nacional and the Mossos d'esquadra (Catalan police) were involved in dozens of squat evictions and searches of people's homes, as well as stopping and identifying people in the streets and at anti-globalisation meetings and actions. The police released reports criminalising alternative groups as vandals or even terrorists, linked to ETA. They created a climate of fear, even cancelling a cycling race due to be held on 25th June.

'Barcelona Neta'

This was a slogan of the local government at the time – 'Clean Up Barcelona'. They announced an attack on the squat movement and on dissident elements in the city which began with the repression outlined above, but was by no means just part of the build up to that event. The crack down on social movements has continued and even escalated. After the World Bank, it was the EU Summit and now it is the *Forum 2004*, all excuses to step up the crack down on social movements. The elation that they were 'foolishly' choosing to meet on 'our' turf didn't last long. In fact it may have suited the Spanish State very nicely.

Anti-terrorist measures

In early 2001 the first of many arrests that year were made under the anti-terrorist laws, amid a massive media circus, alleging links between the Barcelona squat movement and the Basque separatist group ETA and the Comando Barcelona. It is a long and complicated history, which is perhaps not immediately relevant to this pamphlet, but it is worth noting that the (continuing) waves of 'terrorist' arrests in the Spanish State were successfully used by the state in the run up to the World Bank and beyond, to criminalise dissidents and justify massive policing excesses.

Surveillance and police harassment

For a couple of months in the run up to the June demonstration there was a climate of police surveillance and violence reminiscent of police state preparing for a '*coup d'état*'. In neighbourhoods such as Gracia and Guinardò, where a lot of the city's squats were to be found, undercover police constantly stopped, identified, insulted, arbitrarily arrested and harassed anyone they believed to be 'suspicious'. It seemed like there were thousands of them, because there were. Around 2000 extra police were brought into the city from other parts of the state to work undercover forming lists of people linked to different social movements.

This was combined with a more general crack-down, with more and more people being arrested on trumped up charges, interviewed by the '*brigades de informacion*' (The Spanish Police's answer to Special Branch), and put on bail facing serious custodial sentences.

Squat evictions

Some time after the Summer of 2001 I saw an article about squatting in *El Periodico*, a local paper, that published the 'score' of the Police -v-Squatters battle of the previous year. It was badly researched, but recorded 39 evictions and 38 new squats opened. This is probably not too far from reality. It shows that for all their massive police mobilisations they only managed to knock us back by 1 squat.

But those statistics mask a far grimmer reality. They were evicting squats that had been there for years, like El Susto and El Sustillo, which had been occupied and part of the struggle for nine years. We were occupying empty buildings that needed a lot of work to build them up into habitable spaces and functioning centres. And they were leaving us homeless. Some people were woken by riot police kicking the door in three, four or even five times in a month. Once you got released from police custody you had to pick up and start all over again.

Three or four times a week the phone would go early in the morning and we would turn out to face the police lines and support yet another group of people being turned onto the street. People's tat had to be moved, demonstrations to be organised, then prisoner support and then people had to be temporarily housed. It just never stopped. I literally shudder when I think back on those months leading up to June 2001. Many Catalan friends who have been part of the movement there for a lot longer have expressed similar feelings. It just didn't stop: we were running and running just to stand still.

Police untouchability

"Following a day of abuses [the day of the World Bank demonstrations], the list of aggressions would be endless..."

According to hospital services we consulted, more than 60 citizens were attended to as a result of police brutality, many of them with cranial traumas. This does not count those minor injuries that did seek hospital treatment. The Interior Ministry, the Spanish State Government Delegation in Barcelona and other sinister characters affirmed that the police charges were 'measured' and aimed at ensuring the 'safety' of demonstrators."

(Translated from a pamphlet produced in July 2001 to denounce police repression linked to the World Bank demonstrations)

Despite the clear video evidence of police acting as '*agent provocateurs*', and considerable pressure from the media and civil society for them to be called to account, legal action against them was thrown out of court by a judge who stated that to try the police for this was an attack on their right to do their duty unmolested.

Postscript:

Març Attac-the rich cry too

Against the EU Summit, March 2002

Just eight months after the World Bank demonstrations, there was another major summit meeting in Barcelona, when Spain held the EU presidency. There is a good account of that mobilisation being published with this article, which expresses the massive scale of the demonstrations and many of the positive aspects of the event. However, I think the more negative aspects of the mobilisation are not so well reflected:

For example, the aim to avoid more confrontational action created serious political splits. The legal support group received accounts of demonstration stewards, acting on behalf of leftist and reformist groups, attempting to literally cut more radical elements like the Black Block and the Basques out of the demo and leave them trapped in Plaça Catalunya.

The 'self-organised' Manu Ciao concert was a massive, corporate-style project, which massively over-stretched the capacity of the groups involved. It meant that most of the medical team were there, acting as first-aiders to meet insurance requirements, instead of on the streets; and it lost millions of pesetas, rather than raising money for legal support as hoped.

From the point of view of radical, autonomous organising, I feel that the response to the March 2002 Summit shows just how damaging the previous years experiences had been. Energy in the Squat movement was at rock bottom. I heard many many people express the wish that people just wouldn't come, and the general attitude was one of burnt out resignation, and making the best of a bad thing.

One of the major problems was accommodation – thousands, possibly tens of thousands of people were expected from abroad to take part in the mobilisations. Where were they going to stay? The squats just didn't want to know – we all knew we were being watched constantly by the police and no house wanted to be seen to be active in the mobilisations because it would mean almost certain eviction. Some houses banned all guests in that week and just batoned down the hatches to weather the storm. As well as all the repression we had experienced in Barcelona, this was post-Genoa and the Diaz School raid and people were really scared.

There was talk of taking space in the University, but in the end this space was used as a convergence centre, but no one was allowed to stay there. The accommodation that I saw was horrendous, in a notorious squatted theatre with serious drug and alcohol problems and no real internal structures. I heard several awful accounts of what went on there – total disorganisation, descending into fights and even sexual assault.

More important than the slightly sorry reflection that the EU Summit cast on the state of the Barcelona Squat movement, I think it revealed something of the lack of real substance to anti-capitalist networks in Europe at the time (perhaps still). There was very little provision made for international participants in the mobilisation. There was very little real contact between people coming from abroad and local groups mobilising within Barcelona, just 'international calls to action'.

Just two or three weeks before the EU Summit, people from *Info Usurpa* (a mouthpiece of the squat movement in Barcelona) handed me an international call to action. It was a fierce political statement calling for confrontational action. The person who gave it to me said “We’ve written this. This anti-summits thing has a life of its own and people are going to come from abroad to demonstrate whether we like it or not, so we thought we should make our political position clear. Could you translate it please.”

That’s just the wrong way round, with the driving force coming from outside and the local activists being forced to keep up. In the event most of the international participants I met were not in self-sufficient groups. They were basically consumers, who had come to Barcelona largely because of its reputation as a squat capital, arriving just days before the event, not knowing anyone and not knowing the town. They expected to be provided with accommodation, legal information and exciting action, by people who in reality hadn’t asked them to be there. That is an extreme viewpoint, but there was definitely a weird dynamic.

Conclusion

I guess there are three main things I hope we could learn from these for future mobilisations:

1. We need more meaningful international networking where there is two-way communication and not just political consumer tourism.
2. We need to find ways of building mass mobilisations that do not compromise our radicalism.
3. Summit actions need to be less reactive, they-set-the-date-and-we-burn-out-mobilising-for-it events, and more of a process, which works to strengthen existing radical networks. We stopped the World Bank Summit in Barcelona, but, in the long run, it sometimes feels a bit like ‘they’ won...