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IN SELF-ORGANIZATION TODAY

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tracceurbane@gmail.com

**Direttori scientifici:** Carlo Cellamare (DICEA, "La Sapienza" Università di Roma) e Giuseppe Scandurra (Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università di Ferrara)

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Poteri e terreni di ambiguità  
nelle forme di auto-organizzazione contemporanee/  
Powers and terrains of ambiguity  
in self-organization today

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**Self-organization practices in cities:  
discussing the transformative potential**  
Elena Ostanel, Giovanni Attili<sup>1</sup>

**Self-organization and local institutions. Who learns, who changes?**

In a growing number of small and large cities across Europe, citizens are engaging and mobilizing to demonstrate their ability in creating innovative solutions for important social and spatial challenges. We are witnessing a different set of micro-practices that are transforming cities 'from below', thus questioning not only the relation between active citizenship and the State (Uitermark, 2015) but also forms of urban activation themselves. In this brief introduction we examine the politics of urban self-organization with a particular focus on the implications for local governments and the transformative potential of these practices for local communities.

We argue that a focus on self-organization practices in contemporary city raises new questions around the relationship between active citizenship and local governments; this is particularly relevant under global neoliberal conditions where States' retrenchment from social welfare has heightened since the 2008 financial crisis.

Self-organization in cities is a debated term. The term is often used to refer to different forms of local activation. Since the 1960s, self-organization has been understood as the mechanism of internal change within complex urban systems and widely used to build models of city evolution (Allen, 1997; Thrift, 1999). But the notions of self-organization and citizens' participation are often mutually confused. There is, however, a fundamental difference between collaborative participation and self-organization (Boonstra, Boelensb, 2011). The papers presented in this Special Issue highlight this major difference and offer

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<sup>1</sup> Elena Ostanel wrote the paragraph 'Self-organization and local institutions. Who learns, who changes?', Giovanni Attili wrote the paragraph 'The transformative potential of self-organization practices'.

Elena Ostanel's contribution is the result of the research conducted within the Project NEIGHBOURCHANGE that has received funding from the European Commission under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowships, Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, project NEIGHBOURCHANGE grant agreement n° 707726.

a more specific definition of self-organization in cities. When using the term self-organization, we mainly refer to community/citizen-led initiatives that originate outside the government control. In particular, all the contributions in this Issue shed light on the urban as an important scale of analysis when examining relationships between people, places and institutions.

Self-organization should not be understood as a consequence or result of the State retrenching from or not efficiently delivering public goods. Firstly, this argument is dangerous, considering how active citizenship can be commodified within the continuous erosion of the welfare State. Secondly, the observation of self-organization in cities portrays a more complex architecture of actors at different scales and with different intensities that coalesce, meet, and collaborate.

Therefore, self-organization today cannot be simply defined as a force originated in cities without specific interventions from outside. We reject the concept of self-organization as human agency within a liberal and individualistic framework of self-reliance beyond the State (Davoudi, 2001 quoted in Savini, 2016). Do-it-yourself actions, tactical urbanism, everyday making, social innovation, are all buzzwords that in many cases have been used as an excuse for the decreasing role of the State, or as instruments for the public to reclaim public space and reconfigure everyday life (Savini, 2016). It is time to consider self-organization as an arena of opportunities that emphasizes bottom-linked governance which focuses on reconnecting local communities to their governments, as well as scaling up processes of institutional learning. We have argued elsewhere how local governments should reconsider their relation to community/citizen-led initiatives in order to ensure policy backing that is durable, sustainable, and effective (Ostanel, 2017).

Citizen-driven activation increases the possibilities for a broader range of people to become directly involved in all stages of social and urban change while citizens' activation may simultaneously fill the gaps left by government in basic social services (Alford, 2009). In this context, public institutions are challenged to find new ways to provide public values in an open, transparent way but avoiding practices that seek to commodify active citizenship. What we claim in this introduction is that analysing self-organization is also about understanding how local institutions

can put into practice processes of institutional learning and engage with different forms of community/citizen led activation. Agents involved in processes of self-organization can create important spaces of autonomy within these dynamics but as other papers in this issue have discussed, agent mainly witness the existence of different forms of collaboration between self-organized initiatives and more institutional actors.

This study raises new urgent questions, such as: how can self-organization empower local communities and produce socio-political transformation at a local level? And, to what extent and under what conditions can self-organizing in cities contribute to processes of institutional learning and change?

Among the buzzwords we have aforementioned, social innovation has surely been the most pervasive one. Under the impulse of a pervasive European discourse, social innovation has become a buzzword applied in very different contexts. In 2011, the President of the European Commission Barroso launched the 'Social Innovation Europe' initiative, defining social innovation as a 'pivotal instrument to meet unmet social needs and improving social outcomes. In this context, social innovation is for the people and with the people. It is about solidarity and responsibility. It is good for society and it enhances society's capacity to act'. From this moment, social innovation has strongly entered into the public debate inspiring EU policies (as the 'Europe 2020 Strategy') and as a consequence national and local debates and practices. Before Barroso's social innovation initiative, this concept focused mainly on the insertion of technology in production processes or innovation in management processes. But since its origin, social innovation has not been a neutral term and scholars have discussed the relationship between social innovation and the reduction of public spending. Critical scholarly discussions have showed how social innovation could be employed as a strategy or tool to justify the retrenchment of the welfare State. Jamie Peck problematizes the discourse centred on social innovation that could be used to justify the reconfiguration of the State's role in social welfare provision and the rising privatization and commodification of different urban services. According to Peck, social innovation is another example of 'fast' policy interventions, highly replicable and communicable, de facto launching a 'policy of good practices' that could be transplanted everywhere regardless of the social

and institutional context (Peck et al, 2013).

The pervasive rhetoric on co-production/co-creation associated with the discourse on social innovation has missed the opportunity to develop critical research in real-life scenarios where bottom-up action is performed in a dynamic relation with local institutions. Critical analyses of co-production have mainly focused on the factors that enable institutions to design more open decision making processes. These analyses, however, have not taken into much consideration the role that real-scenarios of urban activation have in complex processes of institutional learning. Much of this research has focussed on factors that can enable institutional change within local government; such as: i) the organizational structure and procedures within the public organization; ii) the administrative and political culture; and iii) the incentives/supporting facilities to community led initiatives (Kleinhans, 2017; Voorberg, Bekkers, Tummers, 2015).

An important question raised in this issue that requires further critical scholarly attention is how spatial transformations produced by community/citizen-led initiatives can push for formal and/or informal institutional changes. In this sense, we can overcome the risk of considering self-organization as a 'vehicular idea' for practices of depoliticization when applied to social and urban settings (Swyngedouw, 2010).

What if the more traditional literature on social movements and the most recent literature on self-organization/social innovation would be merged into one analytical framework to claim that community based activation and the collective making of political claims should be mutually reinforced both in theory and practice? For the most part these two conceptual frameworks have remained separated in the literature, overlooking the synergies created between conflict and collaboration. Sophie Watson in the previous issue calls for a better understanding of conflict and collaboration as mutually reinforcing elements of an ongoing political process, where conflict is not only unavoidable but also a necessary aspect of participation and engagement (Watson, 2018).

Space plays a major role in this new analytical framework. Research practice should go beyond a 'space-as-container ontology' (Gotham, 2003) affirming that a full understanding of human actions requires the recognition of the spatial nature of human agency, since space is an assemblage of spatial uses,

practices, and representations 'involved in the production and reproduction of social structures, social action, and relations of power and resistance' (*ibid.*). Space and environment are no longer passive fragments of the city because they provide resources for various groups constructing themselves differently within the space. Space is neither a romantic container for otherness nor a battleground among different communities; it is a specific element forming social interaction and, as a consequence, shaping identities through its use. Urban space is in this sense social and political.

Sophie Watson highlights the potential of new forms of community and social organising that use urban space as a policy and political resource (Watson, 2018). Community/citizen-led actions in cities are inspiring models of active citizenship that can help rebuild cities to be more inclusive, just, and responsive to local needs (Watson, 2018).

### **The transformative potential of self-organization practices**

The new wave of self-organization practices articulates the urban as more than a terrain of struggles between dynamics of exclusion/marginalization and processes of resistance/activation. In cities, inhabitants have built nets, associations, communities based on shared practices for a variety of intentions: to apply solidarity and equity principles to new forms of consumption (solidarity based purchasing groups); to experiment with tools of social and environmental sustainability (short distribution chain, urban agriculture); to fight against the monetization of daily life through free reciprocal service exchange (time banks) or through ethical finance services; to invent virtuous forms of trade (fair trade shops); to rethink urban space from an ecological perspective (through energy saving and the use of renewable energy); to reinvent places and save them from profit obsession (self-organization practices aimed at reusing dismissed/residual spaces); to imagine different forms of production (reinventing production cycle inside abandoned factories); to build a more conscious right to the city (through the occupation of houses or the collective planning of public spaces); to rethink culture as a common good that cannot be commodified (through the re-invention of abandoned culture-spaces destined for demolition). These multiplicities of practices have the potential to create

'relational goods'. The term 'relational goods' emerged in different theoretical conversations in the late 1980s through the works of philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1986), the sociologist Pierpaolo Donati (1987), and the economists Benedetto Gui (1987) and Carole Uhlener (1989). These goods are non-material goods that are essentially linked to interpersonal relationships (Bruni, 2012): they cannot be produced or consumed solely by individuals and they can only be appreciated when shared in reciprocity. In particular, Guy describes them as «immaterial goods connected to interpersonal relationships» (1987: 37). Uhlener refers to «goods that can only be possessed by mutual agreement that they exist, after appropriate joint actions have been taken by a person and non-arbitrary others» (1989: 254). According to Bruni these goods can be materialized through specific properties: they are goods where the *identity* of the people involved is an essential element; they are mutual activities, shared actions and reciprocity play a fundamental role; they are co-produced and co-consumed *simultaneously*; they are led by *motivations* and values that create a distinction between relational goods and non-relational goods; and they can be interpreted as *emerging facts*, being a third component beyond the contributions made by the agents.

All the practices previously outlined have these properties. Moreover, they can be interpreted as 'contextual goods': their aim is to better the quality of the context in which people develop their daily activities (Magatti, 2012). On a smaller scale, many transformative urban practices articulate how context drives change and how space is not a neutral support for human activities. Rather space is the means through which we build our relations, identities and projects. 'Contextual goods' are what is created out of a joint effort to improve the qualities of communities and their territories.

In this wide spectrum of different urban collective actions, many practices are 'informal' actions of re-appropriation (i.e. practices that challenge property and normative regimes in the attempt to recover a multiplicity of spaces that have been dismissed by modernity). These practices are islands of resistance but also incubators of new urban imaginaries, which include: organizational experiments that are potentially able to build the city even out of an institutionally recognized framework; symbolic and material tactics of spatial sense-

making (de Certeau, 1990); molecular and minute writings that transgress the text of the planned city; and capillary battles with power mechanisms (Agamben, 2005).

Informal self-organizational practices offer themselves as potentially significant laboratories of social and environmental experimentation. These experimentations are activated by '*poetical*' because *poietical*' subjects are builders, craftsmen [sic], authors not of texts but of practical and ethical acts that inspire plausible alternative scenarios of possibilities to come (Gargani 1999). Moreover, they can be interpreted as an interconnected urban social movement that is able to produce integrated instances rooted in a renewed social, political and environmental consciousness. They succeed in merging land care, occupation, production, security, social inclusion and participation. «They are the organizational forms, the live schools, where the new social movements of our emerging society are taking place, growing up, learning to breathe, out of reach of the state apparatuses, and outside the closed doors of repressed family life. They are successful when they connect all the repressed aspects of the new, emerging life because this is their specificity: to speak the new language that nobody yet speaks in its multifaceted meaning» (Castells, 1983: 330-331).

According to this perspective, many urban spaces (abandoned, suspended or threatened) have been reinvented by heterogeneous populations. In these spaces, conviviality (Illich, 1974), bonding value (Caillè, 1998) and share value (Porter and Kramer, 2011) have been tested as possible answers to capitalist hegemony. The path is to build goods with a high relational, contextual, and cognitive content (Magatti, 2012). A way to reclaim the right to the city is to transofrm the city itself. In fact, the right to the city cannot be conceived as a way to access what already exists; rather it is the right to change it through the reinvention of an urban life that would be more in accordance with our desires (Lefebvre *et al.*, 1996).

As Castells would argue, if the process of city-production is most evident in the case of social revolt «it is not limited to such exceptional events. Every day, in every context, people acting individually or collectively, produce or reproduce the rules of their society, and translate them into their spatial expression» (Castells, 1983: xvi). Therefore, these practices cannot be

interpreted as «dramatic and exceptional events. They are, in a permanent form, at the very core of social life» (Touraine, 1977: 45). They often contradict power and institutional structures and try to imagine and produce a different city. In this framework people experiment with new ways of being together; create new languages that are able to name things differently; and build social relations that challenge or disrupt what is already established.

Nevertheless, most existing research on informality and self-organization practices combine romantic descriptions with populist ideology. A substantial literature interprets informal practices as a revolution from below (De Soto 1989, 2000), emphasizing the role of people in acting against the State. This stance is comprehensibly sympathetic to the various struggles that take place in the informal territories of claims. Nevertheless, this approach risks producing an ideological and populist celebration of the informal without understanding its inner differentiation and complexity. Informal practices are not, for themselves and without distinction, a virtuous and homogeneous social entity that acts on the base of shared and progressive values. In some cases, they end up implementing spatial privatization processes based on forms of neo-liberal individualism. In other cases, they appear to be forms of 'urban populism' (Castells, 1983) that do not necessarily call into question the urban status quo or create a just city despite their good intentions (Roy, 2009). Finally, and interestingly some forms of insurgency succeed in producing 'public' (services, spaces, goods), implementing an alternative model of urban space production and effectively transforming the city itself. But under which conditions? Or what should be done to achieve this goal? And, as highlighted in the previous section, what role could institutions play in this respect?

With regard to those practices that are able to produce public value, it is important to acknowledge that different resources, knowledge claims, experiences, and competences aimed at addressing public problems cannot be confined to formally recognized institutions (Cottino, Zeppetella, 2009). Rather these factors interweave with informal practices that are able to find significant and usually unconventional answers to collective needs. In this respect, public institutions cannot be considered the only subjects entitled to provide public

services or to produce public politics. Informal practices can be thought as *de facto* public politics if (and when) they succeed in addressing public issues (Crosta, 1998).

In this relatively new sense-making framework, it is important to avoid simplification and deconstruct dichotomous relations (formal-informal; citizen activism-state) in order to adopt a critical stance on what is at stake in the realm of self-organization practices. If we achieve this, we could possibly overcome the risk of depoliticizing self-organization practices as actions divorced from principles of social and economic justice. We could also challenge dominant conceptions of activation as service providers and apolitical moderators between citizens and local governments (de Filippis et al, 2010), and instead emphasize activation's potential for building power and trying to have an impact on the root causes of social and spatial problems.

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**Elena Ostanel**, PhD in Urban Planning, is Marie Curie Fellow for the project NEIGHBOURCHANGE based at Iuav University of Venice, University of Toronto and TU Delft. At Iuav she is part of the UNESCO Chair on Social and Spatial Inclusion of International Migrants. Among her recent publication: «Urban regeneration and social innovation: The role of community-based organisations in the railway station area in Padua», in *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal*, Vol. 11, 1, 1-13, 2017. [ostanel@iuav.it](mailto:ostanel@iuav.it)

**Giovanni Attili**, PhD in Urban Planning, is an Associate Professor working in La Sapienza University (Rome) where he teaches 'Sustainable Development' and 'Analysis of Urban and Regional Systems'. Among his recent publications: «Civita di Bagnoregio, dalla salvaguardia del fuoco al culto delle ceneri. Biografia di una transizione», in *Territorio*, Vol.86, 20-30, 2018. [giovanni.attili@uniroma1.it](mailto:giovanni.attili@uniroma1.it)

**Genealogie. Dalle pratiche di autorganizzazione ai processi di regolazione statuale: verso la costruzione di nuovi cantieri di autocostruzione urbana.**

Lidia Decandia

La visione dello spazio e del tempo dominante nel pensiero urbanistico, che, come avremo modo di dimostrare, ha avuto origine nel Rinascimento con l'affermarsi della visione prospettica e l'uso del sistema di rappresentazione cartografico, ha potentemente condizionato il nostro modo di guardare e progettare la città e il territorio. Invischiati da questa visione infatti gli urbanisti, nel separare la forma dalla vita che l'ha prodotta, hanno cominciato ad immaginare che la città potesse essere concepita non come un processo, esito di pratiche e relazioni sociali molto complesse, ma come un disegno.

Il prodotto di una mente elaborato in un laboratorio chiuso separato dalla vita e poi calato con un atto d'imperio, in un unico tempo, su un territorio pensato come una superficie senza vita e senza storia. In realtà è proprio la storia dei territori e delle città che ci aiuta molto bene a comprendere quanto il privilegiare il momento in cui la città è emersa come aggregato spaziale coerente ci abbia portato, come suggerisce Soja, a minimizzare «l'importanza dei processi dinamici associati con la spazialità della vita sociale e con la costruzione di specifiche geografie umane» (Soja, 2000/2007: 54). Dalle più antiche *πόλεις* greche alle città medioevali emerge, infatti con forza, quanto i processi di autoorganizzazione e di autogestione, non riducibili alle classiche dicotomie pubblico/privato, ma associate piuttosto a diverse forme relazionali tese alla produzione di beni comuni, abbiano avuto un ruolo fondante nella costruzione delle differenti territorialità.

**Una collezione di luoghi differenti: i processi di autoorganizzazione e le pratiche di costruzione dei territori e delle città medioevali**

Se osserviamo per esempio il territorio medioevale, potremmo osservare che esso appariva come una sorta di vero e proprio patchwork, formato da tessere differenti, corrispondenti ad una varietà di situazioni, di forme di vita, di dinamiche d'uso, di pratiche locali, esito di una molteplicità eterogenea di storie e di

processi creativi differenziati<sup>1</sup>. È come se ci trovassimo di fronte ad una partitura in cui ciascuna tessera si muoveva secondo andature e velocità differenti o, meglio ancora, all'accostamento di una serie di spezzoni di film in movimento, ciascuno dei quali raccontava una propria storia. Non esisteva, infatti, l'idea di un tempo unico misura di tutte le cose, esterno al divenire dei fenomeni. Il tempo non era una variabile esterna separata dallo spazio, ma era intimamente connesso al divenire della materia<sup>2</sup>. Si concretizzava nelle stesse tessiture dei paesaggi e nelle qualità spaziali dei contesti. Ogni tessera era l'espressione di storie di uso e di appropriazione dello spazio che avevano coinvolto, in una lunga sequenza evolutiva, gli uomini e le comunità vissute in quei territori. In ognuna di queste tessere gli uomini avevano interagito nel tempo in maniera diversificata con le variegate qualità naturali, che caratterizzavano i diversi ambienti, producendo, attraverso vere e proprie forme di autoorganizzazione, mondi eterogenei e multiformi. Modelli culturali, immaginario urbano, norme morali, materiali, tecniche di misurazione e di costruzione, capacità artistiche ed espressive, conoscenze e saperi pratici aderivano alla specificità delle diverse situazioni insediative, sociali e culturali: nascevano, si producevano, seppur in un processo di interazione e di scambio con reti e scalarità differenti, in un rapporto di intima connessione con il territorio.

In questo spazio, in cui esisteva una totale compenetrazione tra gli uomini e le cose, la realtà fisica, con tutto lo spessore di storie e di memorie che portava con sé, aveva un valore condizionante e cogente.

Lo stesso diritto per esempio «registrava la varietà e complessità del reale senza allontanarsene» (Grossi, 2003: 539). Se oggi noi siamo abituati a pensare la legge come qualcosa che piove dall'alto su un territorio liscio e omogeneo, nel Medioevo al contrario la fonte del diritto, che nasceva proprio dalla terra, era la consuetudine. Sequenza di passi che diventa sentiero,

1 Per un approfondimento della concezione del territorio medioevale e per una più analitica comprensione dei fondamenti delle pratiche di conoscenza, di autorganizzazione, di autogestione e di produzione delle diverse realtà territoriali, mi permetto di rinviare a Decandia (2000), parte II *Lo spazio qualitativo della premodernità*, pp. 51-98, e a Decandia (2008), cap. II, *Prima della prospettiva: lo spazio eterogeneo e simbolico del mondo medioevale*, pp.38-73.

2 Sull'idea di tempo nel medioevo cfr. Sauerländer (2002).

la consuetudine esprimeva bene questo attaccamento ad una memoria, stratificata nel corpo del territorio, che diventava legge. Ogni comunità aveva le proprie consuetudini che registravano appunto la varietà delle forme di appropriazione e d'uso del territorio. Il diritto registrava la varietà delle situazioni<sup>3</sup>. Non esistevano forme gestionali valide in tutti i contesti, ma ogni comunità, localizzata in un territorio, produceva, attraverso complessi processi di autoorganizzazione, che si erano prodotti nel tempo, i propri codici che derivavano da una conoscenza pratica e concreta delle diverse situazioni locali (Franchetti Pardo, 1992).

### **La forma urbana e la bellezza della città come esito di complessi processi interattivi e relazionali**

Non solo la produzione delle norme nei diversi contesti locali, ma la forma e la stessa bellezza delle più importanti e significative città dell'epoca non era altro che l'esito di complessi processi di autoorganizzazione. Quelle stesse città che nel Duecento ci appariranno come deiverie e propri organismi unitari, nel momento in cui ricominciano, dopo i secoli di crisi dell'Alto Medioevo, ad avere un ruolo significativo all'interno del territorio, ci appaiono piuttosto caratterizzate anch'esse da una sommatoria di territori contigui, di clan e famiglie (Heers, 1995; Guidoni, 1978 e 1991; Nuti, 2002) che si aggregavano e si autoorganizzavano, talvolta proprio come dei veri e propri nuclei differenziati (Nuti, 2002; Heers, 1995). La forma di ognuno di questi nuclei, accostati l'uno all'altro, era l'esito di una molteplicità eterogenea di pratiche differenti.

Ciascun gruppo clanico o familiare portava con sé i propri modi di uso dello spazio e le differenti forme del costruire e si organizzava attorno ad un proprio centro simbolico. Poi nel corso del tempo, lentamente, attraverso l'appartenenza a una serie di «contesti di interazione» per mezzo della definizione di patti e di diversi livelli di associazionismo, commisurando le proprie alle altrui esigenze, secondo logiche interdipendenti che definivano diversi livelli di appartenenza comunitaria (la vicinia, il quartiere, il quartiere, la contrada, le associazioni professionali), si costruivano

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3 Sulla dimensione particolaristica e locale del diritto medioevale in rapporto al territorio e alla città cfr. Vaccari (1921), Grossi (1995) e (2003), Cortese (1995), Sergi (2003), Franchetti Pardo (1992) e (2001). Mi permetto inoltre di rinviare a Decandia (2009).

i primi spazi e beni comuni, si strutturavano le prime forme di regolamentazione consuetudinaria, ci si preoccupava della manutenzione delle strade, dell'approvvigionamento dell'acqua, del problema degli scarichi e dei rifiuti (Menant, 2005: 197), si elaboravano modi di costruire e di sentire condivisi, capaci di accogliere e di amalgamare culture e immaginari diversi (Consonni, 2013: 91). Culture e immaginari che orientavano a loro volta quello stesso sentire. Non si trattava mai di un processo pacificato, ma di un processo interessato da complesse dinamiche evolutive fatte di continuità e di rotture, di influenze e di sincretismi, ma anche di conflitti (ibidem: 58). Spesso il conflitto, usato come materia d'arte e di rinnovamento, veniva stemperato in una logica dialogica e teatrale, in cui diverse sensibilità e culture autoctone e d'importazione venivano messe a confronto<sup>4</sup>. A questo contribuivano in maniera sostanziale i riti che avevano un'importanza fondamentale nel fare dialogare le diversità e nel costruire legame sociale. Le feste, le processioni, l'invenzione dei Santi patroni (Vauchez, 1987), i rituali collettivi costituivano un momento centrale per favorire paradossali forme di convivenza e costruire, nell'effervescenza dell'essere insieme, la coesione sociale<sup>5</sup> così come lo stesso senso di identità e di appartenenza..

### **L'affermarsi di un nuovo modo di guardare i territori**

Queste modalità di organizzazione del territorio e della città, basate su forme di produzione comunitaria pensate in stretta connessione con i luoghi e come esito di un processo interattivo e relazionale, subiscono, a partire dal Rinascimento, una profonda modificazione. È a partire da questo momento, infatti, che emerge una nuova visione del mondo capace, nel corso di alcuni secoli, di determinare effetti dirompenti sui modi di conoscere e di governare i territori e le città.

Due sono i passaggi chiave che emblematizzano e simboleggiano l'affermarsi di questo nuovo approccio. Il primo passaggio è costituito dall'invenzione della visione cartografica, intesa non semplicemente come una forma di rappresentazione, ma

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4 Sul ruolo del conflitto nella definizione dello stesso tessuto delle città, in cui si confrontano continuamente poteri e culture differenti, si vedano le interessanti osservazioni di Volli (2002:151).

5 Sul ruolo delle feste, dei simboli e dei miti come momento fondante nelle città medioevali cfr. Galletti (2000); Vauchez (1995) e Menant (2011).

piuttosto come una nuova modalità paradigmatica di guardare al mondo; il secondo e forse ancora più decisivo è l'emergere dell'organizzazione politica dello Stato moderno e il ruolo prioritario che, in questa nuova formula di governo, assume il metodo scientifico, come indiscusso strumento di conoscenza, di interpretazione e di controllo della realtà.

### La svolta cartografica

Con l'affermarsi della visione cartografica nel Rinascimento, infatti, viene messa a punto una prima potente riduzione dell'idea stessa di territorio, che assume un carattere paradigmatico. Si passa dal considerare il territorio come una complessa partitura di luoghi differenti ad una visione semplificata che lo trasforma in semplice superficie piatta senza vita e senza storia<sup>6</sup>.

Quella terra che, come afferma Farinelli, già per i Greci aveva due facce indissolubili – γῆ [gê] superficie e χθών [chthón] profondità (Farinelli, 2003) – comincia, infatti, ad essere rappresentata su un piano, estrapolando le fattezze della forma, misurabili attraverso un sistema di semplici coordinate metriche, dal loro stesso processo di formazione. Attraverso la rappresentazione cartografica per la prima volta i territori finiscono così, con l'applicazione della stessa logica, ad essere guardati non più come ambienti vitali, esito in continuo divenire di relazioni visibili e invisibili stabilite dagli uomini con i propri ambienti, ma come *cadaveri* senza vita e senza storia. Nel riportare la molteplicità dei tempi e delle storie su un unico piano la mappa elimina infatti le diverse temporalità, trasforma le storie in segni, separandoli per sempre dalle pratiche da cui erano stati prodotti, trasforma lo spazio qualitativo dei significati e della percezione, dell'oscuro, dell'eteroclito e dell'invisibile in una superficie in cui solo ciò che può essere visto può essere rappresentato: il resto sparisce per sempre (de Certeau, 1990). Il territorio, in cui i segni non chiedono più di essere decifrati ed interpretati, si trasforma in una superficie piatta ed omogenea in cui le differenze possono essere semplicemente descritte nella loro apparente evidenza (Foucault, 1999).

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<sup>6</sup> Per un approfondimento della rieducazione del nostro sguardo operata dall'affermarsi dello sguardo prospettico e cartografico e sulle conseguenze che essa ha prodotto sui modi di conoscere, rappresentare e governare il territorio mi permetto di rinviare ancora una volta a Decandia (2008) ed in particolare ai primi quattro capitoli e alla bibliografia ivi riportata.

Come ha messo ben in rilievo Farinelli infatti l'idea che sia possibile rappresentare la complessità del globo su una tavola, riducendo la profondità del mondo alla superficie del visibile, spazializzando e bloccando su una superficie il tempo concreto del movimento e del divenire, non solo porta l'introduzione di nuove forme di conoscenza, ma finisce per farci ritenere che sia possibile sostituire il territorio con la sua rappresentazione e scambiare questa rappresentazione con la realtà (Farinelli, 2003).

È a partire da questo momento infatti che, una volta dissociate le forme disegnate sulla carta dall'atto creatore che le ha costituite, si comincia a pensare che le forme possano in un certo senso precedere la vita che le ha prodotte e che la stessa città possa essere disegnata come una carta. Comincia a farsi avanti l'idea che, poiché non esiste il tempo inteso come produzione di novità, si possa pensare il futuro disegno della città tutto già dato in una immagine interamente preformata e preesistente a se stessa. Come tale la città «possibile» potrà essere prima disegnata «come una macchina celibe» (de Certeau, 1990: 223) e poi applicata sul territorio.

Questo dominio assunto dalla carta sul mondo non solo condiziona il modo di pensare il progetto della città, ma determina una svolta radicale negli stessi processi di ridisegno del territorio. Anche in questo caso la carta, diventata un vero e proprio simulacro del mondo, si trasforma nel modello di costruzione della realtà territoriale. Da un assemblaggio derivato dall'accostamento di mondi locali autonomamente organizzati si passa all'idea che il territorio possa essere pensato come una sostanza estesa piatta e omogenea, in cui le diverse parti, prive di spessore e di profondità, possono essere riorganizzate, senza contenere in sé dei divenire, attraverso un disegno cartografico razionale calato su un territorio reso indifferente.

### **La creazione dello Stato moderno: svuotare il territorio dalle pratiche e dai saperi della tradizione**

Questo modo di concepire la città e il territorio viene reso operativo con la creazione dello Stato moderno. Per rendere davvero il territorio una superficie piatta e indifferente, così come la carta lo aveva in qualche modo rappresentato, bisognava infatti separare lo spazio dal tempo, rompere quel cemento che legava ogni

terra ad un popolo; ma anche mettere ordine negli assemblaggi casuali e indistinti delle diverse e polifoniche collezioni di luoghi e di terre, caratterizzate ciascuna da proprie leggi e da propri costumi: riportare insomma l'ingannevole mutevolezza delle forme di autoorganizzazione locale, sedimentate sul territorio, esito di una complessa e diversificata partitura temporale, ad uno spazio-tempo zero universale<sup>7</sup>.

È all'interno di questo quadro di riferimento generale che si colloca, non a caso, l'abolizione degli Statuti che rappresentavano l'espressione normativa di questo territorio delle differenze e che costituivano uno dei pilastri fondamentali delle pratiche di autoorganizzazione locale. Con il passaggio al regime statuale questa messe di codici e di pratiche consuetudinarie, che disciplinavano le diverse forme d'uso dei territori locali, viene sostanzialmente cancellata.

### **L'affermazione dell'individuo come soggettività autonoma**

Per affermare la logica del governo legata all'idea di Stato moderno non era, tuttavia, sufficiente svuotare il territorio dalle differenze di luogo, ma occorreva contemporaneamente ripensare, secondo una nuova chiave, la stessa nozione di individuo. Occorreva distaccare la sua identità dall'appartenenza ad una comunità e ad una terra e immaginarla piuttosto come una soggettività autonoma, completamente distaccata, indipendente e razionale. Sgretolati gli orizzonti condivisi ed i sistemi di appartenenza simbolica, posta in atto una rottura col mondo della tradizione, è a partire da questo momento che si comincia sempre di più a delineare l'idea che l'individuo possa essere pensato come una soggettività sostanzialmente autonoma, distaccata dal logos antico. Una soggettività che, proprio nel fare *tabula rasa* da qualsiasi forma di tradizione ed autorità, può diventare padrona della propria volontà ed acquisire la libertà di autocostruirsi liberamente trovando dentro di sé gli obbiettivi paradigmatici per orientare il corso dell'azione. È evidente che all'interno di questa concezione non è più la fedeltà, il riferimento ad una tradizione a

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7 Per un approfondimento dei riferimenti epistemologici che determinano questo passaggio e per una più dettagliata conoscenza degli effetti posti in essere dalle nuove forme di governo sul territorio, mi permetto di rinviare a Decandia (2000), in particolare alla parte III, 'Lo spazio estensivo della razionalità' e a Decandia (2009). Nei testi viene fornita una più ampia bibliografia di riferimento.

dettare i contenuti dell'agire.

Conseguenza diretta dell'affermazione di questo nuovo concetto di individuo, che va di pari passo al processo di *svuotamento* del territorio, è l'affermarsi di una nuova possibilità di controllo, di dominio e di predizione.

Eliminato ogni rapporto di interazione fra soggetto e ambiente fisico, private di senso le differenze qualitative che strutturavano l'essenza dei luoghi, l'individuo può cominciare a manipolare il territorio, stabilire sullo spazio un *potere altro*, un dominio di natura diversa da quello esistente.

Al venir meno dell'ordine dettato dalla tradizione l'individuo sostituisce un'altra idea di ordine: questa volta una sorta di fede in una razionalità trascendente. Se il territorio esterno al soggetto può essere dunque modellato in funzione dell'azione dell'individuo questa azione deve essere guidata da principi razionali, da una mente superiore che abbia una capacità ordinatrice a cui si attribuisce la competenza di riportare ordine nelle forme del mondo.

### **Il territorio come meccanismo da regolare ciecamente secondo norme astratte pensate al di fuori del tempo e dello spazio**

È sulla base di questo nuovo progetto ordinatore che si potrà procedere, in maniera del tutto inedita, a ridisegnare secondo nuovi contorni il territorio, inteso non più come un organismo complesso fatto da realtà viventi ed autonomamente autoorganizzate, ma come «un artefatto di cose predestinato a qualsiasi artificio di captazione e di controllo» (Merleau-Ponty, 1989) interamente disponibile allo sguardo artificiale e ordinatore di una mente centrale. Un artefatto che può essere finalmente fatto funzionare come una sorta di macchina territoriale secondo un meccanismo piramidale «rigido e statico, monocentrico e gerarchico» (Moroni, 2005: 21).

Una sorta di «mondo orologio» formato da rotelle rigidamente determinate, in grado di funzionare ciecamente secondo i comandi inviati, attraverso potenti cinghie di trasmissione, dall'alto verso il basso, da un'unica mente centrale. Uno spazio quindi totalmente figurato, secondo una struttura piramidale, fatta di realtà politiche subordinate, con al vertice un centro a cui spetta il compito di proiettare sul territorio la *potestà* sovrana. In questo spazio, infatti, le norme non provengono più dal territorio

come esito di processi autoorganizzativi, ma sono esterne allo spazio, «si affacciano sullo spazio, si pongono di fronte ad esso e vi stabiliscono la loro proiezione» (Irti, 2001: 49).

### **Lo Stato come garante del funzionamento della macchina territoriale**

Chi può organizzare questa *macchina territoriale* dovrà evidentemente essere una mente esterna, un luogo neutrale in cui poter elaborare, lontano dai condizionamenti del particolare, una legge universale, che può essere fatta calare indistintamente sui territori. Dovrà essere un occhio esterno, capace del rigore della scienza che, proprio in quanto può affidarsi all'esclusivo primato della razionalità cognitiva e strumentale, potrà costruire, al di fuori dal tempo concreto, un «dover essere che si stacca dall'essere» (Schmitt, 1950: 57).

Quest'occhio geometrico dovrà appartenere evidentemente ad un soggetto impersonale, che verrà interpretato *dalla persona* sovrana dello Stato. È in questa persona astratta che si accentra, anche simbolicamente, il comando e l'amministrazione del territorio, pensato come omogeneo, tutto ugualmente esposto alla potenza ordinativa della legge.

E sarà appunto l'apparato burocratico dello Stato, vero e proprio *laboratorio di questa mente sovrana* – immaginato come il luogo espressione della razionalità e della cultura assoluta, della sistematizzazione e della scienza, del sapere tecnico, della legge astratta e universale, il centro in cui i saperi locali possono essere depurati da tutte le forme di accidentalità e di particolarismo – ad elaborare le regole e le leggi. È in questo laboratorio che dovranno essere messi a punto i modelli, i piani, gli schemi secondo cui quel territorio, reso muto, inerte e passivo, potrà essere ridisegnato e organizzato dall'alto verso il basso, attraverso progressivi comandi, conformi ai modelli generali che dovranno garantire il rispetto dei principi astratti e razionali.

È in questo laboratorio o al servizio delle braccia operative di questa *persona sovrana* che lavoreranno i tecnici: le *menti esperte*, estranee ad ogni rapporto con i luoghi, detentori del sapere della scienza. Coloro cioè che, proprio perché in possesso di un metodo astratto e generalizzante, in grado di depurare il razionale dall'irrazionale, di astrarsi dalla varietà, di neutralizzare ciò che è storico e singolare, saranno in grado di stabilire norme universali, che potranno poi essere rese operanti

nei diversi territori locali.

Agli statuti, che traducevano in norma quelle consuetudini, ormai radicate da secoli, attraverso le quali veniva regolato organicamente, in sintonia con i cicli bioculturali, ogni aspetto della vita locale, si sostituisce il principio della legge generale, il regolamento, applicato omogeneamente alle singole realtà locali. Secondo la logica dello Stato moderno l'infinità varietà delle situazioni codificate a livello locale viene ridotta ad un unico regime amministrativo, ad un unico linguaggio politico, ad un'unica legge generale (Quaini, 1994).

A partire da questo momento, in tempi diversi a seconda delle diverse realtà regionali, la gran parte delle stesse operazioni di cura, di manutenzione e di organizzazione, frutto di processi storici di autoorganizzazione, cominciano ad essere enucleate dai contesti di relazione, separate dalle immediatezze del contesto e affidate a forme di organizzazione, distanziate nel tempo e nello spazio, gestite da queste nuove figure estranee ad ogni rapporto con il luogo. È, infatti, al sapere astratto del tecnico, dell'esperto che viene affidata la *cura del territorio*. Alla diretta, concreta conoscenza dell'abitante e del perito locale si sostituisce l'astratta mentalità scientifica, l'ingegnere: colui cioè che possiede il metodo universale e che sa astrarsi dalla singola realtà locale per proporre soluzioni intercambiabili nei diversi contesti, norme generali appunto. In questo modo l'organizzazione, la gestione e la manutenzione del territorio – prima profondamente ancorata ad un sistema di regole e di pratiche locali che presupponevano una conoscenza diretta ed empirica della realtà fisica e sociale dei luoghi – vengono svincolate da tutte le forme di competenza contestuale e messe in atto senza richiedere più un diretto coinvolgimento della stessa popolazione locale.

### **Tra le pieghe dei territori contemporanei: l'emergere di nuove pratiche di autoorganizzazione**

Quel meraviglioso e *disincantato* meccanismo territoriale configurato nel Moderno, retto in forma piramidale da uno Stato impersonale, astratto e lontano sembra oggi essere messo profondamente in crisi dai nuovi modi di abitare lo spazio e il tempo che si affermano nell'orizzonte contemporaneo.

Mentre nei territori assistiamo ad una incapacità di governare dall'alto le trasformazioni spesso, come è emerso in questo

convegno e come vedremo nei successivi articoli, proprio nelle pieghe dei territori, lontano dall'ordine dei piani, cominciano ad emergere nuove forme di relazione tra popolazioni in divenire e parti di territorio. Spesso nelle più anonime e difficili periferie, ma anche nei luoghi di frontiera o nelle cavità ombrose della città patinata e mercificata, si creano, attraverso nuove forme di occupazione o semplicemente attraverso inedite forme di riappropriazione di pezzi di città o di scampoli di territorio, nuove forme di rapporto con i luoghi, che cominciano a far brillare inedite forme autoorganizzative<sup>8</sup>. Nel ripensare nuovi modi di essere insieme e di costruire beni comuni, si inventano ambienti relazionali, si ristabiliscono nuovi rapporti fra pubblico e privato, si creano differenti forme di partecipazione e di autogestione degli spazi del sociale; si producono scritture nascoste, creative e potenziali che trasgrediscono il testo ordinato della città pianificata. In questi cantieri di autocostruzione e di autorganizzazione, nell'affermare un nuovo diritto alla città (Lefebvre, 1970), *piccole comunità danzanti* rioccupano e recuperano vecchi edifici fatiscenti, colorano e disegnano muri, riusano oggetti e manufatti, assemblandoli in forme inedite, producendo forme impreviste di bellezza, elaborano nuove forme consuetudinarie, sperimentano laboratori di una inedita urbanità. Nella stragrande maggioranza dei casi tuttavia non si tratta di forme di comunità stanziali, ma piuttosto di «popoli in divenire», che si costruiscono piuttosto nel fare insieme.

Mentre infatti le comunità premoderne erano fondate sull'appartenenza ad una terra o sulla condivisione di valori dettati dalla tradizione, esse ci appaiono piuttosto come comunità relazionali, perpetuamente in via di autocostruzione e di gestazione. «Comunità di senso» volute, dinamiche, discursivei, fondate attorno alla individuazione di alcuni temi o problemi, sulla socializzazione del sapere, sul riconoscimento e sull'accrescimento reciproco delle persone, sulla sinergia delle competenze. «Popoli in potenza» (Lévy, 1996), come avrebbe detto Lévy, che prendono corpo non più in un orizzonte dato, ma piuttosto attraverso il diretto coinvolgimento delle singolarità che intessono nuovi legami con il territorio, intrecciando

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<sup>8</sup> Per un approfondimento dei nuovi processi e delle nuove pratiche di autoorganizzazione che attraversano i territori contemporanei, qui solo appena accennate, rimando al saggio di Cellamare (2018), che ha aperto e introdotto il convegno 'Cities and self-organisation'.

scale differenti, nell'ambito di pluriappartenenze disparate e discontinue anche nel tempo.

È in questi nuovi cantieri di autocostruzione che si sperimentano nuove modalità di prendersi cura dei territori. In questo caso non sono più le regole dettate dalla tradizione o i saperi dell'esperienza, come nelle comunità premoderne, a dettare le forme di organizzazione dello spazio; ma neppure le norme calate dall'alto da una mente astratta e lontana a determinare le nuove forme spaziali. Sono piuttosto le forme di conoscenza, le nuove consuetudini che si elaborano creativamente nell'essere insieme.

Queste nuove forme di autoorganizzazione aprono orizzonti inediti, ma pongono anche nuove domande e nuovi problemi che occorrerà indagare e decifrare con attenzione. Sarà importante studiare ed approfondire con attenzione le logiche, i linguaggi, le complesse forme di razionalità, i codici di autoregolamentazione che vengono messi in campo per produrre lo spazio, le forme della convivenza e dell'essere insieme, i beni comuni. Metterne in evidenza le potenzialità, ma anche i limiti. Si apre un lavoro immenso che, dopo la rimessa in discussione delle forme di governo calate dall'alto, potrà certamente aiutarci a rinnovare le pratiche consunte della nostra stessa disciplina e forse a anche scoprire qualcosa di nuovo che tuttavia abbiamo sempre conosciuto.

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**Lidia Decandia** è professore associato presso il Dipartimento di Architettura Design e Urbanistica di Alghero (Università degli Studi di Sassari) dove insegna Progetto e Contesto. È membro del collegio dei docenti del Dottorato di Ricerca in Ingegneria dell'Architettura e dell'Urbanistica (curriculum in Tecnica Urbanistica) presso l'Università di Roma “La Sapienza”. Fa parte del comitato di redazione della rivista CRIOS ed è membro del comitato scientifico della Rivista Scienze del Territorio. Rivista della Società dei territorialisti e delle territorialiste. Nel 2014 le è stata conferita l'Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale come Professore di I Fascia Settore concorsuale 08/F1 – Pianificazione e Progettazione Urbanistica e Terroriale. Tra i suoi volumi: Polifonie urbane. Oltre i confini della visione prospettica, (Meltemi 2008); L'apprendimento come esperienza estetica, (Franco Angeli, 2011); La strada che parla. Dispositivi per ripensare il futuro delle aree interne in una nuova dimensione urbana, (con L. Lutzoni, Franco Angeli, 2016); I territori marginali e la quarta rivoluzione urbana. Il caso della Gallura, (con L. Lutzoni e C. Cannaos, Guerini Associati, 2017). [decandia@uniss.it](mailto:decandia@uniss.it).



IN DIALOGO/CONVERSATIONS

## For the sly city yet to come: self-organisation and common(ing)

Maria Anita Palumbo

Interview edited by editorial board of Tracce Urbane

**Q: On what idea of city and cohabitation are self organized process founded? Which values do they embody?**

A: Portrayals of the contemporary city, seem to place practices of re-appropriation of space and self-organization at the center of attention. If in the past decades these practices were depicting a global landscape of alternative initiatives, today they seem to be a necessary ingredient of metropolis. They participate in branding and labelling capital cities: how could Paris, Rome, New York or Brussels not have networks of urban gardeners appropriating wastelands; public spaces re-shaped through practices of commoning; alternative creative or working spaces bringing life back into abandoned buildings?

And yet, the phenomenon of self-organization in cities seems to be a possibility for some forgotten urban context to take their revenge. In the sidelines of international global cities (Sassen, 1991) and away from the exciting and cosmopolitan urbanity of European capitals, a fringe of drifting towns and forgotten rural territories is emerging. The phenomenon of shrinking cities and territories concerns areas affected simultaneously by deindustrialisation, peri-urbanisation, demographic transition and austerity policies. Images of abandoned factories in Detroit (Michigan, United States), vacant houses in Halle (Germany), empty shop windows in Saint-Étienne (France) are now widely renowned. They raise questions such as: what does it mean to live in a shrinking cities? What daily landscapes do their inhabitants go through? How does this progressive decadence determine transformations in lifestyles, in everyday life? And ultimately what forms of collective organization emerge in the face of such decline? And if such a question arises, it is because the same cities that consolidated an image of a city in decline went onto be the place from which new more positive images of an alternative urban life emerged: community gardens (Paddeu, 2017), open air graffiti galleries (Gribat, 2017), corner shops and empty plots (Béal, Journel, Pala, 2017)<sup>1</sup> reinvested by

<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of self-organized practices in recuperating urban voids in Saint-Etienne see «La Cartonnerie - Expérimenter l'espace public, Saint-Etienne 2010-2016» Coll. Recherche PUCA, Vol. 229a, a collective work edited

groups of neighbors or local non-profit organisations are some of the process participating in transforming decline into an alternative form of making the city (Béal, Rousseau, 2014). Far from the flow of money and in the shadows of rich landscapes of world capitals, these cities have become places of experimentation, laboratories of possible redefinitions of the same values of urbanity which seem to lack in these very same cities due to economic decline. Architects, urban planners, activists, social humanists, scholars “rediscover” and invest these cities as places where a different “smart city” can be invented, mostly based on bottom up process, collaboration, self-organisation, reinventing ways of living together, of defending the commons, and in some cases experimenting new urban policies... From cities in crisis they become models for a decreasing city, in other words examples of possible redefinitions of progress, ways out from a consumeristic society, capable of asserting that, even without large economic capital and without an obligation to grow, a city can still be a city ...

Taking this thought one step further, and consider the relation between Global North and Global South, we see that they share more than it might seem and definitely belong to the same planet. In fact, the absence of an efficient welfare system and the consequent self-organized life in the margins of the formal city are common situations in the so called Global South (Agier, 1999; Davis, 2006). Within this perspective African, Asian, American as well as Mediterranean megacities can be considered as theaters of tactical daily urbanism<sup>2</sup>, places for the emergence of inventive modes of co-existence, alternative housing and service provision, pushing us not to look at southern cities as relics of a past in a breakdown of development but rather as examples of the city yet to come (Simon, 2004; Myers, 2011)<sup>3</sup>.

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by architecte and urban planners of the NGO Carton plein. <http://www.carton-plein.org>.

2 On this subject see the Moma exhibition catalogues « Uneven Growth : Tactical Urbanisms for Expanding Megacities », Paperback 2014, edited by Pedro Gadanho and with texts by Richard Burdett, Teddy Cruz, David Harvey, Saskia Sassen and Nader Tehrani.

3 In 1997 Rem Koolhaas and Kunlé Adeyemi explored the African megacity of Lagos, functioning on a self-organized mode after being largely abandoned by the State. They aimed to find solutions for this apparent dysfunctional system and despite the apparent chaos, they discovered patterns of organisation and at the end they talk about a collection of initiatives that made the city looks almost utopian to their eyes. This project was never published because of the political situation of Nigeria.

A global landscape of self-organized urban situations emerges. This landscape that crosscuts north and south, legal and illegal, rich and poor, formal and informal city making should help us, researchers and planners, to better adjust our lens to look at this phenomenon. Anthropology, in particular, invites us to erase latent asymmetries and hierarchies that are often attributed to these different contexts in order to better define what are we talking about and understand why we talk so much about it.

**Q: About self-organization and institutions: are these processes responding to social needs or are they supporting the commodification of them?**

A: The city has always been partly produced by self-organized processes and community based initiatives. More precisely, from a heuristic perspective, the attention focused on micro-practices «inventing» the city (de Certeau, 1980 and 1994; Agier, 1996), seems to be almost banal as it is considered the base of social production and reproduction of urban life, especially by anthropologist favoring an apprehension of the city from a dweller perspective<sup>4</sup> instead of studying the institutional framework of city-making. A constellation of actions and practices, uses and ruses that every single citizen exercises to go along with its everyday life composes the «infra-ordinary» (Perec, 1989) city, object of the anthropologist observation and analysis.

If today we are so intrigued by the capacity and production of self-organisation is partly because of a changing trend in the urban production of spaces and services. Within the context of modern cities (here considered as production of a contingent historical moment) we have been used to services being provided by the state, as the role of institutions was precisely, in the modern state, to supply services that has been centralized under its competence. In the contemporary context of a neoliberal globalized urban setting, socio-economic dynamics are impacting on the welfare state capacity, or willingness, to keep doing the job. To put it in a simple, and maybe banal, way: when (in time), and where (in space)

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4 Michel Agier uses the expression “city-bis” to signify the product of an anthropological observation of city life: «It's not from the city itself that the knowledge of urban anthropology emerges, but from a montage of urban life sequences taken from a tiny part of the real world. All of this information represents a kind of city-bis, as a result of procedures for collecting and arranging urban data» (Agier, 1996: 35).

centralized state or market organizing forces are weakening, here they come: organized, volunteering, resisting or constrained citizens ready to come together and find solutions. The terrain of ambiguity lies precisely at the place (and questions about the form) of the interplay, or the luck of it, between state organisation and self-organisation.

On the ground, we can observe a double effect of welfare state constraints in the provision of urban services: on one hand citizens are demonstrating their ability in finding solutions for important social issues. In the other hand we can witness some local institutions changing their governance habits confronted with community based initiatives and the central state resignation. For instance, municipal institutions can be motor of choices aiming at facilitating citizens self-organization by regulating it. As Chiara Belingardi demonstrates in her paper, the city of Rome, Naples and Bologna have promoted laws respectively addressing the use of municipal buildings for social use, the inscription of some spaces as «Commons», the definition of some guidelines for the cooperation among citizens and administration for the care and regenerations of commons.

**Q: Are they producing new and innovative institutions or just making bad institutions more accountable? Can we witness a learning process both at institutional level and at community based level?**

A: Institutions are not the only actors of this sort of support by legitimization or «normalisation» process of grassroots initiatives. The cases of Metropoliz in Rome and Cavallerizza Reale in Turin presented by Francesca Bragaglia and Karl Krähmer are very interesting case to address how and to which extent art and culture take a central role in the politics of legitimization, with which effects, benefits and downsides. The first, an old industrial building at the outskirts of Rome, have been occupied by a multiethnic and poor community needing a place to live; the second, a historical complex in the city center of Turin, have been occupied by actors, academics and urban activists in order to prevent its privatization. In both cases the illegality of occupations is combined with its official use by the arts and museum network of both cities. If we can be sure that this inclusion within the art and cultural market is a way to some-how promote the importance of these spaces of autonomy at an urban scale and therefor prevent their premature erasure from

the city-map, we can also observe a reduction of the political and social scope of the squatting original act.

This is why the real independence of these initiatives and their production of spaces of autonomy is so hard to define. Often what we are facing is more a redefinition of roles between bottom/local/ self-organized initiatives, institutional actors and the Market. The case of the Escocesa Cultural Center in Barcelona presented by lolanda Bianchi rises precisely this question. This former industrial complex located in the district of Poblenou, worked from 1999 to 2006 as a space and meeting point for artists and craftspeople when the real estate company Renta Corporación purchased the buildings with the aim of building offices and homes. Artists were evicted from the factory which was left completely empty by the end of 2007. The same year the Barcelona City Council approved a plan for the renewal of La Escocesa, which was catalogued as Industrial Heritage. Two of the buildings in the complex were established as devoted to public use and included in the Strategic Cultural Plan of Barcelona. In 2008, the City Council gave provisional management of La Escocesa to the artists NGO La Associació d'Idees. With this analysis focused on the process and evolution of this cultural center, Bianchi sustain that, in order to emancipate from the capitalist system, Urban Commons need the support of institutions and can only survive through a combination of the logic of self-organization and the logic of universalization and social protection, which is the one defying management of public spaces and goods.

In a context of economic crisis and/or in the need for redevelopment strategies, municipal institutions seem to be particularly open to accompany and empower citizen initiatives by recognizing their role in the dynamic of urban social fabric. They can even decide to be the promoter of such dynamics by providing spaces or organizing conditions for self-managed initiatives when they already proved to be socially and politically successful and respectful of a certain aesthetics and practice of participation. As Juan Arana paper presents, the Local administrations in Madrid and Barcelona have kick-started processes of citizen appropriation of spaces such as urban gardens or empty plots through self-managed initiatives. The 2012 program Pla de Buits Urbans in Barcelona pioneers in the country the promotion from local administration of site-specific citizen-led strategies. The program launches a competition for 19 unused urban voids. In Madrid the administration impulses the participative program

«Imagina Madrid» that approaches the production of collective spaces from artistic and cultural intervention. These two policies are not particularly Spanish one. At the contrary, they are very well known other european municipalities: this fashion of regulating forms of self-organisation by reframing them into formula of public actions that can be exported, replicated, not to say «sold off» from one european capital to the others, should definitely push us to question the aim and sense of these actions when they happen in such a transformed context. We cannot miss the chance to question this shift from ephemeral to institutionalized, from alternative to regulate, from radical to negotiated practices all though these processes seem to share a similar aesthetic and produce, undoubtedly, some communing situations standing as an alternative to exclusive urban development.

But if we zoom out, if we take some distance from the particularity of each case, as well as from the specific relation between the state and the (self)organized citizens that each of them embody, something seems to emerge: what appears to be new is that these actions aim not only to transform a disadvantage status quo in a better one (as it can be the case of the so called «informal», or un-planned neighborhood such as the self organisation in favelas), or to claim a different use and roles of spaces considered to be spatially unjustly organized or unevenly attributed (as it is for squatting movements); today some of these actions are aiming at maintaining<sup>5</sup> things from falling apart. It is less the self organisation itself to be a new phenomenon to me, but more the «direction» and the aim of self organized initiatives to be considered as a new practice. We do not need to go into the extreme situation of an overall State resignation to see that public services are more and more demanding the «participation» and collaboration of dwellers if not in making, at least in maintaining the city... For instance, smart-city labels are flourishing demonstrating how technology is a tool for enabling participation (an individual more than a collective one) pushing us to question the role of the state and its institutions in guaranteeing the common good and the maintenance of the

5 On this topic architects B. Robles Hidalgo and K. Berghmans are currently working on the link between architecture and maintenance. Among other aspects, they are developing this topic by fieldwork on municipal participatory tools like MobiliSÉ Saint-Étienne and Fix My Street in Bruxelles. To know more about their ongoing work, see K. Berghmans and B. Robles Hidalgo, «L'entretien e(s)t l'architecture. BIENNALE 2017 SAINT-ETIENNE, Fig. n°4 - Pléonasme, 2018.

*status quo.*

**Q: What is the very meaning of research in these processes? Are self-organized process occasions to bridge the gap between research and urban policies/practices?**

A: Rather than trying to find a general, not to say generic, answer to this question, I'll summarize some thoughts in the form of a list of «risks» in approaching the field of self-organisation, communing and the city. This should, by no means, be taken as an exhaustive check list. It is just a way to contribute to unpack some of the complexity, and ambiguity, on the topic of the self organized processes and the relation to institutions and power, an attempt to participate into building a common critical approach to our vocabulary.

The first risk we should be aware of, is the risk of de-politisation that I will address by the question of vocabulary. The rather dark horizon of the post-political city has colonized not only our actions, but also our language; symptomatic of that is the kind of categories we mobilise to talk about actors involved in self-organized initiatives: the words we are using are more and more disconnected with a political vocabulary, leaving the *plateau* to categories such as «dwellers», «inhabitants», «neighbors» and «riverains», terms that seem to legitimate the actions of people involved not because they are supporting a cause or envisioning a future they want to fight for, but because of their proximity and belonging to the local scale... If indeed we are facing a period of political crisis, particularly in the lack of political figure entitled to function as mediating figures between social needs and decision making process, this radical (even though progressive) «spatial» turn in our vocabulary has to be questioned.

The second risk is the one of *reification*: as the paper of Romano Alessandro demonstrates, the definition of commons is rather bleary if we go from practices to theory, and, I would add, back from theories to practices. In fact, when we talk about «commons» there is a light tendency to conceive it as «good». Although they are goods in terms of resources (to protect, to shear, to claim) they should not be reduced to «things». The accent should be put at the process transforming, in the opposite direction, goods into commons by a «commoning» movement, that is to say a set of social relations and actions by which a group of people share

responsibility for something that can be an empty plot, a section of a street, the governance of a neighborhood or even drinking water supply.

The third risk is connected with time. Ephemeral and temporary urban practices are often classified as forms of alternative way of making the city. But the temporality of the opportunity where this alternative urbanism can take place is not neutral, and should not be seen as such: empty buildings or vacant plots are often waiting for a new urban project to come; informal management of spaces or services often happens in between formal organisation of it; In fact, as some scholars attempt to demonstrate nowadays, if temporary urban practices are framed as alternative forms of collective collaboration, political activism, self-organization and resistance against neoliberal logics of city production, they also can be seen as a product of the same neoliberal system of flexible economic models aligned with the logic of consumption and privatization (Madanipour 2017; 2018). This contradiction seems to be the one risen by the case of the city of Santiago and the ambivalent nature of its temporary use practices as Marisol García explained in her paper, in line with the emerging critics addressed to «temporal urbanism».

The fourth risk is the one of an anonymous and disembodied conception of actors involved in process of self-organisation and re-appropriation. Often actors involved in such actions are seen as a homogenous entity: for instance, the opposition of citizens, inhabitants, dwellers on one side and institutions in the other side, is quite abstract, not to say often untrue... We should look deeper and closer at biographies and trajectories of actors involved to discover that these categories are far from being watertight. Far from that: in most of the cases we are facing situations where these categories are very porous one. A good exercise could be, for example, to follow the path of a researcher working of this kind of topic. We will easily discover that not only he/she is a researcher, but he/she is also a dweller, an activist, and, why not, could become at one point a municipal worker... Moreover, self-organized urban process and spaces are by definition ambiguous situations where different social actors, with different aims and interests, interact and conflict among them are not exceptions. In the multicultural and ethnically diverse neighborhood of Ballaro, in Palermo (Italy), studied by Giancarlo Gallitano, for instance, «commoning» becomes a way of distinction from the different

network of dwellers living in the same area: Sos Ballarò's activities are therefore a way for certain dwellers to construct a network of relationship and identification that is not at all including the whole neighborhood population. In this case, as it is frequent in multicultural neighborhood, re-appropriation of space, although it is framed as a neutral and positive action of dwellers engagement and of commoning in urban production, is at the same time a very powerful why of distinction (Bourdieu, 1979) and therefore division among dwellers as Giancarlo Gallitano pointed out defying these actions "differential commoning" (Noterman, 2015). Re-appropriation and commoning are not homogenous or exclusively inclusive process!

That leads us to the fifth risk, that I would call the danger of a moral(-istic) approach. Self-organisation and re-appropriation, two terms that are not quite synonymous but are here often used as if they were, are most of the time depicting a positive process of use: independent, autonomous, emancipatory for the first; borrowing, recycling, upgrading for the second. Following a movement of emancipation and re-semantisation, these actions claim an independent way to act and give a new role to what has been rejected and outcast. But these terms are actually describing double-sided phenomena: aside from this positive approach connected with the act of commoning and re-claiming, they could also describe «negative» process, as a means of grabbing goods, fencing territories, privatizing services at the expense of others. In other words, self-reorganisation can also be a crime, as it has very well illustrated Francesco Chiodelli in its work on housing informality and criminality in northern Italy. For the sake of research we have to take in account that informality is not only commoning in a «good» and «civic» sense. Or, to say it in another way, commoning can also be linked with mafia privilege of a «we few we happy few» attitude and therefore be, at the list, a form of selfishness.

Success, is the six risk, in the sense of self-organisation as reproduction of a «model», of a «best practice» forgetting the local emergency of a process; it could therefore become a recipe to be learned and replicated, with less and less taste each time we cook it; a buzzword losing its significance. This is also when self-organisation loses its power of innovation and become just an already tested way to do, or to analyse, things.

The seventh risk is (un)scaling processes we are looking at. We

often celebrate self-organisation as a local/grassroots action to uneven top down decisions. But is the «local» scale always the most «democratic» and inclusive one? This ambiguity is well depicted in Andrew Wallace work about austerity policies and collaborative planning in some English cities where the neighborhood scale have been promoted as a decisional scale instead of regional planning authorities that have been abolished in 2010 by the Conservative-led Coalition government. Following Wallace's conclusion this situation has produced an uneven geography of localized planning activity reflecting wider spatialized inequalities in resources and capitals. This is an opportunity to remember that the scale at which self-management of commons occurs, changes its relationship to forms of social organisation: rising the question of scale, means to question if and how the idea of self-organisation and the commons challenges our traditional conceptions of neighborhood, town, city, regional and national administrative bureaucracy.

Eight, the Risk of « fashion » of re-appropriation and commoning: this *effect de mode* has the tendency to fuzzy our capacity of understanding a phenomenon. Some difficult questions have to help us to go further, such as: If the state is not any more granting on collective and common interest, shell we go for that? Is self-organisation the good answer? Shel we calibrate it for that? Or should we be claiming institutions to take back their job?

To conclude, as a suggestion let's make a lexical exercise: what if we take off from our talks and texts the term «self-organisation» and/or «commons»: which word would we use?

**Q: How the role of the planners and planning itself is changing confronting with community based initiatives?**

A: I would like to frame my answer by the effort of semantisation done by one of the biggest international event on architecture and urban planning: the Biennale of Venice.

We are in 2012 and the U.S. Pavilion at the 13th International Architecture Exhibition of Venice<sup>6</sup> curated by Cathy Lang Ho (Commissioner and Curator), David van der Leer, and Ned Cramer (co-curators) — was devoted to the theme «Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good». The exhibit features 124 urban interventions initiated by architects, designers,

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<sup>6</sup> The Director of the 13th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale was David Chipperfield and the general topic of this biennale was «Common ground».

planners, artists, and everyday citizens that bring positive change to their neighborhoods and cities. Spontaneous Interventions was a reflection of country's attitudes towards civic participation, social justice, and the built environment. That year, the overall theme of the Biennale conceived by director David Chipperfield was «Common Ground». The projects exposed in the US pavilion were characterized by their interest in collaboration, in serving the collective needs of a community, and in improving public space. The exhibition also examined how urban actions that originated as radical ideas have evolved from subversive tactic to increasingly accepted urban strategy.

Two editions and 4 years after, in 2016, Curator Alejandro Aravena from Chile, propose to reflect on architecture and practice from the margins: *Reporting from the Front* is the title of its Biennale that focuses on architecture as an instrument of *self-government*, of humanist civilisation, and as a demonstration of the ability of humans to become masters of their own destiny. Participation of communities was, if not the central topic, at list a very frequent trend in exposed process and works in the global exhibition as in national pavilions.

This year<sup>7</sup>, the moment has come for the French pavilion to put light on the phenomenon of collective and experimental spaces: «Infinite places» is the title that curators Nicola Delon, Julien Choppin, Sébastien Eymard (Encore Heureux) gave to their exhibition celebrating ten pioneering places that explore and experiment with collective processes for dwelling in the world and for building community. Here some words of explanation by the curators:

«These are open places, possible places, un-finished ones that establish spaces of freedom and the search for alternatives — places that are difficult to define because their principal characteristic is to be open to the unexpected, to endlessly build for future possibilities. In the face of the enormous challenges of our time — in which ecological changes conflict with the dominance of commercial economy, at a time of withdrawal into nationalist identities and authoritarianism, it is all the more urgent to maintain hope...to find inspiration in experiments that are sometimes ephemeral, but that are nonetheless concrete and based in solidarity. (...) Almost all of them started with an abandoned building, or a neglected site. Here architecture finds its means of expression through the confrontation of pre-existing spatial qualities with an organic process of transformation, whose

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<sup>7</sup> Directors of the 18th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale were Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara. They decided to entitled this edition «Freespace».

meanings depend on common needs and the aspirations of those who commit themselves to it with courage and determination. In this spatial and temporal combination, the generalist architect serves as an invaluable guide, at the outer margins of the role that she is normally assigned. The architect does not stay within the bounds of building construction but seeks to make places just as well»<sup>8</sup>.

Looking at all this exposed and therefore celebrated experiences, it seems first of all clear that the design itself (of a house, of a garden, of a public square) is not the final product nor the central job of architecture and planning, but rather the medium through which architects and planners can participate in building community relationships and innovative group dynamics. Second, we can conclude that what these situations of self-organisation are doing to design, is challenging the capacity of architects and urban planners to open up their creative process, to make space for co-production, putting, some time, in crises authorship and ownership by destabilizing common definition of what design is and where and when design happens. Ultimately, it seems that for architect and urban planners what is progressively changing is their potential client and therefore their future role. «Making space» to self-organisation and re-appropriation by civil society means not only to explore the role that designers and design have in enabling communities to work together but also to prove that they themselves can work with and be part of larger communities.

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**Maria Anita Palumbo**, PhD in Anthropologie EHESS/ Paris, Associate Professor in Social Science at Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Saint-Etienne. Research fellow at GRF Transformations and Laboratoire Architecture Anthropologie UMR 7218 LAVUE. [maria-anita.palumbo@st-etienne.archi.fr](mailto:maria-anita.palumbo@st-etienne.archi.fr)



## DIETRO LE QUINTE/BACKSTAGE

## The many paths of self-organization. Origins and meanings of self-organization as a concept for planning and urban studies\*

Barbara Pizzo

### Abstract

Questo contributo propone di esaminare congiuntamente i diversi approcci all'auto-organizzazione emersi nei numeri 3 e 4 di *Tracce Urbane* e nella conferenza internazionale dedicata allo stesso tema<sup>1</sup>: di fornire un inquadramento semplice e ad un tempo sufficientemente strutturato, che faciliti l'orientamento tra le declinazioni assunte dal concetto di auto-organizzazione negli studi urbani. Tre autori sono stati più spesso citati: Henry Lefebvre, Elinor Ostrom e Juval Portugali. Il loro lavoro ha contribuito alla diffusione dell'interesse per l'auto-organizzazione negli studi urbani, sebbene solo Portugali abbia costruito una teoria urbana su tale concetto. Ciascuno di loro ricorre al concetto di auto-organizzazione in un modo specifico, e i tre autori sono stati scelti con l'intento di far emergere delle differenze fondamentali. L'intento è anche metodologico: avendo come obiettivo la coerenza – da tenersi in seria considerazione – tra concetti, teorie e strumenti euristici adottati per analizzare e spiegare fenomeni e pratiche urbane.

This contribution aims at giving a consilient interpretation of the various approaches to self-organization – as they emerge from the two issues of *Tracce Urbane*, n. 3 and 4, and from the preliminary conference dedicated to the topic – and one sufficiently structured to allow orientation among the variants in which the concept is used in relation with the city. Three authors in particular have been often quoted during the conference: they are Henry Lefebvre, Elinor Ostrom and Juval Portugali. Their work contributed to the spreading of the interest for self-organization in urban studies, although it is just Portugali that grounded an urban theory on that concept. Indeed, each one refers to self-organization in a specific way, thus they have been chosen here to help making fundamental differences emerge. The intent is, therefore, also methodological, and concerns the consistency between theories and concepts, and the heuristics we adopt to analyse and explain urban phenomena and practices – a consistency that should be taken into serious consideration.

**Parole Chiave:** Auto-organizzazione, concetto e pratiche; auto-organizzazione e istituzioni; planning theory; teorie urbane e sociali.

**Keywords:** Self-organization, concept and practices; self-organization and institutions; planning theory; urban and social theories.

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## Introduction

Sometimes it happens to discuss together for hours and discover that, in essence, we are saying one same thing. But it happens also to speak almost in unison of a certain topic, referring to the same concepts and even using the same words, more or less vaguely aware that, however, we are not saying the same thing: which can be rather destabilizing. In such cases, to perceive that there is something wrong is decisive, to push us towards a deeper understanding of the arguments we are supporting and the differences with respect to the others. Self-organization is that sort of subject often producing the second result, and therefore it deserves some attention.

Without pretensions of completeness or exhaustiveness, given the limited space here, this contribution aims at offering a basic framework for containing and giving sense to the various approaches to self-organization (as they emerge from the two issues of *Tracce Urbane*, n. 3 and 4, dedicated to that topic), yet sufficiently structured to allow orientation among the variants in which the concept is used in relation with the city. A deeper comprehension of the differences and relationship between concepts is required, and particularly of the way we use them for understanding (and acting into) reality. The intent is, therefore, also methodological, and concerns the consistence between theories and concepts, and the heuristics we adopt to analyse and explain urban phenomena and practices (Jabareen, 2009) – a consistency that should be taken in serious consideration.

Perhaps, one among the clearest example of feeble conceptual consistency in the field of planning and urban studies is the still frequent yet inappropriate use of Lefebvre's '*Right to the City*' to support civic participation, which neglects and even negate Lefebvre's own proposal. In fact, self-organization, which is the form of action that Lefebvre sustains, does not coincide with participation: on the contrary, Lefebvre clearly clarified their divergence and incompatibility (Lefebvre 1968). Nonetheless similar examples are countless.

However, this overlap between participation and self-organization is not 'equally' contentious if, instead of Lefebvre's, we are referring to other conceptualizations, with a different origin and meaning. Actually, self-organizing behaviour appears in the literature of many disciplines, both in the natural sciences and in the social

sciences, and is assuming an increasing importance through complexity theories, albeit already a fundamental concept in pre-Socratic philosophy.

For example, ancient atomism, and especially thinkers such as Democritus and later Lucretius, believed that there is no need of any superior 'designing intelligence' to create order (*cosmos*) in nature, and argued that given time, space and matter, order may emerge by itself, let's say 'spontaneously'. Not surprisingly, self-organization is also known as 'spontaneous order'.

This understanding of self-organizing behaviour is a key concept for natural sciences such as physics, which focuses on self-organization as the quality of open, big (containing numerous elements/agents) and complex (in terms of the multiple relations between elements/agents) systems; or biology, where it is related to the ability of each organism to arrange itself according to its (environmental) conditions. From this last statement other very debated conceptualizations derived, related one way or another to adaptation, e.g. the notion of resilience, which is increasingly shaping our way of looking at socio-spatial relations (see e.g. Olsson, 2015; Davoudi, 2014; Pizzo, 2014).

In the broad field of urban studies and planning, we may see that the concept of self-organisation often addresses an order, which is interpreted as long-lasting, deeply rooted into local communities and history, previous to the one which came out from modernity (Decandia, 2000, 2013; see also her contribution within this issue, Decandia & Lutzoni, 2016). In terms of forms of regulation, it is opposed to any 'abstract' order deriving from modern planning (such as the rational- comprehensive plan), state planning more particularly (Alfasi, 2018; Alfasi & Portugali, 2007; Portugali, 1999, 2008). A main part of these interpretations seem to be shared by a broad range of scholars, producing rather unexpected convergences.

Thus, the need emerges to point out the different roots of self-organizations, which may have very different political origins and implications. For example, transferred into urban studies, a certain use of the concept as derived from natural sciences might imply that there is a sort of 'natural' order, a sort of DNA of each place that asks 'just' to be discovered (or re-discovered) and preserved. Along this same line, we risk to (unintentionally?) validate naturalizations of the concept of identity, which, on the contrary, is much often defined as a socio-cultural construct. A

number of potential or explicit inconsistencies arise.

Furthermore, the shift from a super-ordinated 'designing intelligence' to self-organization does not resolve the issue of power. There are no guarantees that self-organization will correspond to a more equal distribution of power. On the contrary, a society left to self-organize risks reproducing some sort of Darwinian 'natural law' regarding condition, role and status of the different individuals. Despite that, in most self-organizing practices there is a strong claim that they represent a more just system; while from a different point of view, since self-organization is conceptualized as a descriptive theory, it is not expected to assure justice or welfare.

All this means, at least, that there should be many different conceptualizations of self-organization to be inquired. A key point is, to me, to differentiate whether self-organization is used in analytical or in normative perspective.

### **Self-organization and its 'knives'**

'Self-organization' might sounds as a smart word: it emphasizes the 'self' and the word 'organization', which are so estimated nowadays. Although self-organization is mostly related to systems and not to individuals, we are living in a time when (almost) everybody would agree on the better possibility of, or the need to, or even the urgency to, self-organize: what should we better have instead?

Nonetheless, that concept has been developed through time in very different ways, and so referring to self-organization without specification can bring us into a rough terrain. My impression is that, particularly when we are very much involved into practices, we often end up walking in such rough terrain without acknowledging that. The simple claim to self-organization is not sufficient.

I want to argue here that instead of a more unitary although faceted concept, some main interpretations of self-organization can be individuated, which have very different origins and implications; that the principles on which they are rooted are very different, and that those principles are embedded into their political meaning that is, consequently, divergent.

In doing that, I will pin point some reasons why this concept is so *en-vogue* among social scientists, and some risks related to its

pervasiveness into social, political, urban theories and practices. I chose three well-known scholars, which particularly contributed to the spreading of the idea of self-organization into the field of planning and urban studies, with three different understandings. My 'knives of self-organization' (apologies) are: Henry Lefebvre, Elinor Ostrom, and Juval Portugali.

After briefly introducing their approach to self-organization, and the context in which they develop their concepts, I will highlight some main differences between the different points of view and interpretations.

In his 'Right to the City' Henry Lefebvre (1968) *opposed* self-organization to participation. Contributing definitely to solve the already long-lasting infertile debate around 'effective' or 'fake' participation, he clearly stated that the only 'real participation' is (in French) '*auto-gestion*' (translated into English as *self-management*), meaning when the power is fully taken by the people, instead of by power elites and their institutions. It is interesting to notice, maybe, that there is a semantic shift related to the translation from French into English, which is not as slight as it might seem. For example, contrarily to the intrinsic 'smartness' of the concept as expressed in English, the French version sounds rather old-fashioned since it immediately reminds the vocabulary of workers and students' protests in the late '60ies and '70ies.

It is important to grasp Lefebvre's thought from his own words:

«Another obsessional theme is *participation*, linked to integration. This is not a simple obsession. In practice, the ideology of participation enables us to have the acquiescence of interested and concerned people at a small price. After a more or less elaborate pretence at information and social activity, they return to their tranquil passivity and retirement. Is it not clear that real and active participation already has a name? *It is called self-management. Which poses other problems*» (Lefebvre, 1996 [1968]: 145, The italics is mine).

His conceptualization is purely political.

Elinor Ostrom refers to the concept of self-organization in relation with the management of common goods (see, e.g. 1990). Although self-organization is not essential in Ostrom's scholarly production, her work is central for a number of researches and experiences dedicated to the topic. Nevertheless 'collective action', one among Ostrom's key concept, materializes as self-organization and characterizes SESs (Socio-Ecologic Systems).

Her understanding of self-organization derives from ecology. At the same time, similarly to the ‘intermediate position’ of the commons as regards ownership - between private and public, ‘self-organization’ in Ostrom’s proposal stands between the logic of state institutions (the public) and that of individuals (the private, the market). This interpretation is related in particular to the management of scarce resources, and contains an economic perspective, which fits with Giddens’ ‘Third way’. Her conceptualizations have been defined as ‘romantic’ (see, e.g. Haiven, 2016: 276), and its political meaning rather controversial. Indeed, her work has been used with very different orientations. Juval Portugali introduces the concept of self-organization (Portugali, 1999) for overcoming the limits of the ‘artificial’ and too abstract idea of rational planning, looking for a different kind of rationality. His main theoretical framework is complex systems theory. Complex systems, in fact, show forms of rationality, which can be hard to understand, but definitely exist. The ‘inner order’ of self-organizing systems is emphasized against what could appear as disorder. Self-organization is described as the ‘natural’ rule that regulate complex systems, its ‘central property’, and its applicability to cities is almost obvious, since cities are complex systems *‘par excellence’* (*ibid.*: VII). In this case, there emerge a strong intention to strictly link decision processes (planning) with laws derived (learnt) from nature, thus a tendency (a risk) to ‘naturalize’ social processes and phenomena. His proposal aims at being a ‘purely’ scientific contribution. (Significantly, it was Hermann Haken which wrote the forewords to Portugali’s book, a physicist with a special interest in synergetic).

A fundamental divide among the various conceptualizations concerns:

- the relationship between self-organization and institutions (self-organization can be alternative or even insurgent against current institutions, or oriented towards forms of co-evolution);
- the expectations regarding self-organization (e.g. higher individual freedom, better management and efficiency, more just societies and cities, a radically different social organization);
- the very meaning of that ‘self’ (Which collectivity define /

- characterizes the self-organizing 'system'? How to apply that concept to 'the city'? What about each individual?);
- what characterizes self-organization (is it a matter of 'natural propensity'? What about power?);
  - which 'better results' are expected through self-organization (e.g. What is more just? More just for whom?).
  - Which are the pre-conditions that (supposedly) allow for self-organization (e.g. which are the 'inner' laws which characterize self-organization? How power is articulated and distributed within self-organizing systems?).

In the following sections I will briefly treat these points.

### **Self-organization and institutions**

Self-organization is often presented as alternative to current institutions: it is presented as opposite to top-down rules; against structures and mechanism which are (or became) meaningless; as the mean of more direct forms of democracy opposed to the hierarchies of representative democracy; as the horizontal against the vertical governance structures; as the dynamic against the static, and so forth. From a different perspective, we could say that the idea of self-organisation (broadly taken) is connatural with human beings, and that the whole human history might be interpreted as a story of self-organisation. In this sense, the production of state institutions could be interpreted as a form of self-organisation as well. For example, representative democracy can be interpreted as the form of self-organization that large communities proposed for themselves in order to permit the broader possible participation to civic life. Thus, self-organization can be interpreted as the counterpart, complementary to institutions.

Indeed, an examination of human history would show how self-organisation as insurgent, emancipatory practices, stimulates and pushes towards processes of re-signification and change, and can be interpreted as a de-institutionalization force; but it reminds us of the well-known recursive cycles of institutionalization and deinstitutonalization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; which refer to Simmel, 1958). From this point of view, it emerges that the relationship between self-organization and institution is (also) a temporal problem, related with the

time frame we are considering.

Referring to our three 'knives of self-organization' (Lefebvre, Olson, Portugali), the one who imagine self-organization somehow as a more 'permanent' condition is the last one (Portugali), because his time frame is extended: self-organization, the central property of complex systems, as a way of continuous readjustment. Lefebvre is concentrated on a more contingent time frame (*this* time of change); he is interested in the upheaval (the revolution) that is going to happen with the people taking control of their own lives. What would happen afterward, how that same people will organize is less explicit (however, I would say that he was too much into an historical perspective to forget the Simmel's lesson, and too much near to constructivism to ignore Berger & Luckmann's). As regards Ostrom, she is the one who more clearly interprets the relationship between self-organization and institutionalization (structuration) as co-evolutive.

### **(Great) Expectations regarding self-organization**

Self-organization is often invoked as the mean to reach some very important societal betterment, which current institutions (or institutions in general) cannot provide or even impede. Nevertheless, what precisely should be bettered helps in articulating and distinguishing the different conceptualizations of self-organization.

Self-organization can be interpreted as a behavioral model, which allows for higher individual freedom against the strong limitations of institutions (as elaborated by Portugali, in particular as regards urban planning and city making); as a more efficient and satisfactory way of managing collective goods, between state logics and market logics (as in Ostrom, referring to the best way of managing the commons); as the ideal to be reached in order to get an actual societal empowerment, shared by all its members, the only way to materialize the 'right to the city' (as in Lefebvre, referring to the shift from participation to '*auto-gestion*', meaning the emancipation of the masses – the working classes in Lefebvre thought - from the power relationships imposed by power elites).

While for Eizenberg (2018) the belief that self-organization would *inevitably* bring to "better forms of planning, and as means to

achieve more just planning processes and outcomes" do not regards the stream of thoughts deriving from natural science and complex system theory, in my view in all the three cases there are great expectations, to get more just societies and cities out of the shift towards self-organization.

This relies on the fact that I recognize a political content in all the three interpretations, although politics seems to be a minor issue in some of them.

To say that self-organization is a descriptive theory of how order emerges, and that you just use self-organization as a model to understand how a certain society works<sup>2</sup>, to shape a norm that possibly resemble that 'spontaneous order', does not mean that there are no expectations regarding self-organization. Differently, it could mean that you are keen to accept the social relationships as they 'spontaneously' emerge, or to comply with them.

Accordingly, the convergence towards an interpretation of self-organization as a mean to reach important societal betterment is just apparent, given the different principles that shape the idea of self-organization in the three interpretations. This is a case, where it seems that we reach the same destination coming from very distant departure points. We must remember that it could happen only by chance, since each one might have followed a very different path, and have a different story. Thus, here resides the reason of the controversial meaning of self-organization: none knows if we are truly talking about the same thing, until we get to know which interpretation of self-organization we are referring to, and for which main purposes. In particular, which idea of 'just' shapes each understanding (which mobilizes ethics), and the very interpretation of the 'self' of self-organizing practices (which mobilizes social and political theory).

### **Who is the 'self' of self-organization?**

Self-organization is an ambiguous word since it could be not so evident to which subject the reflexivity is applied. Currently, given the strong emphasis on the individual, this 'self' sounds like another call to improve one's own capacities, or even to learn to count just on oneself, in the dominant (self)entrepreneurial logic. But since it is not clearly defined, indeed this 'self' could be

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2 As regards the idea of a 'spontaneous order' referred to the social realm, see Moroni (2005).

addressed to different subjects, and to clarify this difference is of the utmost importance. Eizenberg (2018) perceived a similar necessity, but she unpacked the 'self' differentiating collective actors of self-organizing practices according to their rights and recognition within society. For the present purpose, it urges to me to make a step back, differentiating, first of all, which are the subjects of self-organizing action, looking for the meaning and implications of referring that 'self' to different kind of collective actors, and to understand how single individuals are taken into consideration. In Portugali work, self-organization is the quality of cities as complex systems; nonetheless, he turns to single individuals, or to small groups of neighbors (a kind of 'minimum unity'), when his conceptualisation comes to the 'inner rules' that shape the built environment. These rules have been than defined as 'codes' – to be understood, and to be used for planning (see e.g. Alfasi & Portugali, 2007; Moroni, 2015). The inner rules that people (each single entity) follows through pathways of self-organizations make the 'self-planned city', which is opposed to the abstraction of general - comprehensive plans, where the space for individualization (as well as individual freedom and the exercise of other individual rights) is said to be reduced or even erased, and where the long-lasting stratifications of many small additions and changes is overcome by big unitary top-down projects (Alfasi, 2018; Decandia in this issue).

For Ostrom, the 'self' is referred to the collectivity which performs the collective action, and to which the common good is related. For Lefebvre, the 'self' is not even a 'self' but an 'auto': as I already mentioned before the two words do not have exactly the same meaning (although the origin is from the Greek *autos* which is translated into 'self'). Nonetheless, the reflexivity is addressed to the society, and to people (the working classes in particular), which are expected not to simply participate to societal structures that have been created by others (power elites) and tend to manipulate and subjugate them through their mechanisms, but to self-organize (auto-manage) in order to fully take part to the city life (as part of the embodiment and realization of the 'right to the city').

While the conceptualizations of self-organization derived by complexity theories relate the 'self' to the whole complex system (opening problems of definition of boundary, thus inclusion/exclusion, etc.), the shift of self-organizing behaviour from

biology to social sciences happens extending the concept of organism from the individual to the collective dimension. This shift is recognized as a thorny one since long. In fact, the idea that different individuals somehow related to a certain place can be considered as a collectivity, or that they would act similarly to the different parts of a body, is quite contentious. Already at the beginning of the 20th century, R. Park (1921) highlighted that «The problem of the social *organism*, inherited from Comte and Spencer, is the rock upon which the modern schools of sociology have split».

Indeed, much before sociologists, writing about teleology in his *Third Critique* (*Critique of Judgment*), Immanuel Kant mentioned 'self-organization' and argued that teleology is a meaningful concept only if there exists such an entity whose parts or 'organs' are simultaneously ends and means. Such a system of organs must be able to behave as if it had a mind of its own, that is, as if it were capable of governing itself. The possibility to transfer such a concept to some sort of collectivity (except, maybe, for 'intentional communities' – which would lead to other kinds of questions) is problematic. Much more contentious is the idea that it could be applied to 'the city'.

However, a main difference emerges if we consider the collective self-organizing subject as a given (as already existing and defined) or as the outcome of a choice and a process (in Ostrom, collective actors are defined by their engagement with a certain 'common'): the second case permits to avoid the risk of falling into forms of determinism. In this reside a main divide between conceptualizations that refer to natural science, and those that refer to social sciences.

Complex system theories are introduced to explain the relationships between single individuals, which seem to follow some 'hidden' rule rooted deeply into the laws of nature. In complexity theory, self-organization emerges as spontaneous order and as a natural propensity (as it results in Portugal), and not as a political means and a project, as in Lefebvre.

Moreover, while complexity theory focuses on the hidden order of self-organization, in social sciences self-organization emerges often as initially disordered and even messy societal responses to power asymmetries and structural inequality, which then leads to the formation of new subjects (Olsson et al., 2015). It is from this 'mess' that the self-organizing collective actor can

emerge. Complex system theory does not ignore that 'mess', but assumes that it 'just' hides its internal order – things are, as they have to be?

It is quite interesting to read how Portugali built bridges between different theories and encapsulate 'revolution' within complex systems and self-organization theory:

«The term revolution in social theory is, in fact, phase transition in the language of self-organization. Or more specifically, as we have seen in previous chapters, self-organization theory suggests that the evolution of open and complex systems can generally be described by the following sequence:

steady state ~ chaos ~ *bifurcation* ~ *phase transition* ~ steady state

Social theory perceives the dynamics of change in culture and society in a similar way, and in fact the bold-lettered components in this sequence describe in some details what in social theory is often termed a revolution. In both social theory and self-organization theory, the process of change starts when an old regime disintegrates and enters into strong fluctuations and chaos, both theories claim that this chaotic stage is necessary to enable new forces and orders to emerge, assume power and bring the system into a new steady state or a mode of production» (Portugali, 1999: 318).

The 'bifurcation' as a key-phase for understanding change in complex systems was recognized in much previous works, as it emerges from Allen (1981), which referred to Nicolis and Prigogine 1977, to Prigogine et al. 1977, and to his own previous works (such as Allen and Sanglier, 1978). Nonetheless, all the 'non-deterministic' factors that are mentioned ("the 'chance' or 'indeterminacy' that accompanies moments of instability when structural change may occur" – *ibid.*, 167) are harnessed within the 'equation of the model': "it is near to these bifurcations that the role played by the fluctuations present in the system is vital in choosing the 'branch' or 'type' of solution that will be adopted, and thus breaking the ambiguity which the equations of the model permit" (*ibid.*).

A chaotic stage is recognized as 'necessary' but, again, there is something more to clarify. In fact, rather similarly to what has been said regarding resilience theory (Olsson et al. 2015, Pizzo 2014), with its teleological legacy from biology (evolutionary biology in particular), functional claims and explanations are deeply embedded into complex system theory, something that resembles the highly debated consensus theory in sociology.

Functional approaches are inherently conservative, the focus is on balance: when it is lost, it will be replaced by a new one, but within the same logic (given the stability of fundamental natural laws).

Differently, social sciences are more focused on the imbalance that derives from diversities, inequalities, and conflicting interests. Conflict theories, which dominated over consensus theories since the '60ies of XX Century, highlight how social order (similar to balance for natural sciences) is indeed assured through control and also manipulation by dominant groups, and that change happens out of tensions and conflicts. From this viewpoint, self-organization is the way in which different groups may react and re-arrange, and also re-constitute themselves, for a different distribution of power.

### **The issue of power in self-organizing systems**

As said before, particularly in approaches related to complex system theory, self-organization is described as a 'spontaneous order' and as a 'natural propensity'. What does it mean actually? Is this 'propensity' a quality appreciated by the many or by the few? Is it rooted on equally distributed awareness, knowledge and capacity? These questions mean also, and lead to ask: How power is articulated and distributed within self-organizing systems? In natural science perspective this problem does not exist.

In biology and in ecology particularly that 'propensity' is related to the ability of each organism to arrange itself according to its environmental conditions. As a fundamental ordering principle of nature, self-organization lies at the core of Darwinian theories: this is where part of its 'dark-side' resides, particularly when it comes to be too directly translated into social sciences. Actually, in evolutionary perspective different propensities to arrange themselves of different individuals is just a fact, it does not open ethical questions. Differently, in social science that different attitude would be interpreted, for example, as different agency, related to knowledge, capacity, and power.

The issue of power, which is ignored by natural science, is central in social science. Thus, the power related to self-organization is central in Lefebvre, recognized in Ostrom, neglected in Portugali. In Lefebvre, self-organization derives from the recognition of

the power of people that, although highly differentiated between the different groups and individuals, through self-organization is expected to increase. Asymmetries and inequality might lead to self-organization, which increases the power of the self-organized group, for change.

In Ostrom, power is 'just' recognized:

«The key to my argument is that some individuals have broken out of the trap inherent in the commons dilemma, whereas others continue remorsefully trapped into destroying their own resources. This leads me to ask what differences exist between those who have broken the shackles of a commons dilemma and those who have not. The differences may have to do with factors internal to a given group. The participants may simply have no capacity to communicate with one another, no way to develop trust, and no sense that they must share a common future. Alternatively, powerful individuals who stand to gain from the current situation, while others lose, may block efforts by the less powerful to change the rules of the game. Such groups may need some form of external assistance to break out of the perverse logic of their situation. The differences between those who have and those who have not extricated themselves from commons dilemma may also have to do with factors outside the domain of those affected. Some participants do not have the autonomy to change their own institutional structures and are prevented from making constructive changes by external authorities who are indifferent to the perversities of the commons dilemma, or may even stand to gain from it. Also, there is the possibility that external changes may sweep rapidly over a group, giving them insufficient time to adjust their internal structures and to avoid the suboptimal outcomes. Some groups suffer from perverse incentive systems that are themselves the results of policies pursued by central authorities. Many potential answers spring to mind regarding the question why some individuals do not achieve collective benefits for themselves, whereas others do. However, as long 35 analysts presume that individuals cannot change such situations themselves, they do not ask what internal or external variables can enhance or impede the effort of communities or individuals to deal creatively and constructively with perverse problems such as the tragedy of the commons» (Ostrom 1990: 21).

Power permeates her whole reflection but in some sentences it seems to remain unsolved, in other simply accepted as a matter of fact. In Portugali, power is not an issue: it is mentioned mostly when he introduces 'the Marxist City' (1999: 39-41) among the city models (or prototypes) he wants to overcome with his 'self-planned city' that, in abstract, everybody seems to have the (same?) power of contributing to.

### **Which better results through self-organization?**

Given these fundamentally different understandings of power

within self-organization, what better results are expected? As mentioned earlier, self-organization is often presented as a model, or a mean, to get more just societies and cities, if compared with current forms of government or management. Thus we need to understand what is considered as (more) 'just' in the three approaches, and for whom self-organization is a more just system.

Self-organization is often invoked as a more open, horizontal, democratic system.

Yet, in natural science perspective, self-organization does not mean non-hierarchical: on the contrary, each self-organizing system with its internal laws implies clear hierarchies.

Eizenberg articulation of the three different forms of self-organization is explicitly based on different rights and power. When she comes to the 'intermediate category', that of the 'ordinary resident', she needs to clarify that

«First, ordinary residents are distinguished from the other two group categories – the 'disenfranchised' and the 'powerful' – by means of rights: the 'disenfranchised' have no or very few entitlements pertaining to planning; the "powerful" (which are discussed in the next category) have multiple rights and entitlements (mainly economic) that grant them opportunities to produce urban space; and the ordinary residents are varied in their socioeconomic background, education, cultural capital, and so on, but not being disenfranchised, they have better access to the planning institution and planning tools» (Eizenberg, 2018: 10).

This means that self-organization can be something completely different, e.g. in terms of motivations, modalities, tools, and (rather obviously) results, depending on which 'category' of people is concerned.

As regards outcomes and results, questions might arise regarding the 'non-linear' correspondence between power and results of self-organization reported by Eizenberg (*ibid.*), particularly concerning the possibility that self-organization of the 'disenfranchised' would lead to even higher results than those forms practiced by the other social 'categories' (in this case, I fear that a consideration of the 'gradient' or 'slope' of this result is lacking, and should be considered).

Concerning the relationship between self-organization and democracy, Peled (2016) demonstrated that democracy is neither the source, nor the embodiment, nor the outcome of

self-organization. With arguments which complement those used in this paper, he argues that self-organization can be “a fertile ground for democratic values such as liberty, participation and involved citizenry”, but does not necessarily correspond or assure such principles.

### Concluding remarks

Throughout the paper, I analyzed three main understandings of self-organization as they emerge in the field of planning and urban studies, articulating them into a number of features through which it is possible to distinguish their different origins and meanings. I inquired these different features of self-organization as they emerge from the works of three well-known scholars (Lefebvre, Ostrom and Portugali), which used that concept (as Lefebvre and Ostrom), or even ground on that their own theory (as Portugali).

First of all, I highlighted the need to clarify who is the ‘self’ to whom the reflexivity is applied, which is the ‘population’ or the ‘community’ of a certain system, which has a number of important implications.

Indeed, most of the features of self-organization are rather ambivalent, and a number of goals often attributed to self-organizing behaviour are quite contentious, on the basis of the very principles they claim. For example, the issue of power, which is central for social sciences, risks to be ‘naturalized’ and to be simply recognized or underestimated, even neglected (as in Portugali). In fact, in complexity theory there are not expectations regarding self-organization. As there are not expectations from evolution theory.

Problems arise if these theories are used normatively. On this respect, I want to raise the following point. I think that self-organization can hardly be assumed ‘just’ in analytical perspective or as a ‘pure’ descriptive theory, particularly since planning combines the analytical with a normative orientation. Differently, self-organization can be interpreted as a political choice, insurgent (as in Lefebvre) when addressed to radically change existing institutions; co-evolutive (as in Ostrom), when conceived as agency within institutionalization (de-institutionalization) processes.

Thus, referring to self-organization in general terms can be the

cause of main misunderstandings.

A last remark regards what is maybe the most diffuse claim, and precisely that self-organization would represent a 'better' system if compared with current democratic institutions – also that self-organization can overcome current democracy. Concerning the relationship between democracy and self-organization, I referred to Peled (2000), who clarified that democracy is neither the source, nor the embodiment, nor the outcome of self-organization. On the contrary, in new sciences' perspective totalitarism can be seen as the result of a 'bifurcation' with unexpected results of a self-organizing system. Similarly, «the miserable condition of human society throughout history – war, famine, and genocide – can be explained very well in terms of the new sciences. Yet there is nothing democratic about the 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'» (from Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, 1651) human condition throughout most of history" and, again, «Throughout most of history, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and starvation were much more common than democracy and people participated in these activities and adapted their behaviour to them» (ivi.: 29). Furthermore: «There is nothing spontaneous about the emergence of the modern democratic principles that include the adherence to the legal code, the restriction on arbitrary use of political force, the balancing act between equality and liberty through the institution of the welfare state, and the separation of church and state» (ivi.: 30). Thus, as Peled (2000) argued, an unconditional claim towards self-organization or spontaneous order is risky, and perilously tends to exonerate us «from the need to carefully design and nurture institutions that guarantee the long-term wellbeing of democratic societies» and «to zealously protect the non-natural, vulnerable, and formal institutions of democracy». There are no reasons to cast a shadow over self-organization, which can be enabling, capacitating, empowering, emancipating, creative and many other positive things, and of course my intention is not to do that. My intention is primarily to put some order in a rich debate, problematizing a concept that, as other very important ones, risks to be stretched or blurred, or to produce (although unintentionally) fundamental misunderstandings about the meaning of socio-spatial transformations and urban practices. A broad and general reference to self-organization leads to unexpected convergences that should be seriously

scrutinized and discussed.

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**Barbara Pizzo**, PhD in Urban and Territorial Planning, teaches Urban Planning and Urban Policies at Sapienza University of Rome. barbara.pizzo@uniroma1.it



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## Building the Progressive City One Neighborhood at a Time: The Story of the East St. Louis Action Research Project (USA)

Antonio Raciti, Kenneth M. Reardon

### Abstract

Quest'articolo descrive come fenomeni di de-industrializzazione, disinvestimenti, e forze di suburbanizzazione hanno profondamente danneggiato le condizioni di salute dell'economia e del governo municipale di East St. Louis (US), lasciando i 40.000 residenti della città privi dei servizi municipali essenziali. Ciò che contraddistingue questa storia è la presenza di un piccolo gruppo di donne Afro Americane che hanno affrontato questa situazione con iniziative di auto-organizzazione dal basso volte alla mobilitazione, pianificazione e sviluppo del loro quartiere. Più specificatamente, quest'articolo illustra come una partnership fra comunità e università – portata avanti da queste donne in collaborazione con studenti e docenti della University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign – sia stata capace di generare più di 200 milioni di dollari in nuovi investimenti che hanno permesso di stabilizzare un intero quartiere e incoraggiare i residenti di altre comunità della regione a intraprendere iniziative simili.

This article describes how powerful deindustrialization, disinvestment, and suburbanization forces undermined the health of the East St. Louis, Illinois (US) economy and municipal government leaving the city's 40.000 residents without basic municipal services. What distinguishes this story is the emergence of a small group of low-income African American women who responded to these failures by self-organizing a "bottom-up, bottom-sideways" organizing, planning, and development initiative. In particular, this article explains how a community-university partnership carried out by these women and students and faculty from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was able to generate more than \$200 million in new investment that stabilized their neighborhood and encouraged residents from other East St. Louis communities across the region to undertake similar resident-led planning efforts.

**Parole Chiave:** deindustrializzazione; ricerca azione partecipata; mobilitazione di comunità; educazione popolare.

**Keywords:** deindustrialization; participatory action research; direct action organizing; popular education.

### Introduction

While economists and policy-makers celebrate the advantages of today's rapidly globalizing economy for producers and consumers, it is important to note that this process has had a highly uneven impact on metropolitan regions within the U.S. Whereas, one third of American metropolitan regions have

significantly benefited from this process, another one third have seen few, if any, advantages from this process while another third have been devastated by powerful deindustrialization, disinvestment and outmigration forces related to globalization (Goldsmith and Blakely, 2010). This is especially true of many of the older central cities located in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwestern regions of the U.S., commonly referred to as "The Rust Belt", whose economies were based on a single or small number of manufacturing industries.

So-called "legacy cities" such as Lowell, MA, Bridgeport, CT, Buffalo, NY, Erie, PA, Camden, NJ, Baltimore, MD, Youngstown, OH, Gary IN, and St. Louis, MO have experienced waves of plant closings, rising unemployment and poverty, massive public and private disinvestment and escalating fiscal problems that have forced local officials to repeatedly cut services while raising taxes. These business, employment and fiscal trends, exacerbated by reductions in Federal subsidies to cities and counties, have prompted many established businesses and residents from these communities to relocate to areas offering enhanced economic opportunities, municipal services, and quality of life (Mallach and Brachman, 2013).

Nowhere have the combined effects of deindustrialization, outmigration, and public and private disinvestment caused by globalization and well-intentioned but counter-productive local, state, and federal policies been more visible than in the once-vibrant riverfront community of East St. Louis, Illinois. Established as a riverfront trading outpost in 1820, originally called Illinoistown, East St. Louis quickly grew into one of the Mississippi River Watershed's most successful urban communities boasting vibrant transportation, manufacturing, finance, and retail sectors. In 1957, East St. Louis was selected an All-American City by the editors of Look Magazine and the leaders of the National Municipal League. At that time, the city which was frequently referred to as "The Pittsburgh of the West" had a population of 88,000, a large number of well-paying union jobs, extremely low unemployment and poverty rates, the second highest homeownership rate in the State of Illinois and a highly-regarded municipal administration skillful at planning, financing, and implementing major housing and infrastructure projects (Judd and Mendelson, 1973).

Between 1960 and 1980, East St. Louis' economy was ravaged

by technological changes affecting its major industries causing three-quarters of its businesses to close eliminating more than 12,000 well-paying industrial jobs (Fig. 1).



Fig.1: on the left, an abandoned meatpacking plant; on the right, the recently demolished Majestic Theater in East St. Louis (source: St. Louis Newspaper).

These plant closings and job losses devastated the city's retail sector, housing market, and municipal finances. By 1990, East St. Louis' population had plummeted to 39,000, its unemployment and poverty rates had risen to 29% and 42% respectively, and the city had amassed a municipal debt of \$88 million which consumed three-quarters of its annual revenues. By 1990, East St. Louis' deteriorating economic and fiscal condition led to additional outmigration among its working and middle classes leaving one-third of its building lots vacant and one fourth of its residential structures abandoned prompting a well-known editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch to refer to the city as, "The South Bronx of the Midwest" (Reardon, 2000).

As economic and fiscal conditions in East St. Louis worsened, state and federal agencies placed its community development block grant program, public housing agency, and school district under varying forms of state and federal oversight. When these steps failed to stabilize the city's economy, the State of Illinois passed the 1990 Distressed Cities Act providing East St. Louis with \$25 million in emergency aid to reorganize its finances while transferring its budget-making, financial management, and municipal hiring responsibilities to a state-controlled Financial Advisory Authority. The State of Illinois also issued its first riverboat gambling license to a company committed to opening a gaming facility along the city's waterfront that promised to generate 500 living wage hospitality jobs and \$9 million in annual gross receipts taxes for the city (Secretary of

State, August 5, 2018).

### Self-Organization

While these State actions enabled East St. Louis to re-establish a number of basic municipal services that had been suspended for years, including: weekly garbage collection, street lighting, and road repairs, conditions within the city's twenty-two residential neighborhoods continued to decline. Angered by recurring problems with basic municipal service delivery, especially police and fire protection, escalating gang violence, and ever-rising property taxes, a small group of women from the city's Emerson Park neighborhood decided they could not wait for City Hall to address these and other problems (Fig. 2).

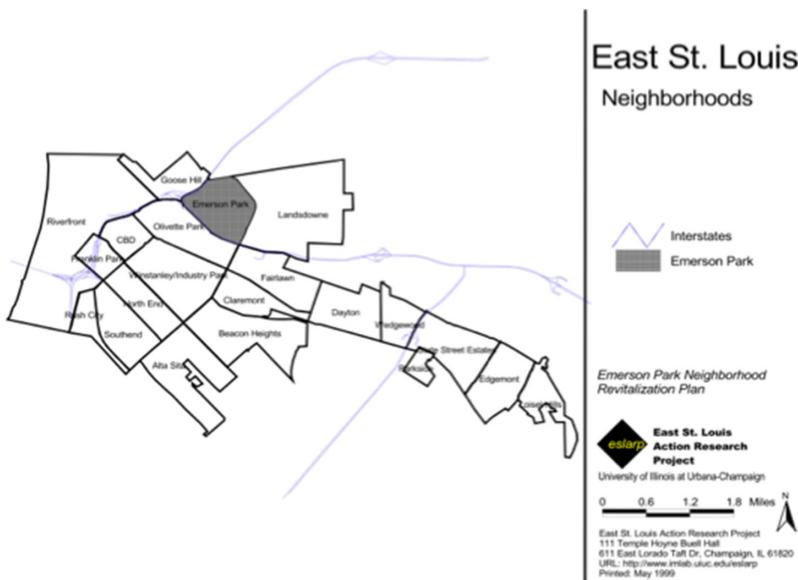


Fig. 2: Location of the Emerson Park Neighborhood within the City of East St. Louis (source: ESLARP/UIUC Plan Map).

Under the leadership of Ms. Ceola Davis, a long-time community activist and settlement house worker, this group composed of determined mothers and grandmothers established, with the help of the Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House, the Emerson Park Development Corporation (EPDC) to carryout a series of resident-initiated improvement projects to stabilize and improve conditions within the neighborhood (Reardon, 2003).

They began their efforts by seeking site control of three arson damaged brick buildings located near the Family Life Day Care Center where many neighborhood children attended pre-school. Upon learning that these properties were being held in trust by St. Clair County due to their owners' failure to pay their local property taxes, Ms. Davis and her neighbors took two buses to Belleville, the County Seat, to formally request the transfer of title for these offending properties to their organization so they could transform them into a much needed and desired toddlers' playground. After securing temporary title to these properties, the leaders of the Emerson Park Development Corporation mobilized more than fifty local residents to "deconstruct" the abandoned structures on these sites carefully salvaging recyclable building materials, such as: windows, doors, tin ceilings, porcelain sinks and tubs, light fixtures, cooper wiring and bricks that could be sold to generate funds to construct the playground.

Following several weeks of careful building deconstruction using hand tools, Emerson Park residents transported the architectural salvage items removed from these structures across the river to St. Louis' flourishing Cherokee's Street Antiques and Collectibles District where they generated more than \$5,000 for EPCD's "playground raising" initiative. Realizing the need to raise additional funds to construct a safe, attractive, and well-equipped children's play space, the group organized a highly successful weekly fish fry which raised several thousand dollars. With these self-generated funds in hand, the Emerson Park Development Corporation then succeeded in securing matching funds for the playground project from the Ralston Purina Company located in nearby St. Louis.

The following spring, the Emerson Park Development Corporation organized dozens of residents to clear, grade, and install play structures, park benches, flowers, shrubbery, cement walkways and an attractive fountain on the land formerly occupied by the three structures which they named Shugue Park in honor of a long-time civic leader from their neighborhood. Buoyed by the success of this grassroots revitalization effort, Emerson Park Development Corporation's leadership committed themselves to rebuilding their severely distressed neighborhood one block at a time. Realizing the need to secure high quality civil engineering, architectural design, and urban planning assistance to

successfully pursue their resident-led revitalization strategy, they approached their long-time State Representative Wyvetter H. Younge (D-East St. Louis) to elicit her assistance in securing these resources.

### University Engagement

Representative H. Younge (Fig. 3), who was the newly appointed Chairperson of the State Legislature's Higher Education Finance Committee, subsequently contacted Dr. Stanley O. Ikenberry, President of the University of Illinois, to request research, planning, design, and management assistance for resident-led revitalization efforts underway in East St. Louis.



Fig. 3: State Representative Wyvetter H. Younge, D-East St. Louis represented East St. Louis from 1965 until her death in 2008 (source: [stltoday.com](http://stltoday.com)).

Shortly after receiving this request, Dr. Ikenberry asked the Deans of UIUC's Colleges of Fine and Applied Arts, Social Work, and Education to create a program to provide the requested technical-assistance to community organizations and municipal agencies engaged in ongoing revitalization efforts in East St. Louis' most distressed neighborhoods. Several weeks later, Professors Lewis D. Hopkins and Kieran P. Donaghy from the Department of Urban and Regional Planning presented Dr. Ikenberry with a proposal entitled the Urban Extension and Minority Assistance Project (UEMAP). This document submitted on behalf of the College of Fine and Applied Arts' architecture, landscape architecture, and urban and regional planning

programs proposed the establishment of studios in each of these units to address the most pressing economic and social problems confront East St. Louis. The proposal also contained several innovative ideas for increasing minority enrollment in the College's planning and design programs.

The Urban Extension and Minority Access Project was launched in the fall of 1987 under the leadership of Associate Professor of Architecture, Carolyn Dry, with \$100,000 in annual funding provided by UIUC's Provost's Office. During the next three years, nearly two hundred architecture, landscape architecture, and urban and regional planning students contributed to studio classes charged with formulating workable solutions to the city's most critical issues as identified by State Representative Younge. When local stakeholders exhibited little interest in all but two of the final reports generated by these UIUC studios, student and faculty interest in the project waned prompting the Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts to initiate a search for a new urban planning professor with a successful track record designing and managing collaborative research projects with community-based organizations serving distressed urban neighborhoods similar to those found in East St. Louis.

### Action Research

In the spring of 1990 Ken Reardon joined UIUC's Department of Urban and Regional Planning as its newest Assistant Professor. In doing so, he accepted responsibility for coordinating the department's involvement in the Urban Extension and Minority Access Project. Shortly after arriving on campus, he made an appointment with Professor Dry to learn more about the University's East St. Louis outreach efforts and to elicit her thoughts regarding how he might best contribute to this project which was clearly struggling to gain community and campus support. During the meeting, she described the problems the project had experienced recruiting students and faculty to participate. Professor Dry explained how reluctant people were to commit to a fieldwork intensive research project taking place nearly 200 miles from the campus in a severely distressed community whose reputation had been savaged by journalists and scholars.

She then informed him that she was stepping aside as the

Faculty Coordinator for the project so he could assume leadership for the effort, which appeared, from her perspective, to be clearly related to his housing and community development research, teaching, and outreach interests. Having made this announcement, she presented him with a large box containing background reports on East St. Louis, maps of the city and its surrounding area, and copies of student and faculty research reports funded by the project. Alarmed by this unexpected turn of events Ken made a beeline to Professor Lew Hopkins, Head of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning Office, to inform him of what had taken place. He argued that it was a bad idea to have an inexperienced Assistant Professor managing an ambitious interdepartmental outreach effort in a severely distressed city during his “probationary period”.

Professor Hopkins assured him that the members of the department, college, and university promotion and tenure committees would recognize the leadership of the project as an important form of engaged scholarship. With this assurance that he agreed to serve as the Urban Extension and Minority Access Project’s Faculty Coordinator for the coming year. After reviewing Professor Dry’s collection of East St. Louis documents, he proceeded to collect and review as many East St. Louis reports, studies and plans from the University’s Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture Library to gain a deeper understanding of the origins, evolution, and current state of the city. Among the many items he read, was a remarkable Comprehensive Plan for East St. Louis, IL prepared by Harlan Bartholomew that warned St. Louis and East St. Louis’ civic leaders of the likely “hollowing out” of the region’s Central Business Districts in the event significant public investments in education, housing, and infrastructure were not made. This was a prophetic but largely ignored document that predicted, with great precision, the economic and social collapse that devastated both cities during the last quarter of the 20th century (Bartholomew, 1920).

As the fall semester approached, Professor Reardon worked with a Graduate Research Assistant, named Ishaq Shafiq, to schedule approximately fifty face-to-face interviews with a cross-section of municipal, business, religious, educational, labor, cultural, and civic leaders from East St. Louis to elicit their views on the city’s most important assets and challenges, future development possibilities, UIUC’s past work within the city, and

its possible future role. The vast majority of those we called for interviews were UIUC alumni who appeared eager to share their assessment of current conditions and future development possibilities for their city. Among the major themes that emerged from these interviews were the following:

1. Economic conditions in East St. Louis were much worse than previously reported.
2. Local human service organizations and area churches attempting to respond to the human costs of the city's economic collapse were "running on empty".
3. The City of East St. Louis was viewed as a highly corrupt entity with little, if any, planning and development capacity.
4. Colleges and Universities which had undertaken East St. Louis research were generally viewed as "parasitic organizations" that used the serious problems confronting the city to secure external grants that provided few, if any, benefits to local stakeholders.

One of the first neighborhood residents interviewed summed up local stakeholders' views of University researchers in the following way, "The last thing East St. Louis needs is another university type telling us what every 6<sup>th</sup> grader in town already knows." While the overwhelming majority of those interviewed expressed little interest in collaborating with UIUC on local research projects, the recently appointed Executive Director of the Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House felt differently. William Kreeb was eager to introduce UIUC students and faculty to the small group of woman who had successfully constructed Shugue Park and were now committed to undertaking the environmental, economic, and social restoration of their once-thriving residential community one project and one block at a time. He, subsequently, introduced faculty and students to the Steering Committee of the Emerson Park Development Corporation which was staffed by Ms. Ceola Davis, a long-time outreach worker and grassroots activist, employed by the Neighborhood House.

During this meeting, Ms. Davis, a local minister, and a dozen neighborhood women described how they had worked together to design and build Shugue Park and were now committed to carrying out a series of larger-scale economic and community

development projects aimed at stabilizing their community. While they expressed a strong desire to collaborate with external partners, such as nearby colleges and universities, to carry out these projects, they said such partnerships would have to be organized differently than they had in the past. To highlight the need for a new social contract between East St. Louis' neighborhoods and colleges and universities seeking to be their allies, Ms. Davis pointed to three stacks of reports resting on the conference table around which we were meeting. She described how external agencies had funded UIUC as well as several nearby universities to undertake each of these research projects, which focused on identifying and analyzing the major problems confronting the city. Ms. Davis went on to criticize the "deficit-focused" nature of these reports while pointing out that not a single one of the planning and development proposal contained in these documents had ever been fully implemented. From the residents' perspective, the city's extreme poverty had frequently been used by academic researchers to secure grants from which they, their students, and their institutions greatly benefitted. Local residents and institutions, on the other hand, typically gained little from these grants while being asked to provide important historical information, current socioeconomic data, and access to key local opinion leaders to the researchers. Over time, the many research reports documenting East St. Louis' serious economic and social problems had contributed to a public narrative, accepted by many policy-makers, that conditions within the city had deteriorated too far to be stabilized or reversed. Ms. Davis and her colleagues fervently believed that their neighborhood and city could, in the short-run, be stabilized and, in the long-run, revitalized. However, they believed this would require a new, more reciprocal, approach to community/university partnerships. After sharing their concerns regarding academic researchers, they invited faculty and students to work with them on a series of community planning and development projects based upon the following principles for a "non-exploitive" or "non-colonial" town-gown partnerships, which they had recently formulated.

1. Local residents and leaders rather than campus officials and regional funders will determine the issues to be addressed by the new community/university development partnership.

2. Local stakeholders will be actively engaged, as equal partners with university researchers, at each and every step in the research, planning, and design process.
3. Local residents expect the University to commit a minimum of five years of collaborative research and planning in Emerson Park to enable the research results generated by the project to be translated into concrete improvements.
4. Community partners assisting the University expect the campus to include their organizations, on an equitable basis, in any external funding they seek to support common work.
5. Local leaders expect the University's help in creating a community-based planning and development organization with the capacity to implement the major improvement projects emerging from the project after the campus ends their involvement in the project (Reardon, 2000).

Following their presentation of these principles, Emerson Park Development Corporation's leaders encouraged our team to return to campus to discuss these alternative partnership principles with our colleagues and administration. Upon returning to campus, Professor Reardon shared the demands of the Emerson Park Development Corporation with the Head of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning and the Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts who strongly encouraged him to work with this group. He subsequently returned to East St. Louis to meet with Ms. Davis and her neighbors to discuss the focus of our first semester's work. While they wanted UIUC students to work with them to complete feasibility studies, program development plans, and grant proposals for specific community improvement projects, Professor Reardon felt that faculty and students needed to prepare a highly professional comprehensive development plan for the area that would convince potential funders that their proposals were evidence based, reflective of the best practices in community development, and workable within the East St. Louis context.

While residents were initially highly skeptical of participating in what they perceived to be another "academic" planning exercise, they were willing to work with students and faculty on the development of a comprehensive neighborhood improvement plan provided, the UIUC group refocused activities after six months on data collection and analysis efforts aimed

at advancing their “top priority” revitalization efforts. As the end of the summer approached, Ishaq and Professor Reardon plastered the campus with flyers announcing the launch of an exciting new Neighborhood Planning Workshop featuring “hands on” projects in an economically challenged Illinois community. Eleven students attended the first class in the fall of 1990 during which Professor Reardon described the research methodology they would be using to formulate a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization plan for a low-income urban community. He then informed them that they would be doing their fieldwork in East St. Louis in support of a newly established community-based planning and development organization. Unsure of how many of the students would remain in the class given East St. Louis’ reputation as a hopeless case of urban decline, Professor Reardon was delighted when all of the students returned to the classroom for the second half of the class ready to work.

The following week, the class made its first trip to East St. Louis, which is located 188 miles from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign campus. As the van entered the city, students quickly noticed the poor condition of the streets, the many vacant stores in its Downtown, the lack of functioning streetlights and traffic signals, and the many illegal-dumping sites. As the van approached the Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House located in the heart of the Emerson Park community, one of the second-year planning students asked, “What can we possibly do to help this community which appears to need so much” (Reardon, 2019). Before Professor Reardon could formulate a thoughtful response to this heartfelt question, Ms. Davis appeared outside of the vehicle inviting students to join the Emerson Park Development Corporation’s founding members for lunch, a discussion of the neighborhood’s rich social history, current challenges and future development possibilities, and a short tour of the Neighborhood House and its surrounding community.

As the UIUC students ate lunch, Ms. Davis asked her neighbors to introduce themselves, explain when and why they had moved to Emerson Park, and describe their hopes for their new partnership with the university. Most of the residents attending the meeting had moved into the neighborhood more than twenty years ago when it was a stable white community of well-kept shotgun bungalows. They described the area as a quiet, well-maintained and highly cohesive community that offered many

services for families and activities for children. They explained how this changed when the rail yards, food processing, chemical production, and steel-making plants that employed local residents closed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They also described how their requests for city assistance to address the emerging environmental, economic, and social problems confronting their neighborhood had gone unheeded prompting them to form the Emerson Park Development Corporation which they viewed as a self-help revitalization organization.

Following this discussion, Ms. Davis offered to take the group on a tour of the neighborhood. As the UIUC delegation followed Ms. Davis out of the building she encountered a small group of children who were leaving the Neighborhood House's Day Care Center. When the children ran to show Ms. Davis their latest artwork, she put her glasses on taking time to offer a positive comment about each drawing. As she did so, she asked each of the children's mothers how they and their families were doing. It was clear that Ms. Davis had gotten to know each of these families extremely well through decades of service in this working-class neighborhood. During the tour, Ms. Davis showed her campus visitors an abandoned public housing complex, a recently shuttered elementary school, dozens of illegal dump sites, and a city street where cash starved residents had used hand tools to remove cobblestones to raise funds for their families. The highlight of the tour, however, was the visit to the recently constructed Shugue Playground where a small group of unemployed men where removing trash from the children's play area. As soon as they saw Ms. Davis they warmly greeted and embraced her. She responded by introducing the class as her newest friends, explaining that they would be working in the neighborhood during the current year. One man stepped forward and volunteered, as a long-time resident, to help the students in any way that he could. As Professor Reardon and his students departed, Ms. Davis reminded the men that she would be cooking dinner, with all of "the fixings" at the Neighborhood House on Sunday at 3 pm. She had been quietly funding and staffing this Sunday dinner for families who were struggling to survive for many years.

Returning to the Neighborhood House, Ms. Davis and her neighbors reviewed their top improvement priorities with the students that included: a reduction in the sale of illegal drugs, the

boarding up of vacant buildings, home improvement assistance for seniors and veterans seeking to remain in their homes, and a workable strategy for addressing the community's illegal dumping crisis. The members of the UIUC student delegation voiced a strong desire to assist EPDC in formulating workable strategies to address each of these problems confronting their community. The group proposed undertaking a comprehensive neighborhood improvement plan during the fall semester to: a.) collect compelling evidence justifying these and other neighborhood improvements; and b.) expand the number of Emerson Park residents, business operators, property owners, and institutional leaders participating in and contributing to EPDC. The UIUC group described how they planned to conduct extensive outreach activities, in the form of door-to-door canvassing, at each step in the planning process to increase the number of local stakeholders supporting EPDC's projects. They justified this bottom-up/bottom-sideways approach to community planning, which was described as participatory action research, as their response to residents' demands to be fully involved at each and every step in the research, planning, and development process (Whyte, 1989).

The residents' initial response to the comprehensive planning proposal was very negative. They stressed the importance of showing local stakeholders concrete progress on the issues they had already identified in order to prevent them from abandoning the neighborhood. While the UIUC group appreciated the urgency of formulating concrete plans to address the public safety, affordable housing, and environmental challenges facing the neighborhood; they also believed that it would be impossible to secure the external funding to address these issues, given East St. Louis' reputation for municipal corruption and political infighting, in the absence of a high-quality, evidence-based, community plan enjoying broad-based support from local residents, institutional leaders, and elected officials. Assuring residents that they could complete such a plan during the fall semester of 1990, the UIUC group committed to devoting the spring semester of 1991 to formulating specific implementation strategies to combat the major issues emerging from the proposed resident-led planning strategy. Viewing this proposal as a reasonable compromise, EPDC's leaders committed themselves to working with the UIUC group to devise and implement a comprehensive neighborhood

improvement plan aimed at restoring the quality of life within their historic African American community.

During the three-hour ride back to campus, students shared their deep admiration for Ms. Davis and her neighbors' unshakable commitment to each other, their neighborhood, and their city. They also discussed their strong desire to do whatever was necessary during the coming semester to produce a high-quality revitalization plan residents could use to secure the political support and financial resources needed to implement community development projects. Towards this end, they organized the class into four (three-person) teams to: formulate an aggressive community media campaign informing residents about the launch of the proposed "bottom-up/bottom-sideways" planning process; prepare a detailed social history and demographic profile of the community; develop a snapshot of existing physical conditions; and summarize local stakeholders' perceptions of Emerson Park's major strengths, weaknesses, and preferred development scenarios. During the next class, students worked together to transform their preliminary work plan into a draft memorandum of agreement that laid out the goals, objectives, research activities, timetable, deliverables, and responsibilities of both parties related to the production of a professional-quality, five-year neighborhood improvement plan for the Emerson Park community.

Following EPDC's approval of the proposed memorandum of agreement, the class developed a schedule involving bi-weekly trips to Emerson Park by the whole class focused on data collection and community meetings. On alternating weeks, students and faculty travelled to East St. Louis to elicit EPDC's input on each phase of the planning process and to conduct door-knocking to ensure a high level of citizen participation and influence in the plan-making process. The UIUC group quickly developed a monthly work schedule in which they would hold an initial meeting with EPDC's leaders to discuss the research objective for each step in the planning process and to engage them in the development of various survey instruments. This meeting would be followed by a second monthly visit to the community during which they would collect the data they needed via property inspections, infrastructure surveys, resident and official interviews, and focus groups carried out by teams including both EPDC leaders and UIUC students. Following these

data collection activities, they would return to the community for a third time each month to personally invite local stakeholders to our planning analysis meetings organized to elicit their feedback on the data and to hold data review and discussion forums.

During the fall semester of 1990, the Neighborhood Planning Workshop collaborated with EPDC's leaders to complete the following research and planning activities aimed at producing a high-quality comprehensive improvement plan for the Emerson neighborhood.

Month	Planning Activities
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Organized a community media campaign to encourage stakeholder participation in the planning process</li> <li>-Conducted archival research and demographic analysis to gain a better understanding of Emerson Park's historical evolution</li> <li>-Canvassed neighbors to ensure a strong planning analysis meeting turnout</li> <li>-Held the first Planning Analysis Meeting to elicit stakeholder feedback on the student-generated social history and demographic profile (35 stakeholders attended)</li> </ul>
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Corrected the social history and demographic analysis based on local stakeholders' feedback</li> <li>-Completed land use, building condition, site maintenance, and local infrastructure surveys (1,407 building parcels and 66 street lengths)</li> <li>-Canvassed neighbors to ensure a strong planning analysis meeting turnout</li> <li>-Held a second Planning Analysis Meeting to elicit feedback on the physical conditions surveys data and related GIS maps (68 stakeholders attended)</li> </ul>

November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Corrected physical conditions data and GIS maps based on local stakeholders' feedback</li> <li>-Canvassed neighbors to ensure strong planning analysis meeting turnout</li> <li>-Held a Third Planning Analysis Meeting to elicit stakeholder feedback on interviews held with local residents and leaders - a.k.a. movers and shakers interviews (91 local stakeholders attended.)</li> </ul>
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Corrected local perceptions data based on stakeholders' feedback</li> <li>-Canvassed neighbors to ensure strong planning analysis meeting turnout</li> <li>-Presented a Preliminary Draft of The Emerson Park Five-Year Neighborhood Improvement Plan at a community-wide meeting referred to as the Community Summit</li> <li>-Revised the plan based on local stakeholder feedback received at the Fourth/Final Planning Analysis (135 local stakeholders attended)</li> <li>-Distributed copies of the plan to local residents and leaders prior to a community-wide meeting scheduled for Dr. King's Birthday on January 16, 1991 at which time local leaders expected stakeholders to formally vote to endorse the plan and identify steps to advance its implementation</li> </ul>

### Advancing the Emerson Park Plan

In January of 1991, more than one hundred local stakeholders reconvened at the Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House to review the final draft of the Emerson Park Neighborhood Improvement Plan which sought to «enhance the overall quality of life within Emerson Park through the implementation of a comprehensive community development strategy featuring environmental remediation, crime prevention, housing

improvement, educational enhancement, and job generation initiatives». Following several suggestions aimed at further strengthening the plan's educational enhancement and job generation elements, the plan was unanimously endorsed by those attending the meeting (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1991). Following this vote, residents discussed the steps needed to be taken to promote their newly adopted plan. Following considerable discussion, those attending the meeting decided to devote the balance of 1991 to the following three activities which they expected the UIUC students and Professor Reardon to work on.

- Organize a *volunteer clean-up* of the neighborhood's major commercial thoroughfare (9<sup>th</sup> Street) which had become a popular site for illegal dumping.
- Initiate, with the help of local law enforcement agencies, a *resident-led crime prevention* initiative to reduce the sale of illegal drugs and the incidence of related violent street crime within the neighborhood.
- *Recruit local, regional, state, and federal funders* to enable EPDC to implement the major programmatic elements of their five-year neighborhood improvement plan.

Lobbying by students enrolled in the first Neighborhood Planning Workshop prompted Professor Lew Hopkins, Head of UIUC's Department of Urban and Regional Planning, to assign Professor Reardon to teach a second East St. Louis studio in the Spring of 1991 focused on "plan implementation". A mix of eighteen undergraduate and graduate planning students were recruited to participate in this "advanced workshop" by those who had participated in the first East St. Louis workshop. These students had become deeply committed to the success of Ms. Davis and her neighbors' community stabilization and revitalization plan and wanted to see the University maintain their support for the effort. With the assistance of several of the original East St. Louis class members who decided to enroll in the follow-up workshop, the UIUC group formed three teams to assist EPDC's leaders with their volunteer clean-up, crime prevention planning, and external fundraising campaign. Following an outreach schedule very similar with the one used in the inaugural workshop, these students succeeded in:

- Mobilizing nearly 200 community and campus volunteers to remove illegally dumped trash from more than twelve privately-owned lots along 9<sup>th</sup> Street which received extensive positive press coverage.
- Completing a resident-initiated crime prevention plan which laid the foundation for a highly successful crime reporting campaign carried out in cooperation with state and federal law enforcement agencies, which removed dozens of street-level drug dealers from the neighborhood greatly enhancing residents' sense of personal safety (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1992).
- Approaching nearly three dozen public and private funders active in the fields of housing and community development which produced considerable rhetorical support for EPDC's neighborhood improvement efforts but no significant funding commitments.

Community and campus enthusiasm for the project received a boost, notwithstanding the failure of EPDC/UIUC's initial funding efforts, in April of 1991 when the American Planning Association recognized the Emerson Park Neighborhood Improvement Plan as the Best Student Plan in the nation.



Fig. 4: Ms. Ceola Davis, Outreach Worker, Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House, R: Richard Settles, President, Emerson Park Development Corporation.

### **Adopting the Ready, Fire, Aim Approach**

Riding a wave of local enthusiasm resulting from the success

of their highly visible clean-up of 9<sup>th</sup> Street, EPDC's leaders identified a series of improvement projects that could be implemented using local and campus volunteers, borrowed vehicles and equipment, donated supplies and small-scale donations. In the fall of 1991, EPDC leaders worked with students participating in UIUC's second Neighborhood Planning Workshop to organize a series of Volunteer Work Weekends focused on cleaning-up of dozens of remaining illegal dump sites located throughout the neighborhood and the scraping, priming, and painting the homes of dozens of low-income senior citizens, Veterans, and persons with disabilities living in the neighborhood (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5: on the left, UIUC volunteers boarding the bus for ESLARP's first neighborhood clean-up; on the right, UIUC volunteers help local residents remove illegally dumped trash from 9th Street.

EPDC's leaders believed these projects would help local residents who remained skeptical regarding the possibilities for meaningful change in East St. Louis overcome these feelings while encouraging outside funders to reconsider financial support for the projects featured in EPDC's recently completed plan.

Throughout the 1991-1992 academic year, students participating in UIUC's Neighborhood Planning Workshop II and Planning Implementation Workshop II, assisted by design students enrolled in studios offered by UIUC's School of Architecture and Department of Landscape Architecture, who had been recruited by UIUC's planning students to join the ever-expanding community/university partnership to turn East St. Louis around, began working together to inform residents about these newly organized grassroots environmental restoration and housing stabilization initiatives. As increasing

numbers of residents requested assistance with clean-up and paint-up projects, EPDC assembled a committee of local pastors to prioritize these requests and assist with the recruitment of local volunteers to work with the UIUC students on the selected projects (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6: on the left, UIUC students and faculty participating in an early paint-up/scrape-up effort; on the right, Rev. Herman Watson, Pastor of the Mt. Sinai Missionary Baptist Church, and UIUC students installing a play structure at the Illinois Avenue Playground.

### Expanding into Other Neighborhoods

Growing numbers of community and campus volunteers allowed the EPDC/UIUC partnership, which we renamed the East St. Louis Action Research Project, to undertake increasing numbers of clean-up and paint-up projects during the 1991-1992 academic year. By the Spring of 1992, more than fifty UIUC architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning students and faculty were travelling to East St. Louis each month to work with local volunteers on what started out as simple outdoor clean-up and exterior paint-up projects but soon progressed to include small playground construction projects on former illegal dump sites and step, porch, and roof repairs to the homes of low-income neighborhood residents. As the number and scale of these do-it-yourselves environmental remediation and home repair projects grew two things happened. First, a well-known obstetrician who had delivered many of the city's civic, religious, and political leaders during segregation approached the partnership requesting assistance for a group of church women working well outside of Emerson Park to transform a vacant building and several adjacent building lots that has been the site of a recent sexual

assault into full-scale community playground. Second, leaders from five other East St. Louis neighborhoods asked the partnership's leaders to consider expanding their community organizing, planning, design, and development activities into their neighborhoods.

ESLARP's successful implementation of a series of increasingly challenging self-help improvement projects carried out through the combined efforts of local volunteers and architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning students enrolled in a parallel set of fall semester planning workshops followed by spring semester design-build studios increased pressure on ESLARP to expand its activities into several low-income neighborhoods close to Emerson Park. With the help of increased funding from UIUC, a generous Community Development Block Grant from the City of East St. Louis, and a major grant from HUD's newly established Community Outreach Partnership Center, ESLARP expanded its bottom-up, bottom-sideways planning activities between 1992 and 1998 into the city's Lansdowne, Winstanley-Industry Park, Olivette Park, Alta Sita, and South End neighborhoods where a majority of East St. Louis' poor and working class residents lived in steadily deteriorating conditions.

With financial support provided by these and other funding sources, ESLARP was able to significantly enhance its support for resident-led planning and development in East St. Louis. These funds enabled ESLARP to hire a full-time director with extensive economic and community development policy-making, programming, and fundraising experience. These resources also permitted the program to offer Graduate Research Assistantships to ten to twelve architecture, landscape architecture, and urban and regional planning students who assisted faculty in recruiting students for their workshops/studios, carrying out the detailed planning, design, and logistical work required for successful work weekends, serving as "crew chiefs" supervising students carrying out clean-up and restoration projects, and preparing funding proposals needed to support ESLARP's rapidly expanding list of neighborhood improvement projects. Finally, these resources allowed ESLARP to establish a fully-staffed community organizing, planning, and development research center in the city, called the East St. Louis Neighborhood Technical

Assistance Center, which offered local residents interested in undertaking new economic and community development projects with a full range of no-cost planning, design, legal and funding assistance. These services were provided by a four-person staff consisting of a: community organizing, urban planner, architect/designer, and a lawyer who were supervised by ESLARP's participating faculty.

### **ESLARP's Accomplishments**

As its tenth anniversary approached in 2000, ESLARP's accomplishments had earned the partnership a well-deserved regional, national, and international reputation for community planning and development excellence. It was asked to host the annual conference of HUD's Community Outreach Partnership Center in 1996, it received highly favorable coverage in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Washington Post and The Economist, and was one of only two American development projects invited to participate in the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development's Voluntary Action for Local Democracy Project enabling its staff to present its resident-led model of community planning and development at UN Headquarters in Geneva, the UN's Social Summit in Copenhagen, and the UN's Habitat II Conference in Istanbul (Pierce, 1996).

During its first decade of operation, this unique community/university development partnership achieved a number of significant outcomes. First, it supported residents, business operators, property owners, institutional leaders, and elected officials from five of East St. Louis' most economically challenged neighborhoods in creating citizen organizations whose leaders possessed the knowledge, skills, and competencies to design and implement significant economic and community development. Second, it provided high quality community planning and design assistance that enabled East St. Louis-based development organizations to successfully implement more than \$200 million in needed economic and community development projects in the city's long abandoned older residential neighborhoods. Among the projects ESLARP helped advance was the Parsons Place Residential Development in Emerson Park, the extension of the MetroLink into East St. Louis (Fig. 7), and the construction of Eagle's Nest, a special

needs housing complex, for wounded Gulf War Veterans.



Fig. 7: Map of the MetroLink System which was originally designed to end at Laclede's Landing on the Missouri side of the Mississippi. However, pressure from ESLARP's community partners supported by student research extended the project through East St. Louis to Belleville providing low-income residents with access to living-wage jobs in Downtown St. Louis and in the Lambert Airport District.

Third, it provided a deeply transformative professional education for thousands of architecture, landscape architecture, and urban and regional planning that prompted a disproportionate number of these students to choose non-traditional professional careers with community-based development organizations, faith-based institutions, and public agencies promoting sustainable forms of development in many of America's poorest communities. Fourth, it exposed hundreds of low-income students of color from East St. Louis to the significant intellectual, professional, and community service opportunities available within the planning and design fields prompting dozens of these young people to pursue careers in architecture, landscape architecture, and urban and regional planning where historically they have been grossly underrepresented. Fifth, the success of the project inspired poor and working-class residents and institutional leaders from other economically challenged cities in the United States and abroad to undertake similar bottom-up, bottom-sideways planning and development efforts. Finally, ESLARP's community leaders and academic partners co-created a highly effective approach to community planning and development which represents a significant contribution to the progressive planning literature which is described, in some detail, in the following section of this paper (Clavel, 1984, Krumholz, 1990).

### The Evolution of ESLARP's Planning Model

#### *Participatory Action Research*

ESLARP's initial Emerson Park planning activities were carried

out using participatory action research methods as described by Kurt Lewin, (1951) William F. Whyte, (Whyte, Greenwood, and Lazes, 1998) and Davydd Greenwood (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). UIUC students sought to actively engage EPDC leaders and Emerson Park residents at each and every phase of the planning process from the: inventorying and prioritizing of planning issues, organizing data collection and analysis, formulating development goals and objectives, creating detailed action plans, devising workable implementation strategies, pursuing project implementation efforts, and structuring monitoring and evaluation schemes.

The ongoing engagement techniques UIUC students and faculty used in Emerson Park and its surrounding neighborhoods produced plans which benefited from the integration of what Clifford Geertz described as the “local knowledge” possessed by well-respected community/institutional actors and the “expert knowledge” possessed by skilled university-trained researchers (Geertz, 1985). These plans which were co-produced by local leaders and university researchers for the Emerson Park, Lansdowne, and Winstanley-Industry Park neighborhoods between 1990-1993 garnered enthusiastic support from their local sponsors as well as a cross-section of other institutions within these communities. Despite the existence of a broad-base of non-partisan political support from what Lewis Wirth (1939), Suzanne Keller (1969), and other described as “local intermediaries” such as block clubs, homeowner associations, tenant organizations, and religious institutions these groups lacked the political power to compel local government and their allies to fund even the most modest improvement projects included in their plans.

Reflecting upon the failure of their participatory action research-based approach to community planning to produce meaningful levels of public and private support for their efforts, local leaders and their university allies re-evaluated their model. While their participatory action research approach had generated plans that their community partners and allies wholeheartedly supported, these networks of local intermediary institutions which had been devastated by the high level of out-migration affecting these neighborhoods, lacked the membership base, leadership cadre and political power to pressure the city to support their work. Referencing Robert Putnam’s widely-cited “Bowling Alone”

article and book which documented the weakening and collapse of many of the civic networks that produce the social capital that enable residents of local communities to come together to solve critical problems, local leaders and their University allies quickly acknowledged the need to fundamentally change their planning process (Putnam, 2000). They articulated the need to devise a planning process that would go beyond engaging residents who were participating in already organized groups. They described the need to reach out to the vast majority of neighborhood residents who were unininvolved in any local institution to encourage them to become active members in the community-based planning and development organizations in East St. Louis that were fighting for more redistributive development policies and participatory planning and policy-making processes.

### *Direct Action Organizing*

After considerable discussion, they decided to integrate the principles and methods of direct action organizing as advocated by Saul Alinsky (1971), Wade Rathke (2018), and Michael Gecan (2004) into their future neighborhood planning activities. In doing so, they began referring to this new power-focused approach to resident-led planning and development as empowerment planning. They articulated the goals of this new approach as, "enhancing the capacity of community-based organizations representing poor and working-class families to affect the public and private investment decisions that, to a large extent, determine the quality of urban life" (Reardon, 2005). The incorporation of direct action organizing into ESLARP's ongoing planning activities had a number of immediate impacts. The empowerment approach to neighborhood planning placed the recruitment of concerned, but previously unininvolved neighborhood residents, into groups that were leading local resident-led planning efforts on par with the collection and analysis of high quality data needed for these plans. It also made the identification and development of new leaders a top priority within ESLARP's future planning efforts. Local leaders, with the assistance of UIUC students and faculty, soon designed a systematic approach to moving neighborhood residents with little previous political experience through a series of increasingly challenging leadership activities, with appropriate support, to expand the pool of experienced activists.

Furthermore, local leaders were discouraged from viewing the formal adoption of community plans by local residents as “the end” of the planning process. They were also trained to identify the key political leaders and bodies responsible for delivering economic and community development services their community needed. Using a basic approach to power analysis formulated by Chicago’s Midwest Academy, they learned how to use their organization’s expanding membership base to pressure these officials and their organizations to support resident-generated development plans (Bobo, Kendall, and Max, 2010).

Beginning in 1993, ESLARP’s leadership applied their new empowerment approach to community planning in their work in East St. Louis’ Winstanley-Industry Park and Olivette Park neighborhoods. The combination of technical planning and grassroots organizing activities central to this new approach enabled ESLARP to secure the support of local officials for their work in these neighborhoods which resulted in the first commitment of significant external funds from the City of East St. Louis, St. Clair County and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Growing external interest in and support for ESLARP’s work among public and private funders enabled the partnership to plan and implement increasingly ambitious community projects. Among these initiatives were the:

- Renovation of the original Mt. Sinai Missionary Church to serve as ESLARP’s East St. Louis planning and design center.
- Moderate rehabilitation of ten low-income family residences using funds provided by HUD’s Home Program.
- Construction of four new homes through the collaboration of EPCD, ESLARP and East Louis’ Family Housing Program.
- Creation of East St. Louis’ first public access computer laboratory at the site of the newly constructed Mt. Sinai Missionary Baptist Church
- Establishment of a “revolving loan fund” to stabilize homes occupied by low-income seniors at risk for abandonment
- Adaptive re-use of a former used car lot as a public market offering affordable, fresh, and culturally appropriate fruits, vegetables, meats, fish, and dry goods.
- Restoration of the historic carriage house at the Katherine Dunham Museum enabling it to be used for classes

and rehearsals for the Katherine Dunham Youth Dance Ensemble.

The success of these and other resident-identified neighborhood improvement projects significantly increased the number of community residents, regional funders, and university students and faculty participating in ESLARP (Fig. 8).

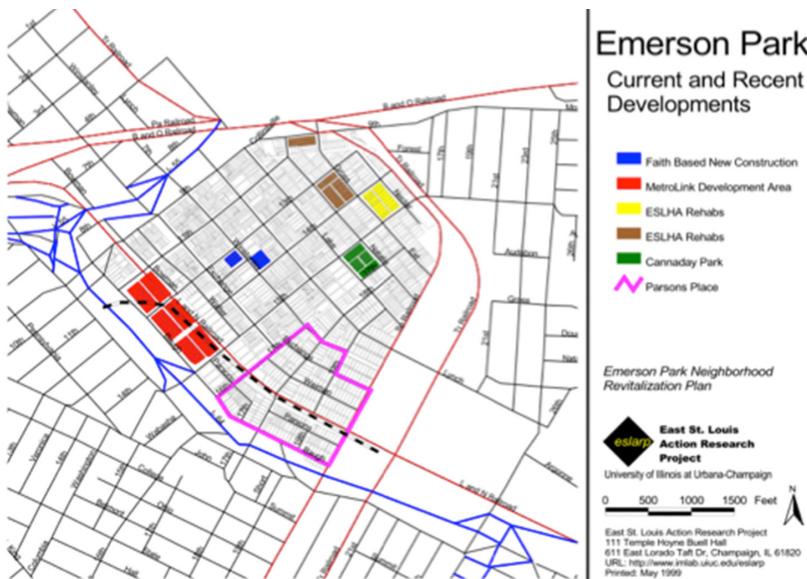


Fig. 8: Map of selective neighborhood improvements in the Emerson Park neighborhood.

These additional human and financial resources enabled ESLARP to undertake increasingly complex, visible, and impactful projects whose success generated increased regional and national press coverage and recognition of the project. Between 1993 and 1996, ESLARP's leaders were the recipients of a number of prestigious urban planning and community excellence awards. Among these were:

- Award-Winning Project for Socially-Responsible Design, Architects and Designers for Social Responsibility
  - National Award for Program Innovation, Economic and Community Development Division, National Universities' Continuing Education Association
  - Interdisciplinary Teaching Award, Association of Collegiate

### Schools of Architecture

- Frederick J. Miller Award for Distinguished Public Service, University YMCA, Champaign, IL
- Public Service Awards, Illinois Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects
- National Excellence Award (Co-Recipient), U.S. Preparatory Committee, U.N. Habitat II World Summit

### *Popular Education*

Therefore, it came as quite a surprise when leaders of the neighborhood organizations ESLARP was working most closely with invited the faculty working on the project to an emergency meeting at the Lessie Bates Davis Neighborhood House. Arriving at the meeting, students and faculty encountered more than forty neighborhood leaders within whom they had been working for a number of years. Ms. Davis began the meeting by stating that she and her colleagues had never had the opportunity to work with a group of outside “allies” as eager and committed to supporting their work as ESLARP’s core faculty. She then proceeded to share the definition of empowerment planning that we had worked with them to develop which appeared earlier in this chapter. Ms. Davis then asked students and faculty if they were still committed to pursuing this type of transformational planning practice. Following their affirmative response, she asked «So, when are you going to get started! ».

Sensing confusion and rising anger, Richard Settles who was then serving as EPDC’s President said, «In your model of community/university development partnership, community residents and grassroots leaders are not even the tail on the dog. INSTEAD, we are the fleas hoping to land on the tail of the dog». He described how ESLARP brought many of the nation’s most talented students together with local leaders, most of whom have never had the opportunity to attend college, to solve complex urban problems. In doing so, the faculty felt it necessary to provide their relatively privileged students with nine to twelve credit hours of graduate instruction in community organizing, physical planning, affordable housing, and non-profit management each semester to enable them to make inspired contributions to the planning and design projects being advanced by the ESLARP partnership. At the same time, ESLARP has failed to develop a single course in economic and

community development, or related fields, for the East St. Louis residents participating in the partnership to enable them to make their highest and best contribution to these efforts. Ms. Davis followed up Mr. Settles remarks by saying, «The bad news is that you inadvertently replicated a racist, sexist, and classist approach to town/gown collaboration. The good news is that redemption is always possible within the Black community».

### **East St. Louis Neighborhood College**

On behalf of the approximately 50 neighborhood leaders attending the meeting, Ms. Davis proposed a solution to our “uneven partnership” problem. She asked students and faculty to work with ESLARP’s community partners to create a People’s School for Planning and Design in East St. Louis modelled after the Highlander Research and Education Center founded by Myles Horton, Don West, and James Dombrowski in 1932 (Adams and Horton, 1975). This famous center for popular education based upon the Norwegian folk schools of the early 1900s played a pivotal role in training labor, Civil Rights, environmental justice, gender/human rights activists in the South for decades. Ms. Davis suggested working with her neighbors to identify three to four courses focused on critical community organizing, planning, and development topics of importance to a cross-section of local leaders given the stage of community development they were currently pursuing. She encouraged offering the courses on Saturday mornings when people were not working and/or engaged in church activities.

While initially irritated by Ms. Davis’ critique of their East St. Louis work, faculty and students quickly realized how our partnership model had unwittingly contributed to reinforcing racial and class privilege within the field of community development in East St. Louis. They subsequently worked with Ms. Davis over the next three years to design and offer more than a dozen courses for community leaders seeking to enhance their community organizing, planning, and development knowledge and skills in order to enable them to provide more skillful leadership of resident-led planning in their neighborhoods and throughout the city. Between 1996 and 2000, more than two hundred East St. Louis residents completed adult education classes in community planning and development offered through

ESLARP's Neighborhood College (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9: Ken Reardon co-teaching, along with Ms. Ceola Davis, the Neighborhood College's first course on direct action organizing.

Among the classes offered through this unique community/university education partnership were the following:

- Fundamentals of Direct Action Organizing
- Community Planning 101
- Urban Design for Beginners
- Basic Grantsmanship
- ABC's of Non-Profit Management
- Principles and Practice of Affordable Housing
- Community-Based Crime Prevention
- Urban Food Systems and Food Security

#### **Completing the New Model: One Size Does Not Fit All?**

When a cross-section of local leaders was asked what the most important contribution ESLARP made to the city on the project's tenth anniversary, the overwhelming majority of respondents identified the courses offered by the Neighborhood College as the most significant contribution UIUC had offered to advance resident-led change in the city. The importance local leaders attributed to the courses offered by the Neighborhood College, prompted ESLARP's leaders to incorporate the popular education

principles and practices embedded within the adult education courses offered through this unique social invention as the third element of their empowerment model of community planning.

During the coming years, this three-pronged approach to resident-led planning and development in East St. Louis produced a series of increasingly impressive community development accomplishments within the city culminating in the extension of a planned light rail line connecting Lambert International Airport and Downtown St. Louis into East St. Louis. Local leaders using the empowerment planning techniques they had acquired through ESLARP were able to pressure local, regional, and federal transportation officials to extend the train line across the river into East St. Louis significantly enhancing residents access to living wage jobs on the Missouri side of the river. Leveraging this massive public investment in mass transportation in East St. Louis made possible by their organizing and planning knowledge and skills, these leaders were able to recruit one of the nation's most highly respected affordable housing builders, Richard Baron, of McCormack, Baron, and Salazar to work with them in locating, designing, and constructing Parsons Place a 140-unit, mixed-income, mixed-finance residential development project which has been highly successful. More recently, the Sasone Development Company has taken advantage of Emerson Park's new commuter rail access and the success of the Parson's Place Project to construct a new four-story, mixed-use complex, called Jazz @ Winter Circle, which features 74 units of affordable senior housing, an attractive "small foot-print" neighborhood grocery featuring fresh foods, and a doctor's office.

During the past twenty-five years, ESLARP's Empowerment Approach to Community Planning has been successfully replicated in a number of economically distressed communities in the United States. Among these are Liberty, NY; New Brunswick, NJ; Memphis, TN and Charlotte, NC. The projects undertaken in these communities using an empowerment approach to community planning are in several important ways similar. First, they took place in urban communities that were severely distress where there was intense competition among local communities and institutions for limited public and private housing, economic, and community development investment. Second, these projects were undertaken in towns and cities where the political power needed to advance large-scale development projects was highly

concentrated in the hands of a small number of elites. Third, they took place within neighborhoods where the overwhelming majority of people engaged in local organizing, planning, and development activities differed substantially from the professional researchers and planners assisting them in terms of race, class, gender, and age (Fig. 10).

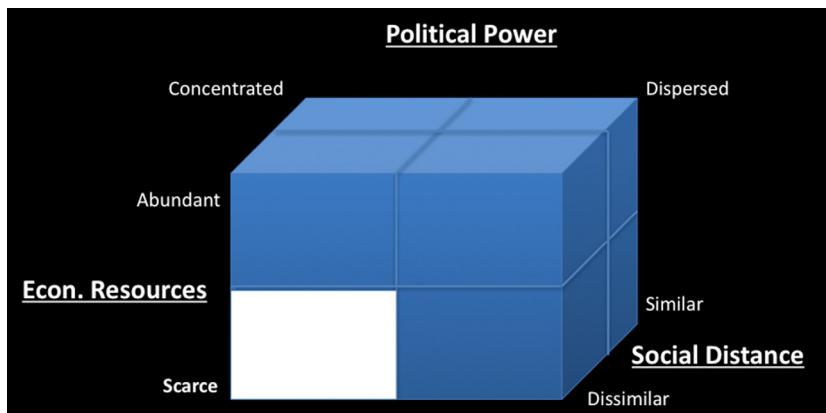


Fig. 10: Image showing alternative planning contexts in which professionals might work.

It appears as though the three elements of the empowerment approach to community planning, namely, participatory action research, direct action organizing, and popular education, are particularly well-suited to address the unique challenges confronting planners seeking to advance the advocacy planning and design efforts by poor and working-class communities in places with few resources, highly concentrated political power, and significant social distance separating those organizing for change and those planning professionals who are supporting them. In this coming years, additional low-income communities should be funded to pursue empowerment-based planning to determine whether or not this suggested relationship is true. If this is found to be the case, alternative models should be development to promote bottom-up planning and design in communities where existing conditions (economic resources, power concentration, and social distance) are different. Those alternative approaches to practice should then be effectively tested. Only in this way, can we hope to formulate an empirically-based approach to community planning practice that is sensitive to the conditions local activists

and professional planners confront. This will enable us to provide future community planners with a contingency theory of community planning practice that will empower them to adopt theoretical frameworks, analytical methods, and professional practices best suited to the conditions they confront.

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**Antonio Raciti** earned his Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning and Design at the University of Catania, Italy. His research interests focus on relational approaches to ecological planning and design. He has been working in partnership with several community organizations in Sicily (Italy), Memphis (TN, US), and Boston (MA, US). He is currently an assistant professor in the MS in Urban Planning and Community Development Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. [antonio.raciti@umb.edu](mailto:antonio.raciti@umb.edu)

**Kenneth M. Reardon** earned his Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning at Cornell University. He served as the faculty director of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP) from 1990 to 1999. He is currently a Professor and Director in the MS in Urban Planning and Community Development Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. [kenneth.reardon@umb.edu](mailto:kenneth.reardon@umb.edu)

**'Art Barricades' and 'Poetic Legitimation' for squatted spaces:  
Metropoliz, Rome and Cavallerizza Reale, Turin**  
Francesca Bragaglia, Karl Krähmer

*"[T]he culture that is potentially powerful is not necessarily the culture that those in cultural power think will or should be powerful."*  
(Lippard, 1984: 4)

### **Abstract**

Can art legitimise squatting? We examine this question through two case studies: Metropoliz in Rome – an old industrial building occupied by a multiethnic community – and Cavallerizza Reale in Turin – a historical complex occupied by active citizens. Both experiences use art, and the capital of attention and market value associated to it, as a tool to protect themselves from eviction. But art has become in the last decades both an economic good in which to invest capital and an instrument of neoliberal and post-fordist urban policies, linked to concepts such as Florida's "creative class". Now, members of precisely this class, who supposedly benefit from this model, engage, alongside others, in urban resistance. Is this use of art an intelligent way to exploit its market value to protect projects aiming at the right to the city? Or does it mean to succumb, at last, to the dominant creative city model? The paper aims to investigate this complex issue, debated also among the activists themselves.

L'arte può legittimare le occupazioni illegali? L'articolo affronta la questione attraverso due casi studio: Metropoliz a Roma – ex-edificio industriale occupato da una comunità multietnica – e la Cavallerizza Reale a Torino, complesso storico occupato da cittadini attivi. Entrambe le esperienze utilizzano l'arte e l'attenzione pubblica e il valore di mercato associati ad essa come strumento per proteggersi dal rischio di sgombero. L'arte però è diventata negli ultimi decenni anche un bene economico in cui investire e uno strumento di politiche urbane neoliberiste e post-fordiste, legate a concetti come quello di "creative class" di Florida. Ora proprio alcuni membri della classe creativa, che avrebbero dovuto beneficiare di questo modello, si impegnano in esperienze di attivismo urbano. Usare l'arte in questa forma può essere un modo per sfruttare il suo valore di mercato per tutelare progetti mirati al diritto alla città o significa piuttosto soccombere al modello dominante?

**Parole Chiave:** squatting; arte; diritto alla città; creative class; auto-organizzazione  
**Keywords:** squatting; art; right to the city; creative class; self-organization

### **Introduction**

Today many bottom-up and autonomous re-appropriation practices arise in reaction to the world economic and financial

crisis related to neoliberal and austerity policies. As Moulaert (2010: 4) points out «the mechanisms of crisis and recovery both provoke and accelerate social innovation». Indeed, the crisis has antithetical consequences: on the one hand, neoliberal urban policies result in the exclusion of parts of the society from the «right to the city» (Lefebvre, 1968). On the other hand, the increasing urban inequalities are the catalyst for the (re) emergence of new bottom-up and tailor-made urban practices, aiming at the re-appropriation of spaces and rights, that can be defined as «right-to-the-city-movements» (Harvey, 2012; Bialski et al., 2015). Among these practices, squatting actions play a pivotal role (Piazza and Martínez López, 2017).

The connection between art and squatting is certainly not new (Novy and Colomb, 2012; Prujit, 2013; Cossu, 2014; Moore and Smart, 2015). Squats, not being legitimised by law, need other means to legitimise their existence (Prujit, 2013). What we enquire here is legitimisation through art. As many examples highlight (e.g. Uitermark, 2004 about Amsterdam), squats related to art and culture often have better possibilities to be broadly accepted than other typologies. This can be seen as related to the context of the hegemonic creative city paradigm – popularized by Richard Florida – in which art and culture have become mainstream instruments for urban development and competitiveness policies. Indeed, cities increasingly try to attract the 'creative class', but in a logic, that – as in the case of other types of neoliberal policies – chooses some creatives and excludes the rest (Harvie, 2013). This leads to the paradox that parts of the creative class frequently oppose creative city policies, operating for example in squats (Harvey, 2012; Novy and Colomb, 2012; Cossu, 2014), as in the cases of Metropoliz and Cavallerizza Reale that we will analyse here. At the same time, these illegal bottom-up practices may actually be appreciated by the creative city policies as augmenting the competitiveness of the respective city, leading to a complex dialectical interaction between radical opposition and potential co-optation (Uitermark, 2004).

In Italy, neoliberal urban austerity policies have been widely applied, especially consequent to the ongoing financial and sovereign debt crisis (Annunziata and Lees, 2016). One of the outcomes is a considerable mismatch between housing supply and demand, leading to a 'housing emergency' strongly felt in the cities of Turin (Caruso, 2016) and Rome (Galdini, 2017) where

our case studies are located. On the other hand, as elsewhere, a response to the urban economic crisis has been attempted with creative city policies. In Turin, a strong discourse is present that originated in the crisis of Fordism beginning in the 80's (Vanolo, 2015); a stable urban regime has been established, in which art and cultural policies play a central role (Belligni and Ravazzi, 2013). In Rome, this is perhaps less explicit, but there is of course a millennial tradition of art-related policies. In both cases these policies tend to be top-down and focused on big events and museums.

Both in Rome (Mudu and Rossini, 2018; Olsen et al., 2018) and in Turin (Berzano and Gallini, 2000), as in most of Italy, there is a considerable squatting tradition linked to the social centres that emerged in the 70's and 80's (Fucolli, 2015). Today, two typologies seem to emerge:

(1) Illegal housing occupations as an answer to the housing crisis – corresponding to Pruit's (2013) deprivation-based configuration – as is the case of Metropoliz.

(2) Culturally focused occupations related to the concept of 'urban commons' (Bailey and Mattei, 2013): e.g. Teatro Valle in Rome, MACAO in Milan, exAsilo Filangeri in Naples and Cavallerizza Reale in Turin.

The specific cases we chose to study, Metropoliz and Cavallerizza, are united by the fact that art constitutes a central factor of legitimization as much as for the possibility of free artistic experimentation and political expression free from market constraints, be it for housing or the commons.

In this paper we will shortly discuss the history of the two squats in order to define the context, but without the aim to disentangle their complex internal developments. Rather, the focus will be on how their use of art influences their external perception and public acceptance.

### **Metropoliz: an art barricade<sup>1</sup>**

The building that once was the Florucci slaughterhouse, on Via Prenestina 913 at the eastern edge of Rome, now houses Metropoliz. The squat represents, simultaneously, an expression and a possible (autonomous) solution to some of the major

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<sup>1</sup> Sources of this paragraph are: an interview to Giorgio de Finis (art director of the MAAM) on 6/11/2017, scientific and newspaper articles and visits to the place. Photos are by the author.

issues of contemporary cities: the reclamation of brownfield sites, the right to the city and housing, and the need to define an inter-cultural and inclusive society. Indeed, since the days of the occupation initiated by BPM<sup>2</sup> activists on March 2nd, 2009, Metropoliz has been made up of families of highly heterogeneous origins (from Italy, Morocco, Eritrea, Tunisia, Peru, Ukraine, Haiti and Sudan). After eviction from a nearby occupation, some Roma families joined Metropoliz, making it the first squat that includes a Roma community. Nevertheless, this is not the only distinction of 'this city within a city' which today houses around 200 people. As the BPM activist Paolo Di Vetta (2015) highlights: Metropoliz's experience is original because of its location in a former factory. Right-to-housing activists usually look for buildings or spaces such as schools or offices as they are more easily converted into apartments. Instead, the idea of occupying such a large space as the Fiorucci Factory, is a more complex and innovative action to start 'creative mechanisms' that other kind of spaces do not allow. In fact, since the very beginning of the occupation, the BPM activists felt strongly about the idea of creating a «*Pidgin City*» (Città Meticcia) (Careri, Goñi Mazzitelli, 2012), a microcosm capable of representing not only a housing solution for the many families who live there, but also the beginning of a new multi-cultural experience.



Fig 1.The entrance of Metropoliz

2 The Blocchi Precari Metropolitani is a non-institutional and political organization that actively works in Rome to respond to the problem of housing emergency



Fig 2. An example of self-organization:Piazza Perù

Unlike most residential occupations that often retain the name of the abandoned building, a key act was giving the space a new name. The name, chosen by the inhabitants and BPM activists, was inspired by both the Fritz Lang film and the urban dimension that the space suggested. This act of re-signification from the «former Fiorucci Factory» to «Metropoliz» was extremely important in the communication process of Metropoliz to the rest of the city to show that the space was no longer an urban void, but a container of a new and self-organised form of living.

The driving idea of the activists was to redefine a space previously perceived to be impregnable from the outside, proving it to be accessible and relevant for the entire city and not just those occupying it.

Art, in this sense, plays a crucial role in building bridges between the inside and the outside through mutual knowledge and a shared re-appropriation of the space.

The relationship between Metropoliz and art started in 2011, when anthropologist and film-maker Giorgio De Finis and film-maker Fabrizio Boni proposed to the inhabitants a project entitled 'Space Metropoliz', consisting in: a short film and docu-film, an experiment of requalification and participatory urban design, an artistic installation, a cycle of shared creative workshops, an anthropological research, a temporary space

for art.

'Space Metropoliz' brought a large number of artists, scholars, musicians, researchers to Metropoliz and, at the same time, catalysed the media's attention. In 2014 the resulting docu-film *Space Metropoliz* aired on the TV channel Sky Arte. Looking for 'Space Metropoliz' on Google, the media effect of the project is clear: before the release of the documentary there were only a couple of results about the occupation of Metropoliz, now there are about 58,000.

After the success of 'Space Metropoliz', Giorgio De Finis was asked to stay and become the artistic producer of Metropoliz. His next project was the 'Museo Dell'Altro e dell'Altrove' (MAAM, 'Museum of the Other and the Elsewhere of Metropoliz'), a museum of contemporary art in the spaces of the factory open to the public; this was unusual as spaces occupied for housing are usually closed to outsiders. The name, MAAM, was conceived as a mockery of contemporary museum acronyms, and more specifically the Roman ones such as MAXXI, MACRO; indeed, according to De Finis, the idea was to demonstrate that a museum could be created without any kind of public or private funding (all MAAM works are loans or gifts). The creation of MAAM intended to spur, from the outskirts of the city, the progressive emergence of a neoliberal paradigm dominant in art (Harvie, 2013), often represented by the institutional museums. Since its opening 5 years ago, more than 300 more or less famous artists have been involved with MAAM, donating and loaning their works (currently around 500).

Among the main goals that MAAM has defined from the very beginning of its creation are: (1) create a barricade of art to defend the occupation and its inhabitants: the works attached to the walls and structures of the factory represent rows of shields lined up; (2) avoid or reduce the 'enclave effect' of Metropoliz because of its need to protect itself behind a closed gate: the attractive power of the MAAM collection, open to the public every Saturday, creates an uninterrupted flow of visitors, resulting in a dialogue with the rest of the city and a 'media support' for the occupation; (3) propose and experiment another model of what a museum can be: an 'inhabited museum' cross-pollinated by life; (4) produce a choral work, praising the value of (bio)diversity in all its forms.



Fig 3. Stefania Fabrizi, I guerrieri della luce, 2013 – MAAM, Roma

Thanks to the works and its original way of 'doing art', MAAM has today achieved strong national and international media attention. The keyword 'MAAM Roma' brings up 136,000 results on Google. Newspapers such as *The Guardian*, and specialized magazines such as *Artribune* and *InsideArt* have featured articles on Metropoliz and its museum. In addition to the 'media legitimization' of MAAM and Metropoliz, an implicit 'institutional legitimization' has also been established by some institutional museums such as the Pistoletto Foundation and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Rivoli, who also donated and loaned some artworks to MAAM. Another crucial stepping stone in the process of legitimization of Metropoliz through art was the visit of Luca Bergamo, the current Councillor for Culture and Deputy Mayor of the city of Rome; he defined MAAM «as a model to preserve»<sup>3</sup>. More recently, De Finis was called upon to rethink and direct MACRO, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome. According to De Finis, this is potentially a big victory for Metropoliz, the MAAM and the legitimization of both, but «it will also be a big challenge to get two pirate ships to sail together».

The MAAM and its art collection has proved to be both a cultural

<sup>3</sup> La Repubblica.it 10/12/2016.

and a political tool in order to gain legitimization and claim the «right to the city and a right to rights» (Holston, 2009: 245) for the inhabitants of Metropoliz.

### **The legitimization of Metropoliz through art production**

What distinguishes Metropoliz from other 'art squats' is that art in this case has been used as an instrument to protect demands that were primarily social and political: the fight against social exclusion, the right to housing and to the city. Metropoliz is not an 'art squat', it is a housing occupation in which «art has been an instrument of political communication» (Ravazzini, Saraceno, 2012: 160). As clearly explained by De Finis in a recent interview:<sup>4</sup>

«If you throw 200 people, including 80 minors, to sleep out in the streets, it will not be seen as a big problem and you will get two lines in the newspapers saying 'beautification of the neighbourhood has started', but if the owners of the place destroy 500 works of art with a significant commercial value, they will be portrayed like ISIS or Talibans who are destroying Buddhas in Afghanistan».

This is a clear result of the role that art has assumed today and its huge market value, which in this case is used as a tool to protect Metropoliz's occupation. The pivotal role of art in protecting the space and in creating consensus around it, is absolutely distinct from its history. Not surprisingly, it is the most enduring housing occupation in Rome existing today (Grazioli, 2017); moreover, since the factory has become a museum, there have been no attempts of eviction. Thus, art has contributed to create a positive image of Metropoliz.

However, as mentioned in the introduction, it should be stressed that, according to the taxonomy of the forms of urban squatting as proposed by Hans Pruit (2013), Metropoliz can be considered deprivation-based squatting, characterized by a clear distinction between activists and occupants. As a matter of fact, the activists of the BPMs, who made the occupation possible, and De Finis' art-related projects, which have substantially contributed to the survival of Metropoliz, come from outside. The success of Metropoliz is therefore the result of a mix of endogenous resources, but also a series of dynamics that have led to a concentration of considerable exogenous resources.

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<sup>4</sup> Atlas Obscura. «An Abandoned Roman Salami Factory Becomes an Illegal, Inhabited Museum». 24/10/2017 (accessed 19/11/ 2017).

De Finis' direction of MACRO, as he himself recognises, is opening up new, potentially contradictory, scenarios for Metropoliz. In the immediate future, MAAM will certainly gain visibility and approval, but in the long run it risks becoming meaningless as it will no longer be the only museum in Rome to offer unconventional artistic proposal. Located in the city centre of Rome with better equipped space, MACRO clearly has more visibility than MAAM, thus the goal and the challenge for De Finis is to create a strong synergy between the two structures so that both MAAM and Metropoliz can take advantage of this achievement.

### **Cavallerizza Reale<sup>5</sup>**

Cavallerizza Reale is a building complex located in the city centre of Turin. Its construction started in the Baroque Age as a part of the Savoia's Zona di Comando and is as such part of the UNESCO world heritage site 'Residenze Sabaude'.



Fig 4. «Cavallerizza is for everybody» at the squat's entrance

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the buildings were badly maintained and physical degradation proceeded.

<sup>5</sup> Sources of this paragraph are: an interview to a group of four occupants (Marco Rezoagli, Fiorella, Luisa Valente, Luciano) on 13/11/2017; the author's experience as part of the project in the first one and a half years and newspaper articles. Photos are from Cavallerizza's Facebook: [www.facebook.com/cavallerizzairreale](http://www.facebook.com/cavallerizzairreale).

In 2007 the Municipality bought it from the state to transform it into a big museum (the project failed). Due to its high debt, in 2010 the Municipality sold Cavallerizza Reale to CCT s.r.l., a company owned by the Municipality itself, with the goal to alienate municipal real estate. Until now Cavallerizza has not found a buyer (see Coscia and Pano, 2012 for more details).

In 2013 the municipal theatre “Teatro Stabile Torino”, that used a part of the space, announced to move out. This decision led to a wider debate on Cavallerizza’s future, which favoured the emergence of a citizens’ movement, opposed to the Municipality’s intention to sell the buildings to private investors. On May 23, 2014 a public assembly decided to occupy.

The movement’s main goal has always been to build a ‘Cavallerizza for everybody’, a public and open common. As a way to reach this objective ‘here and now’ all kinds of events have been organized: political meetings (not only related to the Cavallerizza itself), parties, public debates, workshops, courses, guided tours, calls to clean up the space, but also artistic events, such as concerts, performances, exhibitions. Artists have been present from the very beginning of the occupation in the highly heterogeneous group of squatters.



Fig 5. An assembly.

One of the biggest events of Cavallerizza is ‘Here’, organized yearly since 2016: a one week festival, mainly consisting in an exhibition

that involves hundreds of artists. The double scope of 'Here' is the provide free spaces for art production as well as making accessible the upper floors, initially full of garbage, indeed, every artist has to clean the room assigned to exhibit his/her work. The press echo of 'Here' has been widespread and very positive, but mainly focused on the high number of artists involved and the cleaning of the upper floors in the first year. The Municipality – under its new administration, elected in 2016 – even asked to extend the event to other parts of the city. An interesting aspect of 'Here' is that the presence of famous artists, e.g. Michelangelo Pistoletto and Piero Gilardi, has not been particularly stressed, neither by the occupants, nor by the press.

In Cavallerizza as in Metropoliz art plays a central role, however some crucial differences can be identified. Beyond being situated in the city centre and in a building of recognized architectural and historical value, the occupation of Cavallerizza can be considered, following Prujit (2013), 'conservational', but also 'entrepreneurial squatting', as a project that offers a wide array of cultural, but also social services to the public. Metropoliz, on the other hand, can be described in Prujit's terms as 'deprivation-based squatting'. While in Metropoliz 'artivists' (Sandoval and Latorre, 2007) and inhabitants are well-distinct, in the case of Cavallerizza no separation can be found between occupants and activists - 'squatting' in Cavallerizza means using the space in many ways: only a few people live there, mainly as 'guardians'. The internal organisation is based on a system of assemblies and working groups; several of the latter are oriented at different artistic disciplines.

In our interview with a group of Cavallerizza's artivists, Marco Rezoagli stressed that the absence of bureaucracy plays a fundamental role for Cavallerizza, stimulating artistic production in a non-commercial environment, where free experimentation is possible. Luisa Valente adds that it gives space to young artists, who usually in Turin have no places to work. In Cavallerizza artists have the possibility to contribute to their income – living there, saving on rent, and with visitors' contributions.

For Cavallerizza it has been possible to attempt a quantification of the effectiveness of the approach of legitimization through art. We analysed the articles referring to Cavallerizza (56 in total) that appeared on the newspapers *La Repubblica* and *La Stampa* from the beginning of the occupation until the end of October 2017,

dividing them into four categories. We then assigned a value to the tone of the title and the text body (-2 to +2). Obviously, this evaluation is very subjective and might potentially be biased by our initial hypothesis. Still we preferred this simple approach, because it allowed us to use our context knowledge about the press and codes of language in Turin and give a straightforward answer to our research question. Both authors conducted the evaluation independently from each other and encouragingly the comparison of results showed very little differences (the numbers presented here are averages of our two evaluations).

The most numerous category is that of articles about the official plans for Cavallerizza, which is not surprising, considering the size and central location of the complex. The second most numerous category refers to the occupation in general terms, their political requests, etc. Articles about artistic events organized by the occupants are also frequent, and several of them are placed in the parts of the newspapers speaking about cultural events in Turin, showing that Cavallerizza insofar is generally 'accepted' as a cultural venue and actor. Finally, there are very few articles that refer to Cavallerizza as a venue for the organization of political events (although this happens quite frequently) and they are essentially about the protests against a G7 in summit in Turin in 2017, organized in Cavallerizza by an external group.

Fig 6: Tone of press on the squatted Cavallerizza Reale

(articles from "La Repubblica" and "La Stampa" from the beginning of the occupation until october 30, 2017)

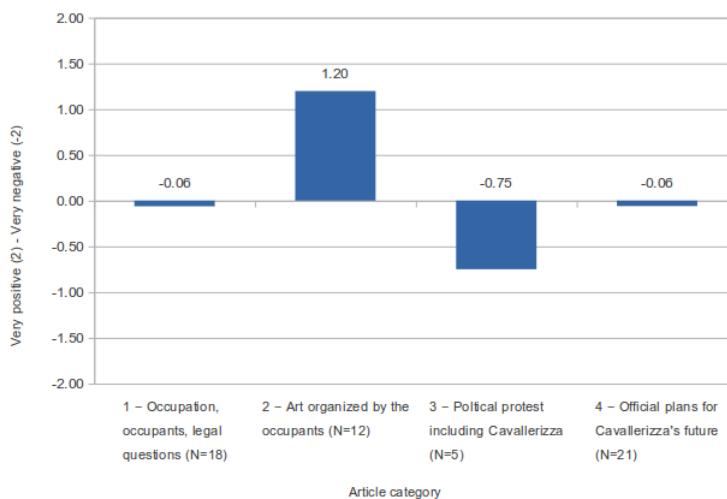


Fig 6. Tone of press on the squatted Cavallerizza Reale

Results show (see fig. 6) that indeed there is a clear tendency to speak positively about the occupation when it acts as a promoter of culture and arts, while general opinions about the occupation vary widely (leading to a neutral average) and are clearly negative when it acts as a stage for political opposition. Interestingly, in the articles about the official plans for Cavallerizza, the occupation is considered only marginally and 10 articles do not mention it at all. Where mentioned, it tends to be depicted simply as an obstacle to the Municipality's plans and as a certainly temporary presence. This changes with the new city government, since summer 2016, which has a rather positive view of the occupation that the newspapers reflect.

Interesting is the comparison of the perception of art and political activism: art appears to have a sort of 'sacred stance', considered uncritically as positive – rarely, if ever, in the articles considerations about the quality of the works appear. There is rather an enthusiasm about quantity. Intentions of the artworks, often very critical about our society, are usually not reported (this point is not seen as problematic by our interviewees, though). On the other hand, explicit political critique and activism is often not considered and if, in the case of G7 protests, represented negatively.

Cavallerizza, as well as Metropoliz, has been recognized in several cases by cultural institutions. It has been inserted in a world map of independent art spaces by MAXXI, there has been a collaboration with the *Pistoletto Foundation* and the festivals *Interplay* and *SeeYouSound* featured Cavallerizza as a venue. These festivals are financed by institutions, such as *Compagnia di San Paolo*, that also have financial interests in the case.

Our interviewees share the view that art is fundamental for Cavallerizza's legitimization; Marco Rezoagli: «total and fundamental [...] without artistic and cultural activity, there would be no Cavallerizza, it wouldn't exist». And: «Poetic legitimization: when beauty is evident, other forms of legitimization, e.g. juridical, are unnecessary».

Asked if there is a risk of de-politicization focusing on art, he answered that from his point of view the production of art in a squatted space is a political act in itself – creating «a new aesthetic of protest» that does not need translation. Furthermore, while art and culture certainly cannot reach everybody, they may be more inclusive than traditional forms of expressing protest that only

speak to a small part of the population.



Fig 7. A cinema night

On the other hand, he referred to the challenge of uniting 'in favour of' something, rather than 'against' something, which he considers much more difficult and therefore inevitably creates a 'filter', reducing in this sense the project's inclusiveness. In fact, there are many discussions among the squatters about the way in which Cavallerizza should engage in political action.

Currently, Cavallerizza is starting, in partial (and still uncertain) agreement with the Municipality a process to elaborate a 'civic use' regulation; a form of legalization developed in Naples

that should allow the place to maintain its informality. Our interviewees identified this as the main challenge: how to consolidate the experience without killing the process of creativity and experimentation in Cavallerizza by an excess of rules and bureaucracy.

It should be noted that Cavallerizza does not operate exclusively as an art space; there are other important projects, such as the creation of a 'Chamber of Precarious Work', aiming at giving a voice to a category of workers not being represented anywhere else. It appears to be a fundamental fact that art here does not just protect itself, but also a non-commercial place of free political debate and expression in the centre of Turin.

### Conclusions

Two ways of how art can help squats to resist can be identified in the discourses of Metropoliz and Cavallerizza. Giorgio de Finis talks about art as a 'barricade' because of the sheer economic market value it has. Marco Rezoagli states that the idealistic and symbolic value of art can contribute to a 'poetic legitimization' – De Finis also refers to this when commenting that destroying a place like MAAM could be compared to the Taliban demolishing Afghanistan's Buddhas.

Moreover, these two visions are not independent from the type of art. For the 'barricade': visual art that is physically tied to the space, i.e. painted on its walls, is probably more effective. While MAAM is living and vibrant, it acts as a permanent museum. Cavallerizza, on the other hand, is a place of creation by artists who are also occupants, where the presence of artworks is more or less temporary, be it in the form of performances or exhibitions. This cannot be seen as independent from the physical and legal circumstances: Metropoliz is an abandoned factory with no recognized architectural value, Cavallerizza is a UNESCO world heritage site. Furthermore, Metropoliz is on private and Cavallerizza is on (semi-)public property, with – potentially – more opportunities for dialogue.

These two approaches of 'artivism' have in common to be amplified through both media and institutional legitimization. In both cases, artistic intervention leads to a positive media resonance and to a recognition by public cultural institutions – even where other, directly responsible public institutions do not accept the projects.

As much as the approach of legitimation through art seems to be fruitful, some critical aspects may be identified. It seems to be much easier to legitimate a place with art than with political requests going beyond the mainstream. Art's critical content, though, appears to be seldom considered by the wider public, which rather sees it as a form of decoration. Consequently, a potential risk of a strong focus on art – if this art does not manage to be perceived with its critical content – is to lack political 'edge'. In fact, in both cases initially there was a component of occupants and activists with a stronger focus on social and political conflict which, while it has not disappeared, certainly lost visibility. Uitermark points out another problem:

«What we see is the emergence of a movement meritocracy: the way in which the local polity delivers incentives follows an increasingly discriminatory pattern, allowing some movements [related to the arts] access to the governance structures while at the same time withholding others» (Uitermark, 2004: 697).

Also in our cases there is a potential issue of elitism, even though this is not a straightforward assertion. While certainly most activists of Cavallerizza are in some way 'intellectuals', it is also true that most of them live in economically precarious situations and their intellectual influence is very limited. Thus, even if they have received higher education and are in some way creative, can they be considered elite (see also Harvie, 2013)? Benefits to a wider community seem to be present, as the users and visitors of the space come from diversified social groups. How representative for the society they are would be a stimulating question for further research.

In the case of Metropoliz, on the contrary, there is a clearer distinction between activists and the marginal population that lives in the squat, but it seems quite clear that the artistic work the – in some way elitist – activists do, brings benefits to the inhabitants.

Beyond these inherent differences, a crucial issue for both these occupied spaces is to balance artistic production with political and social action. Indeed, one of the possible risks by gaining legitimacy through art in the context of a hegemonic creative city rhetoric is to be co-opted by this dominant paradigm (Uitermark, 2004). The challenge is to 'piratize' this rhetoric and use the legitimization gained through art for scopes other than capital accumulation.

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**Francesca Bragaglia** is a PhD candidate in Urban and Regional Development at the Politecnico di Torino, where she deals with issues related to urban regeneration, temporary uses and self-organization in cities. She has collaborated with the scientific journal “Urban Research and Practice” and with the Urban Center of Turin. [francesca.bragaglia@polito.it](mailto:francesca.bragaglia@polito.it).

**Karl Krähmer** is a master graduate in Spatial Planning at the Politecnico di Torino. Researcher and activist in (urban) social movements with interests in social and political change, commons and public space, spatial justice, ecological sustainability and their interrelationship, as well as degrowth. [karlk@posteo.net](mailto:karlk@posteo.net).

## New dynamics in citizen re-appropriation strategies of collective urban spaces. Case of Madrid

Juan Arana

### Abstract

L'impegno dei cittadini per riappropriarsi degli spazi collettivi ha significato, per lungo tempo, spazi utopici di resistenza, un rifugio, una comunità autonoma che opera indipendentemente dal sistema. Questa visione sembra sottendere un approccio co-produttivo, nella letteratura come nella prassi. Lo studio intende esplorare gli effetti sullo spazio urbano delle iniziative di coproduzione nello spazio collettivo e le trasformazioni intervenute nei rapporti fra i diversi attori. Prendiamo in esame due progetti profondamente diversi, avviati di recente nella periferia di Madrid, che rappresentano la nuova ondata di azioni partecipative nel contesto cittadino. I casi analizzati evidenziano come l'incentivazione alla partecipazione promossa dalle amministrazioni locali sia supportata da forme di attivismo locale esistenti e, al contempo, abbia permesso la riduzione degli aspetti politici delle pratiche. Lo studio traccia un quadro generale dell'attivismo urbano madrileno. Ne emerge, a nostro avviso, una rete spaziale fittamente ramificata ed eterogenea, in grado di sviluppare un lavoro congiunto e di costruire spazi collettivi. Nonostante le contraddizioni che hanno accompagnato il percorso, questo è un momento di transizione, in bilico fra speranze e incertezze.

Citizen engagement in re-appropriation of collective spaces has long meant utopian spaces of resistance, a refuge or an autonomous community working aside of the system. This vision has allegedly geared towards a co-production approach both in literature and praxis. The aim of this study is to examine the effects on the urban space of co-production initiatives in the collective urban space and the changes of the relations among different actors. We examine two different recent projects in the outskirts of Madrid that represent a new wave of participative actions in the city. These cases show how the emphasis in participation from the administration partially rests on existing local activisms and at the same time, downplays the political aspect of the practices. The study reviews the background of Madrid urban activism. We find a dense heterogeneous spatial network acting together and producing collective space. Despite the contradictions that emerge during the process, the moment is one of transition with both hope and uncertainties.

**Parole Chiave:** coproduzione; beni comuni urbani; spazio pubblico.

**Keywords:** co-production; urban commons; public space.

### Introduction

Walking through Madrid, Berlin, Rome or any city in Europe, certain spots and landscapes strike us for presenting what seems to be an order of their own: the painted murals and the abundance of signs on the facade of a re-appropriated building, the handmade

furniture in an otherwise empty urban void, or the wild vegetation growing behind the ramshackle fence of a community garden. Despite the apparently chaotic character of such spaces, we can usually guess if there is a collective activity going on. We may be attracted or repelled but we can recognise the traces of a community organizing its own space in the margins of the public space. Such urban landscapes are the product of a heterogeneous cosmos of collective territories of participation. This spatial order does not belong to the administration planned public realm and is not usually part of urban design disciplines, but it takes place within them. It is not part of business and market spaces, but it has a role in the local economy.

Re-appropriation spaces by the citizens may be participated or even be promoted by the institutions as it is the case of recent examples in Madrid. How do different co-produced city-making practices impact on the neighbourhood space? How does the way they are generated affect the resulting practices?

Different narratives are associated with the spatial strategies of appropriation and self-management by citizen initiatives. The paradigm of an autonomous space is epitomized by the Temporary Autonomous Zone, an image of a decentralized system of networked liberated islands (Bey, 1991), places of resistance working as heterotopic representations of an ideal society (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986). But negative traditional utopian spaces may be marked by authoritarianism and exclusion (Harvey, 2000: 239). The concept of “uncontaminated enclaves of emancipation” is questioned (Stavrides, 2015) and gradually replaced by ideas of interaction and coexistence of different and often conflicting worlds. The notion of civic spaces as culmination of aspirations for direct democracy is problematized as a negation of conflict and an idealization of public space (Delgado, 2011). Citizen self-organization does not only address necessities of the residents or fill the gaps left by a withdrawing state but also the collective aspiration of urban values and better life quality through involvement with the environment. The self-managed and co-produced space should be understood as a meeting point for the different actors, a battle ground from which ideas and proposals may emerge, a place from which to reconstruct the political sphere (Cellamare, 2014).

In a simple but useful reading, public sphere has been understood as divided into three sectors: the public administration, the market

and what could be called the communitarian sector (Alguacil, 2000). The spaces in the city that would correspond to this political realm would not necessarily be the same as state-managed public spaces nor market-managed collective spaces but would be a third type of space that has received many names: co-produced space, the Commons, collaborative space, counter-publics, re-appropriated space (Fraser, 1990). This *third space* would not be a substitute for the state, nor an incompatible alternative to the market, nor an isolated, utopian space. The *spaces of participation* would be conceived rather as a liminal territory between administration, market and citizens (Stavrides, 2015). A non-excluding approach would consider re-appropriated, self-managed spaces of participation as a necessary element that critically complements the policies of the state and challenges market appropriations but does not pretend to be a substitute for either of them. This third dimension of the public corresponds to direct participation in the production of the environment. The fundamental characteristics of this realm are not just to supply services complementing the state's function but rather its capacity to unveil necessities and collectively address issues (Hernández Aja, 2003).

### **Emerging forms of activism**

#### *Social Urban Movements and Grassroots Initiatives*

There has been in recent years a transition from Social Urban Movements towards Grassroots Initiatives, both in the European and the Spanish context (Stigendal, 2010; Diaz Orueta and Lourés Seoane, 2018). Between both strategies, there is a twist from mobilization against the system to mobilization for a common good. Social Urban Movements refer to collectives such as Reclaim the Streets in UK in the 1990's who demanded their own space, denouncing and openly challenging urban planning, regulations and administration politics. Social Urban Movements in Madrid as the squat movement and the neighbour's associations in the 1980's had an enormous significance in more recent urban activisms (Carmona, 2007).

Today's grassroots initiatives focus rather on the solution of specific urban problems. These initiatives can overlap with the administration and the economic space, including entrepreneurship or the creation of economic activities (Stigendal, 2010). The term *initiative* implies capacity of action, autonomy

and the constant evolution of the action. At the same time grassroots refers to a bottom-up direction of the action. The origin is context-related, and it suggests the stakeholders have a "weak institutional position" (Fraisse, 2011). Grassroots initiatives have gradually been integrated in public enforced actions and urban development. At the same time political contestation has sometimes been minimized or discouraged (García, 2006; Taylor, 2007).

The emerging forms of organization have been defined as *local welfare systems*, referring to those mechanisms that consist of a combination of formal and informal services (Stigendal, 2010) or *multi-stakeholder coalitions* (Fraisse, 2011). The structure of the initiative consists of a wide collaboration among public stakeholders, public institutions and private actors. As we will see in the case study, we can find organizations of different collectives where the relation among them is mediated by actors from public institutions. The agenda is managed by the participant stakeholders through an array of formal/informal strategies. The common goals that maintains the system together are the management of space and resources, the access to them and the efforts to give visibility to demands and necessities in the community. Coexistence of formal (institutional) and informal actors is obviously not straightforward and there is a necessarily fragile equilibrium of forces and interests.

### **Evolution of Social Urban Movements in Madrid**

The antecedents of contemporary urban activisms in Madrid can be traced to the times before the democracy. Two movements are especially relevant in this context: neighbour's associations and occupied social centres. In recent times, the real state crisis of 2008 and the austerity politics caused a situation of social unrest. Movement 15M (May 15) in 2011 was the name for the massive occupation of squares originated in Madrid central Puerta del Sol and subsequent social and political upheavals in Spain amidst the international *take the square* movements. This event is also critical to understand today's boom of participation and collaborative processes in the city.

#### *Neighbour's movements*

The historic neighbour's associations are still a key actor in

today's re-appropriation initiatives. The generation of people that fought for dignified housing and basic neighbourhood services during the 1960's in Madrid is now still active and they have a leading role in associative movements and social initiatives. This fact is somehow contradictory with the emphasis given in academic contexts to the empowerment of citizens brought about by new information technologies. An older generation of practitioners with a strong sense of solidarity was at the core of the 15M movement. It is a heterogenic collective who started neighbour's associations at a time when they were banned. With deep mistrust for any administration, they have at the same time a very pragmatic approach.

The wave of immigrants from the country side during the decades of the 1950's and the 1960's concentrated in the periphery of Madrid. Informal settlements, shanty towns, various housing programs and pre-existing villages became the origin of contemporary neighbourhoods. Basic services often relied on self-organization (Carmona, 2007). The neighbour's association movement started in the informal settlements. One of the residents of those days refers that the self-construction of dwellings needed a collective force to put the structure up overnight and thus avoid the police. Early resistance practices, crystalized in the first social movements, with a strong local character and neighbourhood identity. The FRAVM (Federation of Neighbour's Associations of Madrid) was legalized in 1977. In 1979 the Communist Party and the Socialist Party won the local elections, marking the end of the first cycle of social movements in the neighbourhoods.

### *Self-Managed Occupied Social Centres*

The squat movement in Madrid is connected to the underground Punk scene. In 1985 an abandoned building in Malasaña neighbourhood was occupied for socio-cultural activities by the collective KOKA (Kolektivo Okupantes de la calle Amparo). The occupation lasted only 10 days, but it marked the beginning of occupied social centres in Madrid (Carmona, 2007). All through the 1990's the movement had important bastions as the *Laboratorios*. Place attachment was very present from the beginning, stressing the aspect of transforming the city. Occupied social centres became a key element of social innovation, housing various activities and giving room to resistance movements. Some of the occupied centres achieved in time recognition from the

Municipality. In 2013 the conservative administration conceded to the Social Centre Seco after twenty-three years of existence the use of part of a cultural centre.

### *Experts involvement*

The burst of the speculative bubble with the 2008 crisis, had an enormous impact on the city social unrest (Arana, 2014). Between 2009 and 2011 several self-managed collective spaces emerged in Madrid. There were re-appropriated urban voids as *Plaza de la Cebada* or *Esto es una Plaza* and the self-managed art centre, *Tabacalera*. Through struggle and mobilization some of these spaces managed to obtain some form of permission or agreement with public institutions (Gomez Nieto, 2015; Walliser, 2013).

Many of these initiatives had a strong involvement of artists and especially architects' collectives from the start. These groups produced a conceptual change for the profession. Transformation of public spaces and innovative solutions for citizen participation became prominent issues in architecture discourse. Projects as *Cinema Usera*, led by architects collective *Todo por la Praxis*, mixing design, reuse, participation and self-construction of urban elements and are born from those experiences.

### *15M and municipal elections 2015*

Three years after the beginning of the crisis, Movement 15M was a big catalyser for many disperse emancipatory struggles nationwide (Janoschka and Mateos, 2015). The movement was not only driven by citizen complains as could be assumed given the name *Los Indignados*, but it was also very proactive. In the intense months that followed, debates took place across Madrid in multiple Neighbourhood Assemblies that spread from a central Sol Assembly in *Puerta del Sol* and were sub-organized in different commissions, discussing with a sense of urgency very diverse topics: economics, urbanism, gender, culture, energy, environment, education, health. After some months the presence on the streets declined, by then new methods and networks had flourished. The neighbourhoods of the city lived a proliferation of social movements and the construction of new collective actors (Diaz Orueta and Lourés Seoane, 2018). The existing neighbourhood associations were strengthened and there was a boost to social innovation in every sector.

Nevertheless, no significant changes in policies of citizen

participation were at the time incorporated by local administration (Andreeva Eneva and Abellán, 2017). This situation changed to some extent after the change in the local government in 2015. After 24 years of conservative rule, a new coalition of parties, some born of the *15M* movement, won the Municipality of Madrid. Three aspects of the new policy towards participation in the public space can be highlighted:

- Publication of criteria for the cession of municipal spaces for citizen entities. This initiative tackles the claims of social movements to be able to legally appropriate vacant buildings belonging to the Municipality. The City Council publishes calls for proposals for specific spaces and takes care of the refurbishing of the buildings.
- Program of urban communitarian food gardens. The movement of community gardens has been growing in the city from 2010. This formal framework has promoted the multiplication of such initiatives which form an important network of collectives and spaces.
- Impulse to artistic collaborative projects programs in the public space. Programs as *Paisaje Sur* and *Imagina Madrid* have been mediated by the previously existing municipal art institution *Intermediae* and fed by a tireless mesh of urban activists and artists' collectives.

### Case studies

The studied cases belong to a new generation of participative collective urban spaces as opposed to the initiatives prior to the current city administration.

#### *CSA Playagata*

One of the first municipal spaces assigned to citizen entities was in 2017 the Social Centre *Playagata* in the neighbourhood of Fuencarral. The case has been showcased by the Council in participation events through its first months. It can be considered a prototype of the self-managed social centre model promoted by the Municipality. The cession of municipal spaces had been under negotiation with collectives and associations since 2015. After continuous confrontations with the Municipality, the long-lasting necessities of space from social collectives was addressed

with a program to assign the management of certain spaces to citizen entities. Out of this program, *CSA Playagata* came into life. A polemical issue was how to determine the public interest of the projects. The 2016 directive for the cession of municipal spaces includes several conditions that the proposed projects should comply with: district centred activities, promotion of citizen participation, development of the community and improvement of life quality, protection of equity, fight against social exclusion and promotion of social goals. Such criteria could be considered difficult to assess. The measure has been criticised by the opposition for being politically biased and favouring akin collectives. On the other hand, squat movements and social collectives have been also very critical with the participation process. Main complaints include excessive bureaucracy or the promotion of a public-private collaboration model rather than a completely independent citizen management.

New generation social centres are born in strong connection with a mesh of existing neighbour's associations. The FRAVM for example, operates within the facility a service for employment dynamization service and assistance to new born associations. In the case of *CSA Playagata*, the administration remains involved in the everyday life of the Centre through social programs such as *Experimenta Distrito* and the Municipal Service of Support to Citizen Participation.

The allocated building is an old unused school of 800 m<sup>2</sup>. It is in the *Poblado Dirigido C*. A housing complex that dates from 1960, a modernist scheme designed by the architects Jose Luis Romany and Luis Miquel. At the time it was built, the new neighbourhood was surrounded by a transforming rural territory that rapidly became the periphery of Madrid. Struggles over time to improve services and life quality resulted in a very cohesive social tissue. Today, the area sits next to the biggest development project in contemporary Madrid, *Distrito Castellana Norte*, impelled by the growing real-estate market in the city after a decade of stagnation. It was expected that the cessions would be done to neighbour's associations or to radical activist collectives. It is significant that the management of the space was assigned to a health-related association without political agenda. During the process of selection of proposals, the Municipality mediated to put together a project for the space with participation of multiple groups and the leadership of a collective unknown to local activists. The

overlapping of different approaches and interests introduces a high level of complexity. These groups include a senior citizen activity group, cultural associations and activist groups. The building has its own food garden and various meeting spaces. The different groups manage together the space and are open to proposals from other collectives.

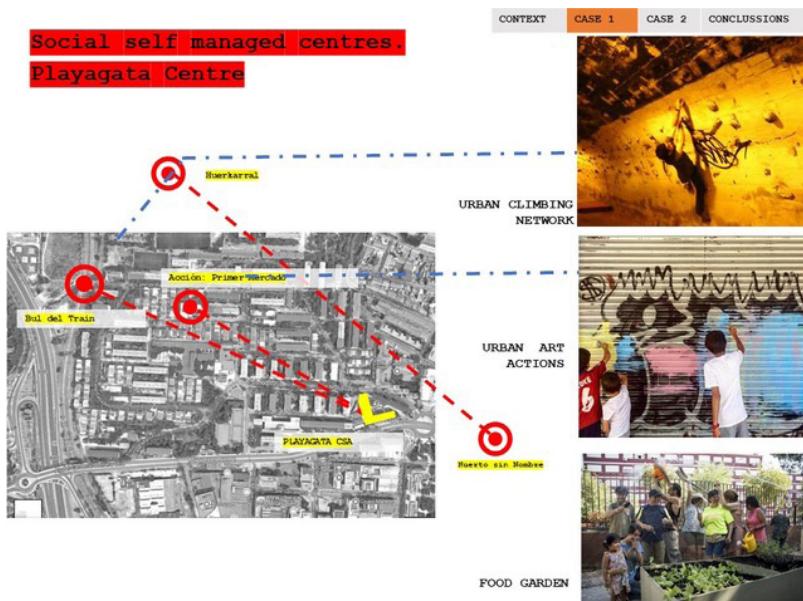


Fig.1. Neighbourhood Spatial Network. *CSA Playagata*

### *Cinema Usera*

Leftover spaces, empty plots, urban ruins: they have become since the 90's protagonists of countless academic studies (De Solà-Morales, 2013). Ever since neorealist films, the character of the periphery is deeply associated to the urban void. The growth of Madrid caused by the countryside-city immigration in the 60s and 70s produced a peripheral landscape characteristic of expectant areas between the countryside and the city. Intermittently occupied by slums of informal housing and new residential developments, the edge of the city was an element in constant change and the empty plots were the childhood playground of an entire generation. This urban landscape was reflected in films, photography and painting. After the rise and burst of real state bubble in the beginning of the century, empty plots in Madrid became harder to come across.

A neglected patch of a green area in the Usera neighbourhood, just north of the park of Pradolongo and with privileged views became in 2016 the site for *Cinema Usera. Paisaje Sur* was part of the program for the betterment of the urban landscape promoted by Madrid City Council's General Direction of Intervention on Urban Landscape and Cultural Heritage in collaboration with *Intermediae*. The program extended from 2013 to 2016. Known as Los Paisajes, the initiative consisted of pilot intervention projects in the public space. The program was launched in neighbourhoods of very different characteristics; all of them far from the central areas of Madrid and from the most visible re-appropriation projects of collective spaces. The program aimed to put together artists and local stakeholders to intervene on the public space of selected neighbourhoods. The specific areas of intervention were chosen through workshops and *dérives* conducted collaboratively with all participants. One of the most successful interventions was *Cinema Usera*.

Usera is a neighbourhood with a very large migrant population, mainly of Chinese origin. The district has the lowest life expectancy in Madrid and one of the highest unemployment rates. The open-air cinema is a traditional leisure event in old Madrid streets and the name of *Cinema Usera* brings memories of lost neighbourhood cinemas that dotted the city. *Intermediae* acts as mediator getting in touch with several selected technical or artistic teams and neighbour's associations, a local artist co working space or an adjacent fringe theatre. The collective of architects *Todo por la Praxis* led the design of furniture and directed the building workshops to put up the infrastructure. Recycled boards from unused benches were given by the Council and the project was realized with a minimum budget. The space has an intense use by the neighbours all through the summer. Decision making is articulated through a co-management board composed by administration and stakeholders. The board meets once a month. After the experience of *Los Paisajes*, Madrid Council launched in 2017 the program *Imagina Madrid*. It is an ambitious upgrading of the previous project with nine different locations and 540.000 € budget. After the selection of sites and a diagnosis of designated neighbourhoods, a call for proposals was published, addressing artists and technicians with proven experience in collaborative projects in the public space. The process included co-design boards, where initially selected artists get together and interact

in the creation of the site-specific project. Some voices of participants from previous experience have criticised the call for lacking a reflection on the deficits of the process. One recurrent criticism is the need for a slower pace in participation processes that collides sometimes with political timing.

Incidentally, the park of Pradolongo, in front of *Cinema Usera*, was the first public space in Madrid realized through citizen participation as early as 1978. The poll that was conducted among neighbours at the time resulted in aspirations of "walking, listening to music and watching shows in the park". Forty years later, the threat of gentrification is running parallel to the rise in participative movements. In 2017 Usera was considered by Airbnb as one of the 17 emergent neighbourhoods worldwide, with a growth of 228% inbound guest arrivals in the period 2015-2016.

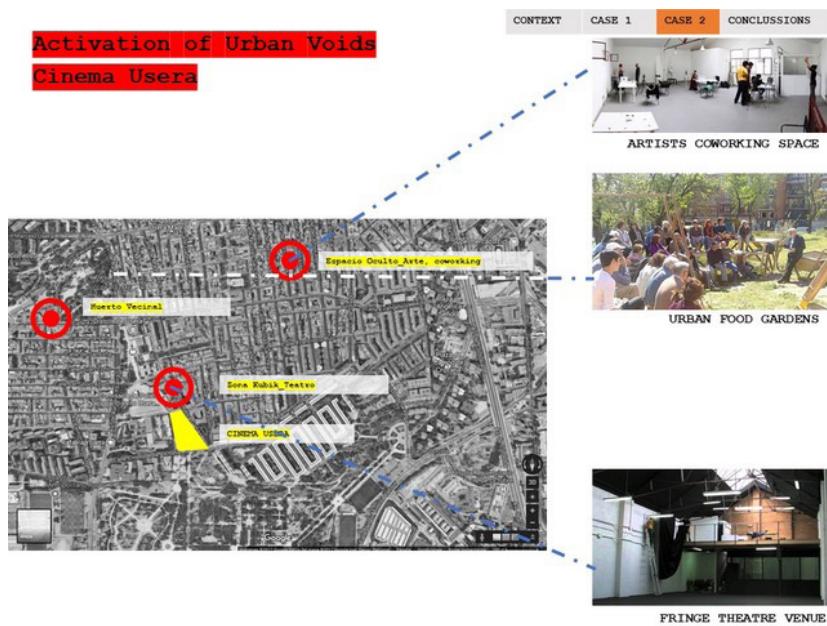


Fig.2. Neighbourhood Spatial Network. *Cinema Usera*

### Effects in the urban collective space

In environmental psychology spatial appropriation has been defined through a dual model composed of transforming action and symbolic identification (Vidal and Pol, 2005). For the study of re-appropriated urban space, together with identity, we will divide action into social and physical transformations. The resulting

working triad for re-appropriation of urban spaces would be: a. Cultural space, regarding shared memory and identity aspects. b. Social space, focusing on inclusion and social capital, economy and politics. c. Urban space in its physical aspect. Maps of stakeholders, activities and spatial relations have been developed for the analysis of the study cases.

### *Cultural space*

The location of the *CSA Playagata* centre in an existing building with its own history of public use in the *Poblado Dirigido* makes it a reference for the revitalization of the neighbourhood. Re-appropriation of space is not limited to the building, but it adopts unexpected forms. One of the groups involved coordinates informal use of climbing areas. Vertical walls in leftover areas and tunnels under the railway are given a new use by an informal collective of young people through specialized webpages and forums. These offer detailed information about the geometry of the tunnels, the walls, the materials and the technical aspects of the climbing elements. This practice re-appropriates and makes visible marginal spaces. The neighbours' association, *Pobladores*, has promoted identity projects such as documentary videos and has led a revitalization project of the urban image through actions on the abandoned market infrastructure. The project originates in the Citizen Labs organized by a program connected to cultural municipal institutions, *Experimenta Distrito*. The action consisted on a collaborative urban art event at the abandoned local market. The Social Centre has also hosted workshops of the project *Los Madriles* Map of Citizen Initiatives. Also promoted from the municipal cultural institutions, it aims to give visibility to different social actors and local initiatives in the city through workshops in the different districts, where the participants develop maps of the most significant actions, associations, public space appropriations, collaborative spaces and historic activist organisations in the chosen neighbourhood. It draws from citizen experience and knowledge of their social environment. But the map itself is seen by the mediators rather as an excuse than as an end by itself. The goal of the project is to bring together different local stakeholders and to create a space for the promotion of the associative tissue of the city. During the presentation of the project's outcome in the Centre, a debate was originated about the times of the project not allowing for enough

feedback from the neighbours.

The two case studies are very different. The self-managed social centre has the possibility of launching ephemeral actions as we have seen with the collaboration of council programs as *Experimenta Distrito*. It can stimulate and host socio-cultural activities. The different actors can gain visibility for their different complaints and proposals for the neighbourhood. On the other hand, *Cinema Usera* is a bold action on the public space, bringing to life a degraded green area and activating it with resident's management. It can be questioned nevertheless whether the participation process that ultimately puts together the initiative is a genuine grassroots movement. The initiative of the institution served here as catalyst for a successful space, but it may not work under different conditions. In terms of culture, the space becomes the scenario to be programmed, not only for spectators but also for co-production of knowledge and culture. Community engagement depends on a successful management process.

### *Social space*

a. Inclusion. Social Centres as *Playagata* combine different social groups. The space includes senior citizens through active aging initiatives such as a water-colourists association and young initiatives as the climbing group. Both groups at the same time re-appropriate public space in the neighbourhood through their own activities. These may consist of group *dérives* of the senior citizens painting their environment or the activation of leftover spaces through sports meetings and social networks.

Social impact in the case of *Cinema Usera* is clear through the prolonged leisure activity that transforms the project into a landmark for the neighbourhood rather than an ephemeral event. Creation of social networks is less formal. On an everyday dimension, the creation of a weekly event offers a chance for interaction among neighbours for as long as the project runs. On the other hand, the process of putting together the space, the collaboration between collectives, the building of the furniture and the technical aspects, created bonds and opened new connections between groups.

b. Economy. The building reform for *Playagata* centre was a public investment. But aspects as organisation and management activities are not financed. They depend greatly on voluntary work of those involved. The initial approach to *Cinema Usera* was done

in collaboration with local artist spaces. The neighbourhood has an emergent life of new business and the initiative was an opportunity for visibility. Despite that, civil economy has hardly been a driving force in this generation of participative programs and it could be one of its weaknesses for long term sustainability of the projects.

c. Politics. The associations that joined forces to obtain the cession of the space for the social centre are very diverse in nature. Therefore, there is not a unified political vision. Some of the groups within it are strongly related to neighbour's association with a marked vindictive approach and there is one anticapitalistic group integrating the coalition, but those views are not necessarily shared by the senior citizen and the health associations. As for *Cinema Usera*, the nature of the project is not explicitly political either, although the topics of cultural inclusion, citizen participation and neighbourhood identity are very present in the programming of the space.

		CSA PLAYAGATA	CINEMA USERA
SOCIAL SPACE	INCLUSION	SENIOR CITIZEN COMMUNITIES HEALTH ACTIVISM  FOOD GARDEN  TRANSVERSAL ACTIVITIES LOCAL GROUPS  INFO POINT COUNCIL SERVICE OF SUPPORT TO DISTRICT CITIZEN PARTICIPATION	HORIZONTAL: INFORMAL SOCIAL NETWORKS
	ECONOMY	PARTIAL FINANCING FROM CITY COUNCIL: BLD RENOVATION	MINIMUM INITIAL INVESTMENT FROM CULTURAL INSITUTION
	POLITICS	VERY DIVERSE POSITIONS	NOT EXPLICITLY POLITICAL
CULTURAL SPACE		STORYTELLING  WORKSHOPS  NEIGHBOURHOOD DISCOVERY: WALKS, CLIMBING GROUP, WATERCOLOURS ASSOCIATION	SELF ORGANISED CULTURAL PROGRAM
URBAN SPACE		RE-APPROPRIATION OF PUBLIC FACILITY EPHEMERAL ACTIONS IN PUBLIC SPACE	CREATION OF AN EVENT BASED NEW COLLECTIVE SPACE RE-APPROPRIATION OF LANDSCAPE ASSETS: PARK, VIEWS

Table 1. Comparative of cases

## Conclusions

New strategies of co-production of participation spaces in Madrid between citizens' associations and the local administration are the product of a long evolution and learning processes on both sides. They are not free of doubts and they present some problems. These initiatives respond to a social need for participation spaces: both physical and political. They render visibility and legitimization to existing collaborative processes.

Projects like *CSA Playagata* become significant spaces of dialogue with the administration in the process of creating new subjects of participation. It is important to note how identarian initiatives draw heavily on pre-existing groups and the associative tissue of the neighbourhood. It is that superposition of networks what the Municipality is aiming to enhance and organize. But neighbours movements are not a compliant subject to work with. The participation processes launched by the administration have been welcomed by several collectives that had been fighting for their space and visibility for years. Nevertheless, the expectations generated by the multiple programs were very high and have also caused strong criticism. Main complaints concern time consuming bureaucracy procedures and financing of the activities themselves. There is also a critical attitude from the practitioners towards the formal aspects of the participation processes as the participants may feel they do not completely control the outcome of the process. One participant expressed his concern that 'Participation has killed participation'. On the other hand, some practitioners agree that for the first time in many years the institutions attend the demands for collaborative spaces. Efforts from the council administration have brought forward the role of citizen participation in urban matters.

If we compare contemporary situation to the heroic times of Madrid neighbour's associations, it seems the earlier struggle was concerned with basic rights of the neighbourhoods in a context of illegality and repression. Nowadays, the struggle of urban activism continues and there are new challenges as gentrification. The association movements have gained visibility and are more often legitimized as valid intermediaries. New channels for participation are opened but the object of the actions is nevertheless less clear. The political claims are blurred, and the goal seems to be sometimes the normalization

of the participation itself, rather than its specific content.

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**Juan Arana** is an architect and lecturer in Urban Design at CEU University in Madrid. As a practitioner he has worked with cooperative architecture projects. His research work deals with the collaborative nature of the urban. He has edited the book The Post-Speculative City and has lately collaborated in a report on Heritage and Citizen Engagement in Deprived Urban Areas for the Council of Europe. His current doctoral research deals with the impact of re-appropriation of collective space from the viewpoint of social cohesion, culture and urban space. agiralt@ceu.es

**Making the city of commons!  
Popular economies between urban conflicts and capitalist  
accumulation: an ethnographic perspective from Argentina**  
Alioscia Castronovo

### **Abstract**

A partire da una ricerca etnografica, in questo articolo analizzo i processi di produzione dell'urbano attraverso pratiche di commoning e processi di autorganizzazione in due differenti esperienze cooperative nell'area metropolitana di Buenos Aires. Analizzando le relazioni tra accumulazione capitalistica, trasformazioni del lavoro e produzione dello spazio urbano, e sviluppando una critica della categoria di informalità, l'obiettivo è presentare le economie popolari come campo ambivalente di conflitto, soggettivazione e possibilità di trasformazione sociale. Ricostruendo i processi socio-spatiali nell'esperienza della cooperativa Juana Villca e della fabbrica recuperata "19 de Diciembre", il contributo riflette sulle ambivalenze, potenzialità e sfide delle esperienze di autogestione del lavoro in quanto infrastrutture di una emergente istituzionalità popolare dal basso.

Based on an ethnographic research, this article analyzes the urban making from below through commoning and self organization social processes in two different cooperative experiences in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires. By analyzing the relationships between capitalistic accumulation, labour transformation and the production of urban spaces, and developing a critique of the category of informality, the aim is presenting popular economies as an ambivalent field of conflict, subjectivation and social transformation possibilities. Delineating the socio-spatial processes in the experiences of Juana Villca cooperative and recuperated enterprise "19 de Diciembre", the contribution reflects on ambivalences, potentialities and challenges of self managed labour experiences as infrastructure of an emergent popular institutionality from below.

**Parole Chiave:** popular economies, selfmanagement, Argentina

**Keywords:** economie popolari, autogestione, Argentina

### **Introduction**

In the last decades urban popular economies emerged in the metropolitan spaces in Latin America as a complex assemblage of productive and reproductive activities, subjectivities, practices, spaces, infrastructure and social relationships (Gago, Mezzadra, 2015) that permits the reproduction of life of popular classes and make visible both their vitality and their heterogeneous connection with the production and circulation of wealth. From

our perspective<sup>1</sup>, in order to understand the emergence of these frameworks in Argentina it's important to take in account both the progressive deconstruction of labour wage as the principle way of inclusion of popular classes in the economic system and the reorganization of the global division of labour. Moreover, situate popular economies between informality and social reproduction (Gago, Cielo, Gachet, 2018) permit us analyze the deep connection between informal economic activities, social struggles and territorialization of popular movements in a context of dispossession, financialization and precarization of labour and life conditions. The debate on popular economies is recently developing throughout both the academies and the popular organization and social struggles in South America, involving different actors, subjectivities and spaces. This debates present deep and intense political, epistemological and conceptual disputes and arguments in the scientific literature on transnational level and within the popular movements and social struggles (Gago, 2014; Mezzadra, 2015; Tassi, Arbona, 2015; Chena, 2017; Fernández Álvarez, 2017, 2018; Giraldo, 2017; Roig, 2017).

The category of popular economy emerged in Argentina in connection with the expansion of social struggles and the emerging of a specific and innovative social unionism experience that has become one of the most important political and social actors during the last years, the Confederation of popular economy workers - CTEP<sup>2</sup>. From this perspective, popular

1 My research has been developed while participating to a very important working group: the GT CLACSO 2016-2019 '*Economías populares: mapeo teórico y práctico*'. Coordinated by Verónica Gago IDAES-UNSAM Alexandre Roig IDAES-UNSAM and Cesar Girando, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, this transnational working group is a space of research, collective mapping, elaboration, discussion and debate on popular economies in several countries and different context of Latin America. In Buenos Aires as working group we organise a doctoral seminar at IDAES UNSAM, which has been fundamental for my research and for this article. I thank Verónica Gago, Ana Julia Bustos and Martha Lucia Bernal for the very productive discussions and reflections.

2 The CTEP - Confederation of Popular Economy Workers' – is the most important organization of the sector and exist since 2011. Founded by different organizations such as *Movimiento Evita*, *MTE* (Excluded Workers Movement) *La Dignidad*, *Patria Grande* and many others, this particular trade union organise different sector of informal workers like cartoneros, as in Argentina are defined the collectors of garbage, street sellers, recuperated factories, textile workers and various others self managed activities, experimenting mutualism and new form of social unionism, having a fundamental role in the

economy appears as a *claim category* (Fernández Álvarez, 2016b) that permits a kind of unification process of a very heterogeneous mixture of “informal” workers claiming for labour rights, social salary, mutualism and services (Fernández Álvarez, 2018). At the same time, popular economy emerged as an analytic category that opens spaces for a critique of three different conceptualizations connected to the wage less people (Denning, 2011). First, this category contrast with the conceptualization of the popular classes as marginal masses (Nun, 2010) or as excluded, in order to focus attention on what relations of production and class fragmentation look like in contemporary capitalism (Carbonella, Kashmir, 2008) analyzing the interconnections of waged and unwaged labourers in front of the increase of precariousness and new forms of accumulation. Second, this approach permits to pay attention to the heterogeneous relationship between these economies and the production and circulation of wealth, investigating their connections with consumptions circuits and new forms of exploitation, tensioning the vision of these frameworks as marginality, poverty or informality (Hart, 1973) and making visible their productivity, forms of organization and accumulation, antagonism, agency and strategic capacity. Third, popular economy as an analytic approach tensions the category of social and solidarity economy (Coraggio, 2012), which describes these economies as simply finalized to the reproduction, remits to a normative definition of individual agency based on solidarity and reciprocity (Chena, 2017; Gago, Cielo, Gachet, 2018) and separate this experiences from the dynamics of capitalistic accumulation, competition in the market and financial exploitation<sup>3</sup>.

Based on this perspective, my ethnographic fieldwork developed between June of 2016 and May 2018 in two different self managed cooperative experiences in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, an historical recovered factory, the ‘19 de Diciembre’, occupied and self managed since 2002 that host a self managed school since 2006, and a textile workshop cooperative ‘Juana Villca’ formed by Bolivian migrant workers at the end of 2015. I will analyze these different experiences as part of complex processes of popular organization and production of urban space

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popular neighbourhoods and negotiating benefits and social plans with the State.

3 More on this critique, see Chena (2017); Roig (2017), Giraldo (2017).

that recombine and redefine labour, political militancy and social unionism in the metropolitan territories. My hypothesis is that self managed labour experiences and popular economies open spaces for commoning processes that contribute to redefine urban spaces from below, constantly facing and suffering consequence of dispossession and exploitation, building up infrastructures for popular institutionalism and urbanization.

This article is based on a collaborative anthropological research (Lassiter, 2013; Carenzo and Fernandez Alvarez, 2012) I developed for my PhD thesis focused on socio-spatial dynamic of self managed labour experiences in Buenos Aires. This methodological perspective opens up a possibility of a theoretical common production with the subjectivities involved in the ethnographic field thanks to an anthropological approach to these frameworks as «living processes composed by bodies, affects, feelings, emotions and daily life activities» (Fernandez Alvarez, 2016a: 16). Particularly, my research was based in the participation to various spaces of self education and collaborative production of knowledge. In the recovered factory I participated to the project *Colabor*<sup>4</sup> and in the self managed textile cooperative to the OTS - Observatory of submerged work<sup>5</sup> and the self education course into the cooperative. *Colabor* is a collective project that involves researchers and workers aimed to produce collectively self education video tools for cooperatives. During one year, researchers and workers organized thematic workshops, meetings interviews and debates in order to co-produce knowledge, videos and texts between all the participants. The collaboration between researchers, students and teachers of the self managed school and workers of the

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4 *Colabor* is a collaborative project finalized to produce self educational tools co-produced by cooperative workers and researchers. More info: <http://colabor.com.ar/> I thanks particularly Gisela Bustos and Enrique Iriarte, member of the cooperative '19 de Diciembre', Sebastián Carenzo (Universidad Nacional de Quilmes), María Inés Fernández Álvarez (UBA) Fabián Pierucci (Grupo Alavio) y Elisa Gigliarelli (Sapienza - Facultad Abierta UBA).

5 OTS - *Observatorio del Trabajo Sumergido* (Observatory of Submerged work) is a militant research space that support the processes of organization of the Juana Villca cooperative and is composed by researchers, activists and workers of the textile workshops. The self education cooperative courses are collaborative spaces aimed to internal formation and empowerment of the workers in the cooperative. I thank particularly Verónica Gago, Nicolás Fernández Bravo, Juan Vázquez, Delia Colque for sharing reflections, discussions and political passion.

cooperative permitted define together priorities, issues and objectives and develop common knowledge and reflections, challenging difficulties and differences linked to rhythm and intensity of different urgencies and necessities.

In the first part of this article I will analyze the connection between the crisis, capitalistic accumulation and popular economies in South America during the last decades, by reflecting on the centrality of the Marxian concept of primitive accumulation in the academic and political debate. From this perspective, I will focus on different approaches that permit us to productively investigate the relationship between labour conflict, urban struggles and popular economies. After that, in the third paragraph, I will present the approach to self organization process in the urban spaces from the perspective of popular economies in order to develop a critique to the notion of informality. I will then focus on the ethnographic study reconstructing the processes of self organization in the recuperated factory '19 de Diciembre' and in the self managed cooperative 'Juana Villca', the challenges, conflicts and the socio-spatial dynamics of two self-managed cooperatives in Buenos Aires in order to contribute to the conceptualization of these frameworks as part of a popular urbanization process (Simone, 2015). This article aims to open a reflection on the challenges that self-managed labour experiences are actually facing while contributing to experiment alternative urban configurations from below: build up through self organization social infrastructures, democratize labour and society, claim for better conditions of labour and life, defend, maintain and increase commoning processes to dispute spaces and wealth in the neoliberal crisis.

### **Crisis and capitalistic accumulation**

After the beginning of last global crisis that involves not only economic but also cultural, political and ecological dimension at a planetary level, as the very pregnant definition of 'civilization crisis' shows (Escobar, 2017; Danowski, De Castro, 2017; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2018), the debate on the Marxian concept of primitive accumulation assumed a renovated centrality. Various scholars proposed rethink the temporality of this process that Marx situated in a specific historical time as a structural characteristic of capitalistic accumulation in different times

and spaces (Federici, 2010; Fraser, 2014; Mezzadra, 2016). This Marxian concept is particularly useful to analyze the reorganization of space and labour in the urban areas and permit us to find out in the contemporary crisis a new wave of 'primitive' accumulation, enclosures of the commons (De Angelis, 2011; Stavrides, 2014; Hardt, Negri, 2010) and reconfiguration of labour exploitation (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2014). The Marxian notion of primitive accumulation is also proposed by Harvey (2013) in order to underline the centrality of dispossession in capitalistic accumulation in the urban space. Before analyzing concrete and specific labour and urban conflicts that open new spaces for commoning practices as part of the city making process, I will focus on some aspects of the discourse on primitive accumulation that allow us to understand and analyze these critical times from the perspective of popular economies. According to different approaches that developed a critique of the contemporary process of accumulation, different scholars underlines the centrality of dispossession (Harvey, 2013), the extension of the limits of capitalistic valorisation (Fraser, 2014) and the intensification of exploitation (Mezzadra, Neilson, 2014; Gago, Mezzadra, 2015). All this different approaches are very productive in order to investigate popular economies, focusing on what Gago calls the 'intimate relationship with the crisis' (Gago, 2014) and the reconfiguration of the urban spaces and conflicts as complex networks based on self organization. From this perspective, the concept of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2013) is interconnected with the new form of exploitation of social cooperation (Gago, Mezzadra, 2015) that finance is exploiting through bancarisation of social rights and financialization of popular life (Gago, 2016; Roig, 2017). Productive and reproductive activities of popular economies are deeply connected with crisis not only because of its origins, but because their persistence and expansion shows like the crisis has become an unstable regime of accumulation and redefinition of the limits between inclusion and exclusion involving labour, citizenship, consumption and financial relationships.

The reconfiguration of contemporary capitalism and the actual debate about the boundaries between crisis, accumulation and new forms of social struggle can be productively analyzed taking in account the way Nancy Fraser (2014) reconceptualises capitalistic accumulation. In her essay 'Behind Marxist hidden

abode', Fraser redefine the proletarian condition identifying dispossession as the basic condition that permit being exploited, just like Denning (2010) propose «decentre wage labour in our conception of life under capitalism [...]. The employment contract is not the founding moment. For capitalism begins not with the offer of work, but with the imperative to earn a living» (Denning, 2010: 80). From his point of view, dispossession and expropriation create the conditions of the possibility of the proletarian condition, whose labour condition is depending of processes of attraction or expulsion of workers in different capitalistic configurations of accumulation and exploitation dynamics. From this perspective, popular economies grow up as consequence of the process of expulsion, like Sassen propose to conceptualize the global rise of inequality that characterize contemporary crisis (Sassen, 2015).

Fraser proposes this concept as a tool for analyzing capitalism in a broader way: rethinking the notion of primitive accumulation, Fraser underlines the tendency to the continuous expansion of the border of capitalist valorisation, through appropriation of spaces and commodification of new territories, relationships and resources. As Fraser argues that social reproduction, ecology and political power constitute structurally necessary conditions for capitalism accumulation, this expanded conception of capitalism represents a very productive perspective to analyze popular economies<sup>6</sup>. From this interesting and productive perspective, the critique of capitalism and the same class struggle should include these various battlefields that are the scenarios of new resistances and conflicts in the contemporary societies and urban spaces. Fraser argues that an anti capitalist critique need to go beyond the very economy in order to understand the complexity of this regime of domination and production, showing the background conditions of possibility of production in contemporary capitalism that this different fields represent. The life and labour conditions of self organized workers in the popular economies, the motley and multilayered urban spaces they produce and live in, the intermittent temporality and heterogeneous incomes of the wage less lives, using a

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<sup>6</sup> Fraser's analysis of contemporary capitalism in order to investigate popular economies was proposed by Veronica Gago during the phd seminar *Economías populares: mapeo teórico y práctico* organized during 2017 by the homonymous CLACSO working group at IDAES UNSAM.

pregnant definition that Michael Denning proposed (2011) are becoming under neoliberal capitalism spaces of colonization and valorisation, and for instance spaces of resistance, of struggle and conflict. This perspective permits a more complex analysis of the urban condition focusing on the intersection between self managed and precarious labour, urban dispossessions and financial exploitation (Gago, 2015; Roig, 2017). Popular economies appear as a battlefield where capitalistic colonization of new territories and activities, through financial exploitation, valorisation and expropriation of wealth and space confront with self organized practices, dynamics and logics of working, resisting, producing and reproducing life inside, against and beyond capital and State.

### **Popular economies and urban spaces**

The plebeian insurrections and popular riots (Gutierrez Aguilar, 2008) that put in crisis legitimacy of neoliberalism in different countries of Latin America at the beginning of the new century and deeply redefined the regional scenario constitutes a key process to understand the reconfiguration of urban conflict in the last decades. According to Gago (2016) to trace a political genealogy of the contemporary popular economies is fundamental to find out the political origin of these frameworks, connecting them with the struggles that around 2001 faced neoliberal crisis. As she argues, the role of living labour and social antagonism in the urban spaces appears as a urgent political question in Argentina exactly during the emergency of the *piquetero*<sup>7</sup> movement in the 90's and around 2001 (Gago, 2016). The increase of precarization, unemployment and fragmentation of the working class, the growing of so called informal economic activities and the unemployed workers struggles contributed to the spatial reorganization of class conflict in the urban space. As the value is produced in the whole metropolitan space after the end of the centrality of the industry and the salary mediation, cities started to become the spaces of class struggle where the antagonism between living labour and capitalism unfolds.

The centrality of collective and community practices in order to resist to the crisis and reorganize urban common life,

<sup>7</sup> The definition of *piqueteros* for the unemployed movement is linked to their struggles practices based on *piquetes*, blockades, that were done not in the factory any more but in the public spaces, in the streets and often highways.

infrastructure and welfare, deeply modified the space and time of the city through different dynamics of self organization that made possible reproduction of life in the popular territories and created the possibilities of new forms of production and accumulation of wealth. The recombination of these experiences and the increase of informal economy because of the processes of expulsion that characterize contemporary financial capitalism (Sassen, 2015), made possible a particular assemblage of what Gago called '*motley baroque economies*' (Gago, 2014) that established during the decade of progressive governments and economic growth of Argentina ambivalent relationships with the market, the State and finance (Gago, 2014; Mezzadra, 2015; Roig, 2017).

As the metropolitan areas have become the central spaces for production of wealth investigate the boundaries between labour, social and urban transformations represent a very important point to understand contemporary capitalism. Productive transformations deeply modified urban spaces since the last decades within contemporary planetary urbanization (Brenner, 2014), through the reorganization of global division of labour and deindustrialization, outsourcing and relocation of factories and workshops, development of logistic infrastructure of global economy and expansion of extractivism. Different and coexistent process produces new socio-spatial dynamics, hierarchies, differentiation, social fragmentation and concrete forms of expropriation that articulate and spatially materialize in the neoliberal process of urbanization. According to Mezzadra and Neilson (2014), the extractive operation of capital involves not only spaces and territories, but also forms of social cooperation. This perspective makes possible to rethink the relationships between dispossession and exploitation – both labour and financial one – as articulations of a more general extractive dimension of capital that characterize contemporary mode of production. From this point of view, urban extractivism would appears as a more general process that involves gentrification, urban renewal, segregation and displacement but also new dynamics of financial exploitation and extraction of value from social cooperation, including self organization experiences. As Simone affirms, in the Global South the popular urbanization process confronts with specific problems and limitations (Simone, 2015) connected to the conditions of urban infrastructure,

economies and spaces that since the 80's suffered neoliberal austerity policies and deindustrialization. This processes deeply redefined both the time and spaces of urban life (Obarrio, 2002) and the configurations of the geography of labour, welfare and services: in an effort to investigate boundaries between popular economies and urban transformation from below, in this article I reflect on self managed activities and cooperatives as an opportunity and, as Simone argues, as a kind of platforms for new urban economy (Simone, 2015).

### **Beyond informality: self organization and multiplication of labour**

In this paragraph, I will outline questions, experiences and practices that emerge in the urban space in Argentina in order to situate the ethnographic perspective I will develop on self-managed experiences and popular economies as infrastructure of emerging institutions and urbanization process from below. The phenomenon of recuperated factories, occupied after their failure and self managed by the workers with the support of community (Ruggeri, 2014; Azzellini 2015; Vieta, 2012) has grown up during the last decade until arriving to 368 experiences and almost 15 thousand workers (Facultad Abierta, 2017). The continuity of these experiences and the reproduction in different context, sectors and area shows their strength and capacity to reinvent tools and struggles in different context. Particularly during 2001 crisis, in the neighbourhood a huge proliferation of assemblies and various forms of popular organization transformed spaces and activities, while other organizational processes, just like recovered factories, continued during the progressive governments and also increased their importance. Is this the case of the cooperatives of *cartoneros*<sup>8</sup>, that produces innovation and an important ecological support for the whole society<sup>9</sup>, the

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8 *Cartoneros* are called in Argentina the street sweeper that recollect and recycle plastic, glass and cardboard, in general recycling the garbage creating circular economies and organizing in cooperatives in order to claim for better condition and negotiate benefits with the State.

9 For more info: Carenzo S. (2017). «Invisibilized creativity: Sociogenesis of an "Innovation" Process Developed by Cartoneros for Post-Consumption Waste Recycling». *International Journal of Engineering, Social Justice, and Peace*, 5: 30-49; Carenzo and Schmukler (2018). «Hacia una ontología política del diseño cartonero: reflexiones etnográficas a partir de la experiencia de la cooperativa Reciclando Sueños (La Matanza, Argentina) ». Buenos Aires, *Immaterial. Diseño, arte y sociedad*, 3 (5).

heterogeneous migrant small enterprises in the *villas*<sup>10</sup>, street sellers, care work, community kitchens and other self managed jobs literally invented by unemployed people, constitute some of the most important experiences of this complex assemblage of economic activities of popular classes. All this different networks shows subalterns capacity to create their own job and define collective strategies and at the same time makes visible the huge variety of activities that wage less people does to guarantee their reproduction. Popular economies appear from this perspective as a constellation of practices and conflicts whose meaningful instability shows a particular and specific articulation of ambivalent subjectivities, struggles, strategies and projects socially embodied and spatially organized. The popular, affirms Stuart Hall, is a battlefield constantly transformed by struggles and disputes, defined by contrasting dynamics of resistance and incorporation (Hall, 2006). This constitutive ambivalence, that Gago define 'neoliberalism from below', appears in these frameworks as a coexistence of neoliberal values, practices of resistance, community logics and individual calculation in behalf of the «appropriation of neoliberal conditions from below as an answer to dispossession» (Gago, 2014: 18).

The persistence of self organization in the heterogeneous and creative ways through which popular classes organize their life the urban space, accumulate wealth and confront with dispossession, labour and urban transformations is a central characteristic of grassroots movement in Argentina. On one side they face State inability to provide infrastructure and public services as healthcare and education and on the other negotiate with the State the recognition of informal and self-managed activities as labour (Gago, 2016). The very connection between popular economies and social movements enable an innovative critique of the category of informality (Hart, 1972) as it has appeared during the seventies in the third world and is still used in social sciences. Originally this category was used to define wage less masses (Denning, 20015) that outside of Europe were historically the majority of population, demonstrating that under capitalism wage labour has been hegemonic both geographically and historically for a brief temporality (Quijano, 2014). According to this critique, race, gender and class hierarchies

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10 In Argentina it means slum.

are constitutive of social fragmentation and exploitation, based on coexistence of different labour regime and heterogeneous economic activities exceeding wage relationships. 'Informal' activities have often been seen as a problem, a lack or an absence, the negative side of an incomplete modernization rather than a residual marginality, which would have been eliminated by the advance of development and progress that would have arrived at the post-colonial periphery from the centre. But current neoliberal capitalism demonstrates the contrary: as Sassen (2015) underlines, informality and precarity are growing globally and constitute a structural dimension of capitalism especially in urban and metropolitan areas. In this context, the current multiplication and fragmentation of proletariat, urban spaces and forms of labour is the result, according to Carbonella and Kashmir, of combined «political and structural violence that today constitute key avenues of dispossession and the creation of precariousness» (Carbonella, Kashmir, 2008: 52). From an anthropological perspective, they propose to reconceptualise anthropological subjects within historical and spatial processes of capital accumulation starting from this «dispossession and the production of difference, the accumulation of labor, the politics of dispossession, the violence-laden disorganization of working classes, the myth of disposable people» (Carbonella, Kashmir, 2008: 43). Analyzing the global processes of reconfiguration of labour, space and mobility in the production of subjectivities, Mezzadra and Neilson (2014) proposed the concept of multiplication of labour for understanding the new regimes of exploitation and investigate the contemporary scenario of class struggles. The authors identify three tendencies of contemporary labour transformations: first, the intensification, as a tendency to colonize entire life-time, second, the diversification, as a process of expansion of what is included as labour and third the heterogenisation, concerning social and legal regimes of contracts, flexibilization and outsourcing (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2014). In this context, labour struggles are immediately investing other territories, subjectivities and spaces, as we will see in the different experiences, the self managed factory and the popular economy cooperative: from this perspective, as Gago and Sztulwark (2016) affirms, popular economies represent a paradigmatic space to investigate «what the popular is and how it functions today, the relationships between the popular and the

common, the variations of the common, the possibilities of its composition, and its chances for becoming concrete affirmations in the current dispute over modes of life and their increasing exploitation» (Gago, Sztulwark, 2016: 611).

### **Working without bosses: the recuperated factory '19 de Diciembre'**

The recuperated factory '19 de Diciembre', situated in San Martín district, an historical industrial area of Buenos Aires metropolitan area, is a metalworker occupied factory whose process of recuperation started in 2002, when the conflict raised up and a group of workers decided start an occupation that opened the possibility of self-managing production under worker's control. This experience of workers organization had an immediate connection with territorial organization of social movements and struggles, with neighbourhood networks and other recovered factories that makes it a strategic place for analyzing reinvention of labour as a common. A main aspect of its development as experience includes the active role in the transformation of the urban socio-spatial dynamics, economic productivity and use of the spaces of the factory that make possible a reorganization from below of territorial conflicts, services and mutual aid which overflows its own borders. During the crisis of 2001 in San Martín district, northwest periphery of Gran Buenos Aires, the workers of the Isaco factory were hardly fighting for defending their job and after various layoffs in December 2002 the owner of the factory closed and declared failure. A small group of workers decided to struggle standing for days in a tent in front of the factory, denouncing the situation and receiving solidarity from social movements and neighbourhoods. It was happening in hundreds and hundreds of factories and enterprisers all over the country.

«People from other occupied factories and activist of different groups came to support us» told me Enrique, who worked more than twenty years in the factory, during my first visit to the factory, «we had no chance in that hard times it was impossible to find another job. We had no alternative, so we decided to occupy the factory» (interview to Enrique, June 2016).

The recuperated factory '19 de Diciembre' produces spare parts for cars and sell it to other enterprisers. During the ethnographic fieldwork, conversation, interview and informal

meeting emerges that occupy and self manage a factory is a social, political and economic process that deeply tension, transform and challenge identities, subjectivities, relationships between private and public spaces, forms of living, using the space and modify the insertion of the factory and his workers in the territory. As Ruggeri affirms, recuperating factories is not the product of an offensive capacity of the working class, but an answer to neoliberal offensive (Ruggeri, 2014), a defensive and desperate answer to expulsions and deindustrialization imposed by neoliberal politics. But at the same time, this conflict permits the collective production of new subjectivity that reorganizes workers and practice knowledge, spaces and roles, way of working and cooperates.

«We recuperated labour while during the crisis the unemployment was growing every day, we invented a different way of working, we avoided to keep without job and suffering with our families. But we also transformed this space and decided to offer services to our neighbourhoods, as a form or return for the solidarity we received. Today, after more than fourteen years, we work for several other companies, and although we work in freedom and self organize our job inside the factory, we still depend on the market and we fight everyday with providers, with companies and with the State. Nobody likes that us as workers self organize our work, but we resist because we do all this with responsibility, taking care of the space, of our comrades and of our job» (Interview to Enrique, December 2016).

Caro is a worker that joined to the cooperative after the recuperation and during a meeting in the factory affirms:

«We work in freedom, but at the same time now that we manage the whole factory we go home and continue thinking to the factory, how to solve problems, how to find out new strategies for facing the crisis, but we also discuss it all together like we never did before, we support other recuperated factories or other struggles in companies and factories in the district» (Interview to Caro, October 2016).

The materiality of the solidarity as a tension towards the other comrades and the neighbourhood is visible analyzing the private space of the factory that was property of the boss and has been transformed radically after the recuperation process. The offices that were part of the company management has not only become a collective property of all the workers, but also a commons space, in terms of collective space that open new possibilities. For the reasons that Enrique explained, inside

the factory there is a popular library, a self-managed popular school, officially recognised by the State thanks to long term mobilisations, whose students receive scholarships and the teachers are paid by the State. The spaces where various private offices were situated until 2002, finalized to the accumulation of private wealth through exploitation of other workers, has become through the collective action and struggles spaces for studying, where young and no more young neighbourhood can study, meet, educate and organize. The self managed school is part of the *Coordinadora de bachilleratos populares*, a metropolitan educational network based on self education and Freire's pedagogic methodology that established popular schools in several recuperated factories, trade union places and community centre in the huge capital city and metropolitan area of Buenos Aires. So in the '19 de Diciembre', workers teach in a school, students learn from the struggles and the experience of self management, teachers learn from the workers. Almost all different subjects get involved in territorial networks and redefine the socio-spatial dynamics connecting in a different way education and labour, mutualism and solidarity as a complex assemblage self organization producing constantly territories. The coexisting tendency toward self-management and pragmatic relationship with the State and the market, the intersection of social struggles and daily practices, labour and activism are continuously tensioning the borders between private and public spaces, productive and reproductive activities, renovating and changing both labour and militancy habits (Fernandez Alvarez, 2016) and tensioning the «operative principle of common that animates social cooperation» (Gago, Mezzadra, 2016: 109). During a collective mapping laboratory<sup>11</sup> in the factory, with a large group of students, workers and researchers we were creating an alternative cartography of the area, focusing on social relationships that redefine the borders of the 'Espacio Popular 19 de Diciembre', the self definition of the whole assemblage of project I have recently presented. In this map, we started to represent all the conflicts linked to recuperated factories and the connection among self managed spaces, community centres and solidarity network. The way solidarity

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11 This workshop was part of the COLABOR Project, a collaborative research project based on developing tool for self education in recuperated factories. More info on [www.colabor.com.ar](http://www.colabor.com.ar).

and cooperation value and resources are constantly created as material and symbolic practices, concrete possibilities of organizing spaces of commoning and opportunity for building world providing new infrastructure for the urban (Simone, 2015) were collectively represented on the map opening spaces for a collective discussion and allowing strategic imagination.

During the mapping workshop, a particular productive atmosphere made possible that everyone could contribute from his own experience and perspectives, not only to reconstruct collectively how the spaces of factory and the territory changed through socio-spatial relationships, but also creating new collective projections. Almost all the participants joined some of the different spaces that we are mapping trying to rethink collectively the multiplicity of connection and the modification of the borders between the inside and the outside of the factory. Less than twenty blocks from the factory, there is a health centre, situated at a border of a slum in the same neighbourhood that was born as a self managed organization and was lately recognized by the State. This health centre maintain a particular organization based on horizontal assemblies that involves all the workers and some of the neighbourhoods, providing medical assistance to the people of the neighbourhood but also organizing spaces for collective organization linked to health care, claiming for public economic support and networking with various organizations. Various of the students that does their internship at the health centre teaches science at the self managed school in the recuperated factory, while the health centre provides medical assistance for the self managed workers of the '19 de Diciembre' and other cooperatives.

A great collective space that involves several political and territorial organizations, cooperatives and self managed experiences is the *Mesa Reconquista*<sup>12</sup> which compose an emergent territorial organizations that discuss, propose and materially organize different projects, offer concrete services, provide tools and support to groups and collectives, establishing relationships with the University of San Martin and the Municipality of the district. The assembly of recuperated factories in the district, the so-called *Mesa de ERT de San*

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<sup>12</sup> *Mesa Reconquista* is a territorial network of popular economies, self managed factories, popular schools, cultural centre and community territorial organization of San Martin district.

Martin, is another very important space for mutualism and support between recuperated factories (there are actually 12 ERT in the district) that also improved some specific municipal laws that recognize the social and economic role of recuperated factories for the district. The variety and variable intensity of this relationships, reciprocity frameworks, mutualism and economic exchange between heterogeneous subjectivities and spaces represent kind of infrastructures for a new configuration of the urban from below.

### Weaving the common: the Juana Villca cooperative

The metropolitan area of Buenos Aires has an important role in the reconfiguration of geographies of labour linked to global value chains in the textile sector, connected with migration trajectories particularly linked, during the last decades, with Bolivia. Almost 70% of the textile sector production is outsourced to the informal workshops<sup>13</sup> emblematic places of a *urbanization of injustice* (Gago, 2014). The double spatial and discursive segregation makes invisible migrant work and exploitation, relationships with big transnational companies and the textile regime of production. In the district of *Tres de Febrero*, in the neighbourhood of *Ciudadela* close to the huge *Rivadavia* street, at the western border between capital and metropolitan area, a very new experimentation of cooperative textile common labour was founded two years ago by Bolivian migrant workers challenging spatial injustice (Soja, 2016), labour geography regime and subaltern conditions in the market's hierarchies. Tracing a genealogy of the process of organization, struggle and strategic imagination that made possible this self-managed cooperative composed by almost sixty workers, linked to the experience of *Simbiosis Cultural* collective and affiliated with CTEP, I will analyze the dynamics of self organization in this experience and the challenge they're facing.

From the southern part of federal capital city until the last *villas*<sup>14</sup> of the metropolitan area, informal and community based networks connect La Paz to Buenos Aires, the informal workshop to the popular markets and the sparkling windows of the shopping centres. If we look at Buenos Aires from this

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13 INTI (2011).

14 In Argentinean language it means slum.

spatial and social perspective, this huge metropolis appears as a complex heterogeneity and rhythms of transnational networks and plebeian vitality, labour exploitation and different form of wealth accumulation and financial accumulation. Gago affirms that «mapping popular economies is a way of mapping neoliberalism as a battlefield: they are a space-time of situated economies that are key for thinking about how capital, through the diversification of financial forms, attempts to incorporate new territories» (Gago, 2015:25). The ambivalent relationships with the market, the State and the finance, and the efforts towards democratization and construction of autonomous forms of organization make popular economies a strategic territory both from the perspective of class struggle and the capital. The huge concentration of motley workers, popular abilities, powerful creativity and potentiality of city making that reinvents and mixes a multiplicity of cultural, social and economic practices historically and spatially situated, articulated and over layered. The self-managed textile centre Juana Villca is situated some hundreds of meters after the eastern frontier of capital city and was founded at the end of 2015 in order to organize collectively informal workers. get out of the ghetto of informality and resist to criminalization and exploitation of migrant work. After the fire in two different informal workshops in which eight people died between 2006, in *Luis Viale* street, and in 2015 in *Páez* street in the neighbourhoods of *Caballito* and *Flores*<sup>15</sup>, the ghost of informal work invaded the city showing the “normal” condition of outsourced labour. The public discourse on informality produced criminalization and invisibilization of the migrant workers as well as of the enterprisers and State responsibility for some unsecure and exploited workers’ condition. After the second fire, the collective *Simbiosis Cultural* and other Bolivian organization decided to organize public assemblies in order to discuss collectively about their condition of work and elaborate new strategies to transform their condition, connecting with self managed and community spaces like *Casona de Flores* and the CTEP. From these assemblies started a complex and difficult process which involved various workshops and workers that finally founded the ‘Juana Villca’ cooperative. As in the informal workshops the coincidence of house and workplace represent

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15 More info at [juicioluisviale.wordpress.com](http://juicioluisviale.wordpress.com)

an economic advantage for the 'enterpriser' and make possible accumulation of money that circulate and expand popular economies, the separation of the space for living from the workplace was the first attainment of the cooperative.

«When a migrant arrives here, he first need a place to sleep, food and job: this system provides it easily and in the same place»<sup>16</sup> told me Juan, activist of *Simbiosis Cultural* and worker of the cooperative, explaining me why this model proliferates among the migrant, taking advantage from community networks in order to obtain insertion in the neoliberal informal textile market. Among these 'economic strategies' we can find reactualization of ancestral or traditional logics of organizing common life through cultural, symbolic and ritual dynamics and historical working class' struggle strategies that produce heterogeneous motley frameworks (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2018) mixed with calculation and 'self-entrepreneurship' (Gago 2015). This kind of labour organization allows the 'enterpriser' to provide food and bed to the migrant workers, often familiar or friends, and be able to earn some money and get profits. These forms of accumulation, mixing exploitation and kinship and community relationships, is linked to community finance, economic and political informal networks and subaltern strategies in order to reproduce their life under this regime of production and domination. These fragmented communities that constitute themselves facing multiple dispossession processes on transnational level are, according to Gago, examples of the ambivalence of popular economies as spaces of dispute and conflicts that involves habits, embodied affects and cultural dynamics.

The reasons for joining the cooperative, as various workers reveal, are very heterogeneous: during the first interview, Luis told me that he joined the Juana Villca when «police confiscate my machines because I didn't have the official permission to work in my house, so I lost everything and I joined the cooperative in order to be more protected», while Marcos consider that he «joined this cooperative although I didn't trust in political organization but I want to work on my own and do not depend of others, so I calculate that this experience can help me».

Juan affirms that «our aim is to combine work and politics, self education and social struggle, collective mobilization and

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16 Interview with Juan Vazquez, August 2016.

community work» and for these reasons, as part of the collective *Simbiosis Cultural*, he put all his efforts in this process. The coexistence of individual calculation and necessity of a collective organization is a continuous tension that crosses the experience. The heterogeneity of experiences and complexity of collective and individual strategies that I heard listening to the voices of the workers, during informal conversations or interviews, needs to be understood from a native point of view, in order to understand subaltern's agency both as resistance and as a project (Ortner, 2014). First, recognizing them ability to define strategies confronting dispossession, exclusion and exploitation, secondly, understanding that participation to the cooperative and the experience of self management are complex challenges, full of complexity and difficulties, that involves and mobilize multiple biographies, subjectivities and identities.

Cristina is a bolivian woman, she arrived some months before starting to work in the cooperative to Argentina, and affirms that «I want to contribute to a different labour organization in order to avoid to other migrants like me this terrible condition that we all lived ». The memories of previous experiences are often collectively discuss and shared, in order to emphasize the common experience and create space for confidence. «It's hard and difficult, but we are putting all our energies and resources because we want to demonstrate that is possible to work collectively, in better conditions and escaping that terrible places we have all experienced and lived in» affirms Delia during an assembly in the cooperative. «We also build networks with other workers in cooperatives of factories, and we organize especially among migrant workers in order to make visible the oppression we are suffering because of racism and austerity policies» continues Delia<sup>17</sup>. Challenge the processes of invisibilization of migrant labour force and the forms of their subordination to a structural regime of spatial injustice (Bret et al., 2016; Soja, 2016) is a central aspect of this self organized cooperative. Make visible these frameworks permit to rethink the urban as a place of collective struggle against the combination of dispossession and exploitation, creating different kind of solidarity networks inside and outside the cooperative. As an example, the cooperative established relationships with the self managed farmers of the

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17 Interview to Luis, Marcos, Juan, Cristina y Delia, October - December 2016.

UTT<sup>18</sup>, the union of workers of the land, in order to have good quality of food in the cooperative and at the same time support them in solidarity.

The workers are creating their own spaces for make collective decision possible and open up a collective discussion that involves all the associated, to define the way of organizing labour process, the social and political relationships, the participation to popular economy workers' demonstration, the ways to resist to the economic crisis that during the last two years are deeply tensioning the economic sustainability of the collective process. After the first year of collective work in the same space, Luis shares with me some of the achievement he affirms have been obtained. «We decided discuss how many hours we have to work and how to organize the space where we work together, this is really something new and we are learning to decide collectively in assemblies. But we still depend on the suppliers and are not able to negotiate the low price of our work, neither the temporality of the work delivery»<sup>19</sup>. The collective organization permits both to question the internal hierarchies and the external regime of exploitation, as I have argued deeply in another article (Castronovo, 2018): this double tension, inside and outside the cooperative, characterize this experimentation of unionism that aims to organize social cooperation and workers without bosses that fight against the devaluation of work, the lack of social rights and financial exploitation (Roig, 2017). This complex composition of practices, problems and challenges that Juana Villca cooperative is facing exhibit how political transformation and production of commons coexist, as Gago argues, with mass capacity of self organization in the neoliberal global market (Gago, 2014).

### **Open conclusions: between urban commoning and social conflict**

The experiences I have briefly analyzed overflow the borders between labour and social conflict, between productive and reproductive activities, providing services and welfare reorganizing spaces and territorial relationships from below: for these reasons I propose to define these experiences as infrastructures of an emergent popular institutionalism based

18 *Union de Trabajadores de la Tierra*: it is the most important organization of popular economies peasant workers of the suburban area of Buenos Aires.

19 Interview to Luis, December 2016.

on self organization. These frameworks of popular institutions enable to produce the urban as a common, and both renovate and redefine social conflicts in times of austerity and neoliberal hegemony. On the other hand, the perspective on urban popular economies I have delineated according to various scholars and critical studies permit us to analyze urban transformation and social conflict from the point of view of the popular sector's strategies and struggles, in order to situate the urban question in within the processes of class struggle facing extraction of value and wealth accumulation.

As we have seen in both cases, self organized and popular economies are not separated from the market and the more general processes of accumulation of capital (Gago and Mezzadra, 2015); they constitute rather a battlefield between new logics of accumulation and extraction of value and heterogeneous practices of class struggle that reinvent popular and workers institutions. Following these authors, the ambivalence that characterize these frameworks represent both the main reason of its expansion related to a subaltern insertion in the global trade and exploitation circuit and the condition of possibility of the reconfiguration of class struggle and social antagonism.

The neoliberal policies are producing in the last years structural waves of expulsions (Sassen, 2014) caused by dispossession and financialization of economies that are producing poverty and social fragmentation. In this context, self organization in the urban space is globally growing and showing his ambivalence that are deeply connected with the centrality of consumption in the processes of inclusion and production of subjectivities, the criminalization of popular life and informality and the increase of criminal economies. These phenomena create a space of overflowing of different kind of urban violence escalating in the last years because of austerity policies and flexibilization of labour and connecting with the growing popular debt. So the increasing power of finance in the territories connected with popular economies and within this framework with new illegal accumulation of capital in the metropolitan areas creates an ongoing process of «segmentation of hierarchized spaces due to differential access to security [...] that promotes a “civil war” in defence of property» (Gago, Sztulwark, 2016). From this perspective, the urgency of analyzing critically ambivalences and potentialities of self-organized urban economies is urgent

in order to permit an exhaustive comprehension of the current social processes in urban territories and the definition of possible strategies to confront precariousness and dispossession.

Focusing on the experiences I have analyzed in this article, I underline that the spaces they enable and their effort to answer collectively to processes of individualization, isolation and precarization constitutes specific ways to confront the neoliberal production of subjectivity based on the ideology of the self entrepreneur. These experiences demonstrate that collective processes of self-organization have a specific productivity in terms of politic, economic, social and cultural ways to dispute the forms of capitalistic accumulation making the city as a common, in terms of what Gutiérrez Aguilar define a «collective appropriation of disposable material wealth and of the possibility to decide on it and define the way to use and manage it collectively» (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015: 32). As part of multiple ways of organizing life in the territories, in the neighbourhoods and slums, in community centres and in suburban zones confronting neoliberal way to self organization, recuperated factories and collective labour forms of self organization of popular economies make visible popular and social infrastructures as new possible configurations of urban life, reinventing the urban as a common through interstitial and potential alternatives based on reciprocity, community and cooperative practices (Gibson Graham, 2013; Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015) to resist and challenge capitalist relationships and spaces.

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**Alioscia Castronovo**, antropologo, dottorando in Ingegneria dell'Architettura e dell'Urbanistica presso la facoltà di Ingegneria della Sapienza di Roma, in cotutela con il dottorato in Antropologia Sociale dell'IDAES dell'Università di San Martin, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Membro del GT CLACSO "Economías populares: mapeo teórico y práctico", vive in movimento tra il Mediterraneo e l'Argentina, si occupa di processi di soggettivazione, organizzazione e conflitto nelle economie popolari urbane, dinamiche socio-spatiali e trame territoriali delle fabbriche recuperate, urbanizzazione popolare e autogestione. [alioscia.castronovo@uniroma1.it](mailto:alioscia.castronovo@uniroma1.it)

## A Relational Approach for the Study of Urban Commons: The Case of the Escocesa Art Centre in Barcelona

Ioletta Bianchi

### Abstract

Negli ultimi decenni, la categoria del Comune è emersa nel discorso post-Marxista per tracciare un percorso di emancipazione dal capitalismo oltre lo Stato e il Mercato. Tuttavia, i Beni Comuni sembrano mancare di un approccio empirico condiviso che permetta l'effettiva comprensione della loro capacità di emancipazione. Questo articolo tenta di fornire un contributo nel colmare questa lacuna proponendo l'utilizzo di un approccio relazionale allo studio dei Beni Comuni Urbani. Basandosi sull'analisi del caso studio dell'Escocesa, un centro d'arte situato a Barcellona, l'articolo sostiene che svelando le diverse relazioni che costituiscono i Beni Comuni Urbani è possibile coglierne la complessità e valutare il loro potenziale di emancipazione.

In the last few decades, the category of Common has emerged in the post-Marxist discourse to draw a path of emancipation from capitalism beyond the State and the Market. Nevertheless, a shared empirical approach that allows us to understand the Commons' emancipatory potential seems to be lacking. This paper attempts to provide a contribution in filling this gap proposing the utilisation of a relational approach for the study of Urban Commons. Analysing the Escocesa case study, an art centre located in Barcelona, the paper suggests that, by unveiling the different relations that constitute Urban Commons, it is possible to grasp their complexity and evaluate their emancipatory potential.

**Parole Chiave:** beni comuni urbani; politiche culturali; Barcellona

**Keywords:** urban commons; cultural policy; Barcelona

### Introduction

The critical approaches to the history of economic institutions suggest that, since the unfolding of industrial capitalism, the institution of the Market, based on the logic of competitive exchange and commodification, has prevailed in the social space (Polanyi, 1944). From this perspective, the State, on behalf of Society, should have represented the institution which, through the logic of the Public based on universalisation and social protection (Polanyi, 1944), could have balanced and challenged the Market (Dardot and Laval, 2010, 2015). However, the Marxist and post-Marxist political economy seems to suggest that the expansion of the Market has been possible thanks to the support of the institution of the State (Marx, 1867; Hardt and

Negri, 2009]. Although the latter reinforced its protective nature during the phase of the welfare capitalism, it has never stopped to support the development of the Market, building a complex and intertwined relation with it. The last decades of our history, with the construction of the hegemonic, albeit variegated, neoliberal regime (Peck, Theodore and Brenner, 2013), have seen a further strengthening of the support of the State to the logic of the Market (Harvey, 2005, 2007). Notwithstanding the possible different interpretations of this dynamic, it seems hard to imagine that the State can still represent an institution able to protect Society from the logic of the Market, especially after the recent economic crisis and the implementation of austerity measures in most European countries.

In response to this scenario, a new category has emerged in the post-Marxist discourse: the category of Common (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Harvey, 2012; Federici and Caffentzis, 2013; Dardot and Laval, 2015; Mattei, 2015). This category is based on two main principles, cooperation and self-government, and aims to challenge not only the institution of the Market but also the intertwined relation between the latter and the State putting in motion a process of emancipation from both these institutions. In this post-Marxist perspective, the category of Common is constituted by its plural and singular inflection: the theory of 'The Common' (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Dardot and Laval, 2015) and the practice of the 'Commons' (Mattei, 2011; Harvey, 2012; Federici and Caffentzis, 2013). 'The Common' can be interpreted both as a political strategy of the radical Left and as the new order that the latter should institute. The 'Commons' can be interpreted as social practice whose claims would allow The Common to be instituted. Nevertheless, despite the abundance of academic contributions, a shared empirical approach to evaluate the Commons seems to be lacking, limiting the effective understanding of its emancipatory potential. By setting the analysis in the urban context, this paper proposes the utilisation of a relational approach for the study of Urban Commons with the objective to provide a contribution to such understanding.

Firstly, the paper describes the theory of The Common and the practice of the Commons in the post-Marxist perspective, underlining the lack of a shared empirical approach. Secondly, the paper proposes the utilisation of a research methodology

based on a relational approach. This methodology implies studying firstly the relation that constitutes the Urban Commons, i.e. the relation between the social group and the resource; and secondly the relation of the Urban Commons with the State and the Market. By analysing an Urban Commons located in the city of Barcelona, the Escocesa art centre, the paper shows the emancipatory capacity of the Urban Commons and the inevitable tension between the logic of The Common and the logic of The Public. The paper concludes arguing that by unveiling the different relations that constitute Urban Commons it is possible to grasp their complexity and fully understand their emancipatory potential.

### **Post-Marxist Common's theories: from The Common to the Commons**

In the post-Marxist perspective, the theory of The Common and the practice of the Commons are closely linked since they are based on the organisational principles of cooperation and self-government and aim to design a Society's path of emancipation from the Market and the State. However, these two concepts represent two different entities which should be separated, especially in the light of empirical analysis.

The theory of The Common was presented for the first time in 'Commonwealth' by Hardt and Negri (2009) and successively in 'Commun. Essai sur la révolution au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle' by Laval and Dardot (2015). Both contributions propose a political project to define a path of emancipation from capitalism through an autonomist Marxist approach. However, they show an important theoretical difference. Hardt and Negri's work is the expression of the updating of the Italian 'Operaismo' while Laval and Dardot's work is the expression of the updating of Castoriadis's institutional autonomy. This difference leads to many theoretical discrepancies such as the same meaning of The Common, being a mode of production for the former and a principle for the latter; and the radicality of their revolutionary project, being a project of 'rupture' for the former and a project of 'radical transformation' for the latter. Nevertheless, it is possible to define some common elements between these two revolutionary projects.

According to both theories, The Common is a project that should

enable Society to go beyond capitalism through a bottom-up process capable of producing an alternative configuration of the space, a new order based on The Common, i.e. based on cooperation and self-government (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Dardot and Laval, 2015). This alternative configuration can be achieved by questioning and challenging the space occupied by the institutions of the Market and the State through collective practices that would eventually 'institute' The Common (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Dardot and Laval, 2015). Thus, despite their different theoretical approach, their thesis converges on the objective and the function of The Common. This becomes a new category that, by re-articulating all the antagonist struggles, may drive a path of emancipation from capitalism. However, their contribution is markedly theoretical and does not suggest an empirical approach that allows us to understand how to analyse this path of emancipation.

The practice of the Commons has been studied not only by post-Marxist scholars. Since the second half of the last century, the practice of the Commons has re-emerged thanks to the ground-breaking works of the new institutionalist studies of Elinor Ostrom. Her contribution can be considered crucial for two reasons. Firstly, she has had the merit to demonstrate that the collective management of different resource systems, both material and immaterial, not only was possible but also represented a valuable alternative to the State and the Market (Ostrom, 1990; Hess and Ostrom, 2007). Secondly, she proposed the utilisation of a rigorous empirical approach that aimed to show that communities of individuals can take collective decisions. This empirical approach was based on the construction of an interpretative framework to explain how individuals, through a cost-benefit analysis, are not necessarily driven by their profit-making incentives.

According to Ostrom, the Commons were management systems to be put side by side to the State and the Market and not an emancipatory category to go beyond the State and the Market (Caffentzis, 2010; Federici and Caffentzis, 2013). In this way, Ostrom's neo-institutionalist work theoretically distances itself from the post-Marxist perspective (Castro-Coma and Martí-Costa, 2016; Rossi and Enright, 2017). However, this theoretical approach has also empirical consequences. As sustained by Laval and Dardot, Ostrom tended to overestimate in the

construction of her framework the individual rationality of each member of the community, and to underestimate the role played by the political and economic context (Dardot and Laval, 2015). Therefore, despite the rigorousness of Ostrom's approach, this does not seem to be usable by post-Marxist Common's theorists. Firstly, because the cost-benefit analysis does not take into account the revolutionary objective of the Commons; and secondly because, in the light of the revolutionary project, it is not possible to underestimate the crucial role played by the political and economic context.

Many are the post-Marxist approaches on the practice of the Commons that have emerged in the past decades. These include the political economic approach of the Midnight Notes Collective (De Angelis, 2003, 2012; Federici and Caffentzis, 2013), the legal approach of Italian scholars (Mattei, 2011; Quarta and Spanò, 2016), the geographical approach of Harvey (Harvey, 2010, 2012) and the socio-political approach of Spanish scholars (El Observatorio Metropolitano, 2011; Comunaria, 2017). Without reducing the specificities of each contribution, it is considered necessary to propose a summary that, although not exhaustive, represents the mesh in which these contributions are set. By and large, in the post-Marxist perspective, the Commons are practices of struggle based on cooperation and self-government that demonstrate that autonomous non-capitalist forms to produce and reproduce life beyond the logic of the State and the Market are possible. In this categorisation, there is no emphasis, as in the case of Ostrom, on the collective ability of a community of individuals to self-govern a resource system. The emphasis is instead on how the process of collective self-governing a resource, material or immaterial, represents an emancipatory practice that resists and challenges not only the Market's tension to the appropriation and commodification of the resources but also the tension of absorption and transformation into a bureaucratic and homogenous State form. In this understanding, the practices of the Commons become a *means* through which The Common, i.e. *the objective*, can be instituted.

All the post-Marxist contributions on the Commons underline their emancipatory potential. However, as sustained by the feminist critique, they often tend to deepen the characteristics of the Commons but side-line the question of their social

reproduction (Federici, 2011; Huron, 2015). In other words, in the post-Marxist debate on the Commons there is a shortage of literature, in comparison to the whole theoretical production, that empirically investigates how the Commons can be maintained in a given context over time, preventing the full understanding of their emancipatory potential. Among the empirical research carried out so far, some of the most relevant contributions come from the discipline of urban studies.

### **The Urban Commons**

There are several urban studies on the Commons, carried out from a post-Marxist point of view, that come from different disciplinary approaches such as geography and planning. These studies contribute to understand the emancipatory capacity of Commons through empirical analyses carried out in the urban space. The critical geography of Chatterton and Pickerill consider Urban Commons as practices of self-management where activists desire to constitute no capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social, and economic organisation through a combination of resistance and creation (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). Analysing several self-managed spaces in the United Kingdom, such as social centres, Low Impact Developments (LID) and tenants' networks resisting gentrification, they focus on the activists' everyday practices. Their work shows the difficulty that activists have when these practices become more institutionalised in maintaining a democratic decision-making process and their radicalism.

The Greek planner Stavrides sees Urban Commons as spaces that are produced by people in their effort to establish a common world that houses, supports and expresses the community that participates in and against the capitalist order (Stavrides, 2016). According to Stavrides, Urban Commons have to be threshold space in order to be truly emancipatory. A threshold is a permeable space of exchange and passage that allows one to meet 'the others'. An example of a threshold is the social housing block called the 'Alexandras complex' built in the outskirt of Athens in order to house Asia Minor refugees. Here, despite the hostile and unfriendly environment, refugees transformed outdoor places into playground and meeting places where vesting, small fests and everyday encounters

between neighbours were taking place. This interpretation is also taken up by some critical geographers such as Ferreri (2016). Analysing the experience of a social group that occupies abandoned spaces in London to open them to the community, like some shop fronts, she shows the possibilities and limits that Urban Commons have to be open to 'the others' concluding that the openness is a space that is always challenged and struggled over (Ferreri, 2016).

Many other contributions coming from the critical geography could be added to this literature. As an example, Huron, analysing a limited-equity housing cooperative in Washington, argues that the emancipatory capacity of Urban Commons can be limited by the necessity to work with strangers and by the threat of enclosure (Huron, 2015). By analysing independent cultural spaces in Dublin, Bresnihan and Byrne (2015) show that the two most relevant constraints for Urban Commons are represented by the intervention of public authority that most of the times either evict or shut them down, and by the increasing rent prices with the consequent impossibility for communities to afford them. Finally, Bunce (2016), in the analysis of a community land trust, highlights how Urban Commons have to find compromises with public agencies and private actors that may undermine their emancipatory potential.

In conclusion, the empirical contributions that study the emancipatory capacity of Urban Commons are numerous but very fragmented. Some of them focus on the democratising capacity of the activists' group, others on their openness capacity, others on the different limits and constraints that they face in the urban space. The result is that the fragmentation of the empirical contributions prevents from a fully back-feeding of post-Marxist Common's theory. This paper aims to try to bridge the gap by proposing an empirical approach for the study of Urban Commons that could help in the construction of an empirically-based theory of their emancipatory potential, that is to say of their capacity to institute The Common.

### **A relational approach for the study of Urban Commons**

A proposal for the empirical approach for the study of Urban Commons could come from the same ontology of the Commons, that is their relational nature. According to Harvey,

the Commons are built when «a social relation, although unstable and malleable, is built between a self-defined social group and those aspects of its actually existing or yet-to-be-created social and/or physical environment deemed crucial to its life and livelihood» (Harvey, 2012: 73). However, it is very difficult for this relationship to be wholly separated from the context as the Commons coexist with a myriad of other private and public forms of ownership and governance (Chatterton, 2016; Rendueles, 2017). As Stavrides argues, «we need to abandon the view that fantasies on uncontaminated enclaves of emancipation» (Stavrides, 2016, p. 56). This means that pure Commons, autonomous from the State and the Market, do not exist. This nature is even more evident in the urban space, a space characterised by economic and demographic saturation, and by the State regulation.

Drawing from these reflections, the article argues that a Commons is characterised not only by the social relation between the group and the resource, but also by the social relation with other institutions. In other words, a Commons can be considered as a *relational social relation* since it is constituted by the social group's relation with the resource but this social relation needs to relate also with the same institutions it aims to overcome: the State and the Market. For this reason, the empirical approach that this research proposes is a relational approach for the study of Urban Commons whereby the objects of the study become: i) the relation between the social group and the resource that constitutes the Urban Commons; ii) the relation between Urban Commons and the main institutions that dominate the social space, which are the State and the Market, that are also the same institutions from which the Urban Commons aim to emancipate from.

Usually, the Urban Commons' relation with the State and the Market emerges as a result of empirical works that finally show the type of alliances that Commons need to build to survive (Bresnihan and Byrne, 2015; Huron, 2015; Bunce, 2016). However, the proposed methodology suggests that, in order to understand the process of emancipation of the Commons, their relational nature, and therefore their non-pure-self-governing-form, cannot simply be the result of an inductive work but must be deductively considered as a postulate of the research itself and as a guide for the entire empirical work. Applying a

relational approach means adopting a relational ontological and epistemological stance (Simondon, 1989; Balibar and Morfino, 2014) in the study of the Urban Commons. This stance is based on one essential idea: the interpretation of the entities of the world in relational terms, where the subject is made of the relations it/he/she has with the environment and thus it is impossible to define its limits (Morfino, 2014).

Applying a relational approach for the study of Urban Commons means, at the ontological level, not only considering Urban Commons as relational practices that have to relate to the State and the Market but also as relational practices whose birth and development is the result of the relations with the State and the Market. At the empirical level, this means firstly to analyse the reasons of the relation between the social group and the resource. Secondly, it means considering the multiple temporal layers that determine the history of the Urban Commons, supposing that the Urban Commons' genesis is determined by its relation with the State and the Market, as well as their evolution over time. Thirdly, it means considering the contingency of the relations as a metastable balance and not as something terminated and concluded. Finally, it means considering the continuous evolution of the Urban Commons' relations because, even if it reaches a metastable balance, it will continue to maintain relations with the State and the Market.

In other words, a relational approach implies *studying the reality of Urban Commons starting from the study of its relations* rather than *starting from the reality of Urban Commons to then study its relations*. To illustrate the utilisation of the proposed methodology, this paper uses the case of an artists' self-governed space that started in Barcelona in the late 1990s. Such relational approach is firstly used to define through which web of relations the Urban Commons takes shape; secondly it is used to analyse whether these relations limit or foster the Urban Commons; and finally, it is used to understand the emancipatory potential of the logic of The Common and its tension with the logic of The Public. The analysis of the case study is based on different methods: direct observations with the participation to the art centre's assemblies, interviews with social and political actors/stakeholders, and document analysis, including websites of national and local media, City Council official documents and press releases. The analysis has

been carried out between 2015 and 2017.

### **The case of the Escocesa art centre**

#### *The Urban Commons*

The Escocesa Urban Commons is the expression of a social relation established between a group of artists and the Escocesa, a privately owned industrial warehouse located in a former industrial district of Barcelona, the Poblenou. With the termination of industrial activities in the late '80s, the factory started to be rented at an affordable price by creative professionals. In the beginning, they were around 12-13 artists. As time passed, the number of artists grew steadily. By the end of 2006, there were around 75 artists among which painters, sculptors, photographers, circus performers, etc. During this period, the Escocesa was self-governed and self-sufficient. Self-government was rather elementary because artists had little to share, mainly the bills, and only a few decisions had to be taken together, principally concerning the realisation of shared art events within the Escocesa. Self-sufficiency must be understood in the sense that the Escocesa was not receiving any public funding and each artist was paying the rent separately. However, the Escocesa was not an isolated case. In those years, the Poblenou, suffering the decline of industrial activities, was an undervalued area due to the financial disinvestment by real estate developers and the laissez-faire approach of institutional power. This is why, from the 1970s onwards, many artists' groups settled in the area using the former industrial factories as workspaces. During that period, in which no other social group and no other economic and institutional actors were interested in these properties, artists represented the only potential users of these spaces. As a result, the artists' concentration in the Poblenou grew to the point that it was identified in the literature as an unplanned creative milieu (Martí-Costa and Pradel i Miquel, 2012). The Escocesa and the Poblenou creative milieu grew without any institutional planning and only through the relation between the artists' need for affordable spaces on the one hand, and landlords' profitability on the other.

The relation that all artists had with the Escocesa warehouse was based mainly on economic interest. Artists needed a space to work which had some specific characteristics, such as wide-

open areas, an abundance of natural light, affordable renting prices and proximity to the city centre, and the industrial site of the Escocesa met all them. Obviously, for young, unsalable and low-income artists the relation of economic interest was a relation of necessity since, without access to affordable spaces, they could no longer afford to carry out their art activities. Nevertheless, in addition to the economic reason, some artists also began to develop an identity relation with the Escocesa and the Poblenou creative milieu. This is why the Escocesa Urban Commons cannot be considered separate from the unplanned creative milieu of Poblenou as it was because of this dense network of self-governed art spaces that The Common was producing.

### *The Common*

The Common referenced in this case is the democratic and de-commodified art production, autonomous from market and political pressures. In the case of the Escocesa and the Poblenou creative milieu, the democratic and de-commodified art production was due to the affordable access to space. If generally only those who can afford the uncertain economic stability can undertake this professional path, in this case young, unsalable and low-income artists could also find a workplace in the Escocesa, or in other art spaces, and produce art. In this way, artists were keeping their creativity free, without feeling the pressure to highly commodify their art or to fully meet the need of the art market or to be constantly in search of public funding. Nevertheless, even though affordable access to space was helping to democratise, and de-commodify art production, and to maintain artists' creative freedom, the democratisation and de-commodification could only be partial, since it could not guarantee access to space to all artists who cannot even afford those affordable spaces.

### *The threat*

The Barcelona City Council, governed in those times by a left-wing coalition, played a leading role in the land revalorization process of the Poblenou through the implementation of a pro-growth land-use reform based on the notion of the knowledge city – the 22@ Plan, approved in 2000 (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2000). However, although knowledge was the driving principle

behind the transformation, the presence of the unplanned creative milieu was not taken into account when the plan was developed. In the Plan, the many vacant factories, together with those occupied by artists, were only considered to be disused architectural artefacts, symbols of the economic downturn, and all artists' social groups were not considered productive agents, but rather only a further demonstration of the economic obsolescence.

With the approval of the 22@ Plan, many redevelopment projects started and land value increased (Martí-Costa and Pradel i Miquel, 2012). Many artists' workshops started to disappear, progressively moving somewhere else, mainly towards another undervalued former industrial area: the Hospitalet de Llobregat. A few years after the Plan's approval, the Escocesa also began being threatened. At the end of 2005, the factory was bought by Renta Corporación S.A, a Spanish real estate company. Their redevelopment plan for the Escocesa was to turn the factory into high-standing houses and lofts, and handing over the remaining 30% to the City Council for public facilities, as established by the 22@ Plan. The Escocesa redevelopment project was approved and made public in March 2007. As soon as Renta Corporación S.A. bought the factory, it started to offer economic compensation to artists to facilitate their way out. Many artists accepted the indemnification but a reduced number of artists refused the compensation and campaigned against the redevelopment project.

### *The struggle*

Artists who decided to stay and to struggle in the Escocesa were few, around 15 people. This group was formed mainly by those young, unsalable and low-income artists who could not afford to pay higher rent for a studio space. Thus, in order to facilitate institutional negotiation, they gather into the Emma Ideas Association (EME). The EME association presented a project to the ICUB, the Cultural Institute of Barcelona, in order to take advantage of the possible transfer to the City Council of the 30% of the area to be dedicated to public facilities. They proposed that the Escocesa become a not-for-profit art centre managed by the EME Association to experiment, produce and spread fine plastic arts, where self-sufficiency would be provided by the members' fees and by the renting out of some studio spaces (Eme, 2007).

Eventually, the EME association managed to remain in the factory, saved thanks to the intervention of the City Council which acquired two warehouses and included them in the Art Factories Programme (AFP) approved in 2006. However, most of the self-governed art centre under threat did not benefit from the same institutional help and disappeared from the Poblenou.

#### *The Escocesa Urban Commons within the Public logic*

The objective of the AFP was to support existing and new creative activities by retaining affordable spaces in Barcelona for artists and creative professionals through the provision of a network of public art factories with different artistic specialisations, assigning to art companies or association or groups the management of these spaces (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2006). Through the AFP programme, it seemed that public institutions had understood how the provision of affordable spaces was relevant to guaranteeing a fully democratic and de-commodified art production. The first stage of the plan was characterised by the researching of public industrial buildings across the entire Barcelona area that could be incorporated into the network. The Escocesa factory was included in the first selection but, surprisingly, it was not considered for its existing creative activity, but only as an industrial artefact that met architectural requirements (Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 2006). During this first phase, another six factories were included in the programme but only one them was a former Poblenou art centre. Some factories were long-standing self-managed art spaces, so they were allowed to continue being managed by the same associations, while other factories were entrusted to different organisations, each one representative of a specific artistic sector. The second phase of the AFP involved the architectonic renovation of all factories. Once the renovation was about to be terminated, each factory could finally become part of the network and start to receive public funding to become a fully functioning Art Factory.

The 1st of January of 2008, two warehouses of the Escocesa estate were transferred by Renta Corporacion S.A. to the ICUB to be used as public art facilities. However, as the ICUB did not yet have a clear idea of the type of artistic specialization which the two buildings could accommodate, and since it wasn't aware of any other art associations to entrust them to, it decided to take advantage of the presence of the EME association by

welcoming their claim to manage the building. The same month, one of the two warehouses was temporarily entrusted to the EME association. The rest of the estate was still in the hands of Renta Corporacion S.A which had however temporarily stopped the redevelopment project due to the economic crisis. According to public officers, the temporary entrustment was due to the fact that Escocesa was not recognised as a long-standing self-managed creative space, with a tradition of social and cultural activism, and it could not rely on a well-structured art project. The contract signed between the ICUB and the EME association established that the warehouse could be managed by the association until the renovation project of the building had taken place. From that moment on, the art project of the Escocesa factory had to be re-discussed and a public call had to be launched to assign the management of the art project. This did not prevent the EME association from participating and eventually winning the call. However, if the EME had won, the association members would have to leave after two years in order to provide a complete rotation of artists, for the sake of the public, the cultural and the artistic interest, guaranteeing its open accessibility and use. Thus, the ICUB temporarily saved the social relation of Escocesa' artists with the factory, not because it recognised the relation of interest and identity of artists with the space, but only because of a temporarily lack of planning that should have soon been overcome. However, the temporary status of the Escocesa factory never ended and became structural.

In 2010 refurbishment works began in all the factories. The Escocesa was the only one in which the refurbishment works did not begin. The reasons given by public officers were that in those years of economic crisis, the AFP did not have enough resources to carry out all of the planned works. Thus, it had to prioritise some projects and, in this list of priorities, the Escocesa was the last one. However, a small amount of funding was allocated in a timely manner to secure the building, as it was already operating as a sort of public art centre, albeit imperfectly. In those times the Escocesa became a not-for-profit art centre self-managed by the EME association, organising a variety of public art and training activities and offering to artists temporary access to some of their studio space through public calls in order to economically sustain the project.

As soon as the refurbishment works were completed, the

other factories were incorporated into the programme as fully functioning Art Factories and started to receive a constant public subsidy. Thus, the Escocesa was the only factory that, since it did not undergo the refurbishment works, was not entitled to funds as it could not be considered a fully-fledged Art Factory. However, the Escocesa was part of the programme, and it was functioning as a sort of imperfect public art centre. Thus, in order not to leave the Escocesa in a particularly disadvantaged position, the ICUB decided to transform the funds allocation to secure the building into an annually-renewed contribution. In the beginning, the amount of the contribution was small, around 4000-5000 Euros, but it progressively increased over the following years. However, the funds were much lower in comparison to others factories. This precarious condition created by the postponement of refurbishment works and the reduced amount of public funds has characterised the Escocesa up to recent times.

*The effects of the Public logic on the Escocesa Urban Commons*

Being part of the AFP and being a publicly-funded, albeit imperfect, art centre implied progressive structural changes in the Escocesa. Firstly, the relationship between the Escocesa and ICUB changed. The latter, in order to justify its inclusion in the programme and the direct investment of public money, began to be more demanding towards the Escocesa. Two demands were the most pressing: the realisation of as many public activities as possible and the rotation of as many artists as possible. Secondly, the internal management changed. Artists who were involved in the management of the Escocesa were no longer able to carry out his/her art project. The management entailed such an amount of work that it could not be carried out during an artist's free time but instead required a person to be contracted full-time. Thus, at the end of 2011, the association decided to hire a manager, dedicating a part of its budget for this new administrative role. Although the manager was appointed by the same EME association, he was seen as a sort of representative of the public institution, since he strongly pushed for the Escocesa to satisfy the public and cultural interests.

From 2011 onwards, the AFP was marked by a significant policy change. In this year municipal elections were won for the first time in Barcelona by a conservative party, Convergence and Union. The new government set a new cultural agenda, also

affecting the AFP design. The new guideline for the programme represented a shift towards a market-oriented cultural approach, whereby the Art Factories had to be frontline art centres in order to contribute to the city's cultural internationalisation and professionalisation (ICUB, 2011). In relation to the Escocesa, the ICUB became less tolerant of its precarious conditions because they did not allow the factory to achieve the new objectives. However, as the ICUB could not send away the EME until the renovation works had been done, while not having any intention of actually carrying them out, it began to put the artists under pressure, pushing for an internal collapse of the Escocesa by underfunding the project while over-demanding results.

During these years, public funds increased, reaching around 40.000 euros from 2013 onwards. Nevertheless, this contribution was still the by far lowest in comparison with other factories. This situation made Escocesa's artists feel discriminated by the public administration and always in competition for funds with other factories. The underfunding also caused many social tensions among the same Escocesa artists. Since a part of the resources could finance art projects of both permanent and temporary residents, the result was that especially young, unsalable and low-income artists, for whom a little contribution meant a lot, were struggling for an extremely limited budget. Moreover, the underfunding also increased the tension among artists and workers. In order to be positively evaluated by the AFP and to receive more funds, the Escocesa had to maintain a high level of performance, but with inadequate resources, relying on the overworking and the exploitation of both the artists and the manager.

In reality, the reasons for all of these tensions are rooted in the protraction of the precarious condition created by the postponement of refurbishment works and the integration of the Escocesa into the AFP as an imperfect Art Factory. Due to the lack of realisation of the works, the artists were paying for the effects of a non-compliance of the ICUB. This was also the reason why the relation of the permanent artists with the space changed. Since there was no prospect for the works to be carried out, the temporary privilege of permanent artists that were retaining a studio space at a price far below the market standards was becoming more and more a consolidated privilege. This is why the Escocesa artists did not develop claims to press the ICUB to

start the renovation works. Retaining the affordable studio space in such a location of the city, and benefitting from the public funds for their art projects was an extremely advantageous situation that none of the artists sought to change. The permanent artists' attempt to protect the privilege on the space, along with the tension in the struggle for the monetary resources among all artists, caused the collapse of the Escocesa, as the ICUB had expected it.

In September 2016, the artists of Escocesa decided to dismiss the manager. This decision was officially taken after a majority vote of the Assembly but it was pushed for by a group of permanent artists who saw him as a threat to their privilege on the space. The dismissal of the manager can be seen as the last desperate attempt by some artists to maintain their affordable studio space by stopping the transformation of the Escocesa into a fully Art Factory. However, this operation contributed to increase the tension among artists and to the legitimisation of the ICUB's view of the factory, which played a leading role in its future transformation. At the moment, the Escocesa is in a transition period where the assembly presidency has changed, handed over to one of the artists who has good relations with the ICUB while the latter, despite its non-compliance, is leading a progressive transformation of the Escocesa to make it a fully frontline Art Factory: with many public art activities and with the rotation of all of its artists. Being public property, and given the fact that the AFP was a consolidated programme of the ICUB, the artists no longer had any legitimacy to maintain their relations with space, especially in the re-valued, saturated space of the Poblenou.

### *Discussion*

Before the Escocesa became part of the AFP, it could have been considered an Urban Commons as it was somewhat self-sufficient and self-governed. Moreover, the Escocesa, together with other creative factories of the Poblenou creative milieu, was contributing to producing The Common, that is, a more democratic and de-commodified art production, free from market and political imperatives. However, this production was partial because it could exclude all those more than unsalable, young and low-income artists. In this sense the logic of The Public could have compensated the logic of The Common, reducing its

imperfection. However, the existence of the Escocesa Urban Commons and the Poblenou creative milieu depended on the City Council and private sector's lack of interests and investments in the area that undervalued land prices. Once the City Council and private sector's interest and investments increased, due to the 22@ Plan, the days of both the Escocesa and the Poblenou creative milieu were numbered. The result was that the autonomous creative factories disappeared from the Poblenou and moved to other under-valued post-industrial areas, such as the Hospitalet de Llobregat, where the same type of Urban Commons can currently be found. The existence of the Escocesa Urban Commons was saved only thanks to the intervention of the ICUB. The public ownership was the only guarantee to save the Escocesa at the cost of its inclusion in the AFP.

This AFP programme was born with the intention of protecting and compensating the imperfection of The Common produced by the Escocesa and the Poblenou creative milieu, through the logic of The Public, by universally providing affordable creative spaces to art professionals. However, in its operationalisation, it was neither able to protect nor to compensate the imperfection of The Common. The ICUB did not protect the Poblenou creative milieu and it saved the Escocesa only because of a lack of planning. The emergence of autonomous creative factories and the production of the same type of The Common moved to more marginal areas, and the Escocesa could not be considered an Urban Commons anymore since its management and sufficiency was no longer autonomous from state power. Under the Public logic, the democratic and de-commodified art production of the Escocesa had been distorted, confined within a spectrum of artistic excellence and market imperatives. In other words, the AFP became the expression of the intertwined relation between the State and the Market, where the intervention of the State, although the utilisation of the logic of the Public should have protected and compensated the imperfection of The Common, was in practice not able to do so. The current state of the Escocesa is the materialisation of the degeneration of the conflictual relation between The Common and The Public. Indeed, The Public logic in the name of universality must guarantee open and democratic access to all. In this respect, the defence of the interest of permanent artists on the space represented the defence of the interest of a particular collective on a universal

space. However, it is also the last desperate attempt of a group to defend that crucial social relation with the space although, in this case, this defence meant the closure of the group on its own privileges, inside the Urban Commons.

## Conclusion

Despite the abundance of theoretical contributions, a shared empirical approach that allows us to understand the Commons' emancipatory capacity seems to be lacking. This paper has attempted to provide a contribution in filling this gap proposing the utilisation of a relational approach for the study of the Urban Commons. This methodology has been applied to the analysis of the Escocesa art centre in Barcelona. Through the utilisation of this approach it has been possible: 1) to understand the reasons of the social group's relation with the space and how they have changed over time; 2) to build the network of relations that made the Urban Commons emerge; 3) to analyse how changes in these relations impact the Urban Commons and its emancipatory capacity; and 4) to highlight the inevitable tension between the emancipatory capacity of The Common and the Public.

The case study shows that Urban Commons can represent a means to institute The Common. However, Urban Commons may need the intervention of the State and the logic of the Public. Firstly because in the saturated space of the city, the public property may become the only salvation for an Urban Commons; and secondly because The Common produced by Urban Commons may be imperfect and may need to be compensated by the logic of the Public to guarantee universality and democratisation. However, the intervention of the State, using the logic of the Public permeated by the logic of the Market, may lead to a deterioration of the Urban Commons and, instead of protecting and compensating The Common produced by the Urban Commons, can limit its emancipatory potential.

Undoubtedly, the conclusions drawn from this single case study analysed through the relational approach cannot be generalised and cannot substantially back-feed the Common's theoretical contribution. In order to build an empirically-based theory of the emancipatory capacity of the Commons a comparative analysis of a consistent number of case studies are needed. However, this case study allows us to start to show how the proposed

relational approach in the study of Urban Commons, unveiling the relation between the social group and the resource and the relation of the Urban Commons with the State and the Market, allow us to begin to grasp their complexity and evaluate their emancipatory potential.

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**Iolanda Bianchi** holds a PhD in Politics, Policies and International Relation from the UAB and in Regional Planning and Public Policy from the University IUAV of Venice. She is a Research Fellow at the IGOP, UAB. [iolebianchi@gmail.com](mailto:iolebianchi@gmail.com)

## Public value in temporary practices of self-organization.

### Lessons from Santiago's Mapocho Pedaleable

Marisol García González<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

L'articolo esamina la relazione tra auto-organizzazione e valore pubblico attraverso lo studio della pratica *Mapocho Pedaleable* a Santiago – una riappropriazione di una sponda del fiume altrimenti inutilizzata, e ora destinata a spazio pubblico. Focalizzandosi sulla discussione sul valore pubblico, l'articolo esplora criticamente la misura in cui queste pratiche sfidano il significato di tale valore nella creazione di spazi in cui i cittadini si riuniscono con uno scopo comune, nell'intento di costringere le autorità ad agire. Mettendo in discussione la relazione tra organizzazioni civiche e istituzioni statali, la ricerca si propone di svelare la misura in cui i diversi attori coinvolti perseguono fini pubblici attraverso pratiche di auto-organizzazione. L'articolo sostiene che il potenziale di trasformazione delle pratiche di auto-organizzazione possa essere ampliato solo combinando gli interessi e le motivazioni dei diversi gruppi, senza posizionare gli interessi privati al di sopra del valore pubblico. Questo studio esplorativo ha adottato un approccio qualitativo, basato principalmente su interviste semi-strutturate condotte sul campo, e parte di una ricerca più ampia.

This paper examines the relation between self-organization and public value through the study of Santiago's *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice, a reclamation of an unused river bank in the city as a space for the public. Centring on the discussion of the public sphere, the paper critically explores the extent to which self-organization practices challenge the meaning of the public when creating spaces in which citizens come together, with a common purpose, in an intent to compel authorities to action. By questioning the relationship between civic organizations and State institutions, the research seeks to unravel the extent to which the different actors at play pursue public value through practices of self-organization. I suggest that the transformative potential of self-organized practices can only be expanded when combining the interests and motivations of the different groups without positioning private interests over public value. A qualitative research approach was adopted to conduct this exploratory study, based primarily on semi-structured interviews conducted in the field which are part of a wider research endeavour.

**Parole chiave:** sfera pubblica; auto-organizzazione; Santiago

**Keywords:** public sphere; self-organization; Santiago

### Introduction

«I believe that not only the definition of the project with all the technical complexities, the number of entities, the citizen dimension but also the

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<sup>1</sup> All interview quotes used in the paper have been translated by the author from Spanish.

symbolic dimension, recovering the river bank became a political statement that goes far beyond the 5.5 km of cycle path. It's much more than that» (Interviewee 12, Regional Government Representative).

One Sunday in May 2011 a group of about 400 cyclists occupy an emblematic and neglected public space in the city of Santiago, the river bank of *Mapocho* river, in order to reclaim its ignored public value. As recognized on the above quotation, the reclamation and recovery of the river carries a symbolic and political dimension that goes far beyond the physical transformation of space. In an intent to compel authorities to action, this process of self-organization challenges the value and meaning of the public while bringing attention to a forgotten (public) space.

What does the public means in the city? The term 'public' is associated with the terms public space, public sphere, public realm, 'publicness' and with the public itself. The term can be traced back to the Latin term 'publicus' which means «of the people; of the state; done for the state, (but) also the common, general, public; ordinary or vulgar» (Harper, 2001-2017). The discussions of the public sphere have grown in importance by the emergence and formation of different 'publics' or civic groups that have «unleashed accelerating changes across public cultures and civil societies, and altered the practices of democratic struggle and deliberation» (Goodnight, 1997b). The discussion is even more critical in a context where neoliberal thinking is dominant, and in which civic groups are leading initiatives for expanding the potential of public spaces.

The aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between public value and self-organization through the study of the *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice, a temporary practice of self-organization initiated as a reclamation of Santiago's founding river. My intention is to unpack the relations among the different actors involved in the process and specifically, to focus in the perceptions of both State actors and activist's groups, while considering their diversity and their multiple interests at stake. The question that guides this paper is what are the controversial relations between civic organizations and State institutions in the *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice? The underlying premise is on the ambiguity of self-organization practices. The diverse intentions and motivations of the actors interacting in such practices, both converge and diverge with public value and common good. This

paper attempts to show that the transformative potential of self-organized practices can only be expanded when enhancing mechanisms for dialogue and collaboration with a focus on public value, without negating dissensus in the process of production of space. The paper will first attempt to present the practice of study within the context of the city of Santiago and Chile's neoliberal politics, to then establish its theoretical foundations and methodological approach. It will close with the analysis and discussion of the case and conclusions.

### ***Santiago's Mapocho Pedaleable: Reclaiming the use of the river as a public space***

The Chilean capital, Santiago, has an estimate number of 7.3 million inhabitants which represents 40% of the country population. It is a deeply segregated city and its urban structure reflects its extreme socio-economic inequality. The metropolitan area of 'Greater Santiago' is atomized in 34 municipalities, and although it has high levels of access to basic infrastructure and public services, the quality of them differ greatly in different boroughs of the capital (Rodríguez and Winchester, 2001). Santiago is a paradigmatic case as the neoliberal model imposed by Pinochet's dictatorship perpetuates today. The neoliberal project influenced by Milton Friedman, ideated by the 'Chicago Boys' and implemented by the dictatorship (1973-1990) had the aim of destroying civil society networks, reducing the power of the state and expanding the control of the private sector by freeing the market economy. The neoliberal project has deeply influenced Santiago's urban development. Examples of this neoliberalisation process are seen in the public-private focus of the social housing market, the privatization of water networks (Hidalgo and Janoschka, 2014), the gentrification of central areas triggered by real estate developments (Lopez Morales, 2011) and in the processes of commodification and privatization of public spaces.

Back in the 1990s when Chile opened to democracy, after seventeen years of dictatorship, paradoxically, social movements were mostly quiet (Paley, 2001). The strong social mobilizations for land and housing in the 60's, the workers' movement and social mobilizations enhanced by Allende's Popular Unity in the early 70's, and the political manifestations against the dictatorship

in the 80's appeared to diminish in the outset of democracy (Paley, 2001). However, in 2011, the wave of mobilizations that emerge in various parts of the world hit Chile. The widespread student movement protests, known as the *Chilean Spring*, were the most visible of various other political, environmental, social and economic demands emerging in the form of social mobilization happening then and during the following years (Donoso and von Bülow, 2017). After a decade from the return to democracy, social movements were showing their strength and transformative potential. Civil society organizations were supporting and leading manifestations but also, opening new possibilities for self-organization connected to not just reactive but proactive actions and temporary self-organization practices.

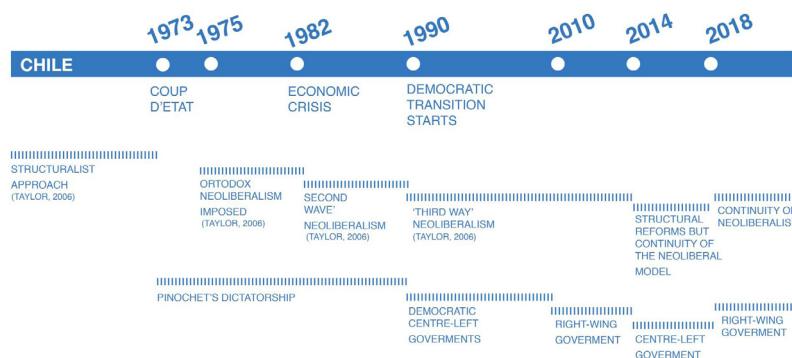


Figure 1. Timeline of Chilean Neoliberal Context | Source: Author's own based on Taylor (2006).

Temporary self-organization practices, such as street markets, squats and artistic manifestations, have a long history in cities, as it has had in Santiago. However, the character, reasons and intentions of such practices varies, ranging from insurgent and resistance practices, to others been complicit to the capitalist mode of production imposed by the neoliberal project. Recently, there has been renewed interest in the topic due to the global spread of these practices and faster speed of their occurrence (Ferreri, 2015; Madanipour, 2017: 176). The public space debate has gained fresh prominence with many arguing that this new paradigm is a complex arena where roles and rights are getting redistributed and defying the traditional logic of public space

provision (Bodnar, 2015; De Magalhães, 2010; Gadanho, 2014). Practices of self-organization, hand-made interventions, do-it-yourself (DIY) actions, citizen-led initiatives and provisional, interim, or insurgent public space appropriations are different ways to name this expanding urban trend (de Certau, 1984; Gadanho, 2014; Hou, 2010; Lydon and Garcia, 2015; Madanipour, 2017; Rosa and Weiland, 2013). Whereas some of these terms used emphasize its mode of production, others, highlight its temporary condition or character. Making use of the unused, vacant, interstitial, lost, ruined, neglected and abandoned spaces; these practices are reclaiming the 'publicness' of public space by occupying it temporarily for political, social, environmental and economical purposes. As Jeffrey Hou claims,

«these instances of self-made urban spaces, reclaimed and appropriated sites, temporary events and flash mobs (...) have provided new expressions of the collective realms in the contemporary city. No longer confined to the archetypal categories of neighbourhood parks public plaza, and civic architecture, these insurgent public spaces challenge the conventional, codified notion of public and the making of space» (Hou, 2010: 2).

I define temporary self-organization practices as self-made, experimental and collective actions of citizens and civic organizations, driven by a will of producing transformative change in the city and done under the logic of reversibility. I consider temporary self-organization experiences as non-linear processes but cyclical ones, because cities are in constant flux. Self-organization does not just comply counter-hegemonic practices of resistance but also practices that relate to power structures through their collective actions. *Mapocho Pedaleable* was chosen within this framework for analysis because is an emblematic and contested temporary self-organization practice in Santiago, in which different State and civic actors have been involved for almost a decade.

In the heart of the Chilean capital, *Mapocho Pedaleable* was emerging at the same time that political demonstrations for free education spread through the capital. *Mapocho Pedaleable* is a self-organized practice driven by individuals and pro-cycling civil society organizations who seek to transform *Mapocho*'s river bank into an open public space with a cycling path. The self-organized practice was initiated as an academic proposal within an architecture school by two (now former) graduate students.

The idea was tested for the first time in 2011, when about 400 people and activists led by the students, cycled through a small stretch of the river bank and register their experience raising awareness of the action through social networks and online platforms. The initiative arises following the river clean-up of sewerage discharges executed by the water utility company serving Santiago. The river bank is a national good for public use (BNUP) not accessible to the public, and although it was not illegal to use it, the first occupation of the river was done without any official form of authorization.

Following the first activity in the river, the Centre of Public Policies (CPP) of *Universidad Católica* and the former local mayors of Santiago and Providencia, two central municipalities of the city, offered institutional support to the group that came up with the idea and they start collaborating. In 2013, with the support of local governments and civil society organizations the river bank was opened to the public during a single-day event known as *Yo Vivo Mapocho* that summoned more than 4.000 people (Pedaleable, 2017). By building temporary accesses to the river with scaffolding and scheduling activities for a day the aim was to encourage citizens to make use of the space. During the same time, the CPP was showing the project to diverse government representatives triggering a study driven by the central government's Transportation Planning Secretariat (SECTRA) for evaluating its feasibility.



Image 1. *Yo Vivo Mapocho* 2014. Source: Author's own

Following so, and supported by the local governments, the leading group won an urban development and social inclusion contest from the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) which meant getting resources for developing the project design. The team worked in parallel both in developing the events in the river and in the design project of the accesses. In 2014, *Yo Vivo Mapocho* event was held during one day and in 2015 the river was open for two consecutive days attracting approximately 30.000 people. By then, the political support of the former Metropolitan Regional Government Governor was openly manifested and he lead a process to involve both the Minister of Public Works (MOP) and the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism (MINVU) in the design of the long-term project for transforming the river into a public space.

During the 5<sup>th</sup> World Bike Forum held in Chile in 2016, the river was occupied by approximately 50.000 people during six consecutive days. Through a private company sponsorship secured by some of the creators of the idea (i.e. the NGO *Pedaleable*), a strip of the river bank was paved to facilitate the transit of cyclists for the first time (Pedaleable, 2017). After this event, President Bachelet committed presidential priority to the initiative encouraging the Regional Metropolitan Government (GORE RM) to fund the initiative to recover 7 kms. of the river as an accessible public space. The political support received triggered two parallel processes. On the one hand, MOP lead the design of the bidding process of the project by bringing together different areas of expertise within the Ministry (i.e. National Architecture Directorate, Hydraulic Works Directorate, Roadways Agency, National Institute of Hydraulic) and from the Ministry of Housing and Urbanization (i.e. Housing and Urbanization Service of the Metropolitan Region, SERVIU). On the other hand, a four months pilot project lead by GORE for opening the space to be used in an everyday basis, named *Interim Mapocho Pedaleable*, was carried out from December 2016 to April 2017 and during the following year for an additional five months period (i.e. Oct 2017- Mar 2018).

Nearly 10M USD on funding was secured for the long-term project through a National Fund for Regional Development (NFRD) of the GORE RM and the bidding process to define the contractors that will deliver the project was published in December 2017. The project was meant to enable a flood park, including a 5 kms.

paving strip, four staircase-accesses and two universal accesses (GORE, 2017). The outcome of this story is still to be written. Currently, after the change of administration of the central government in March 2018, the bidding process was revoked by MOP following an instruction given by the current administration of GORE RM that questions the use of the approved public funds for the project and have sent a query to the General Comptroller of the Republic to oversee the decision of the former regional authority.

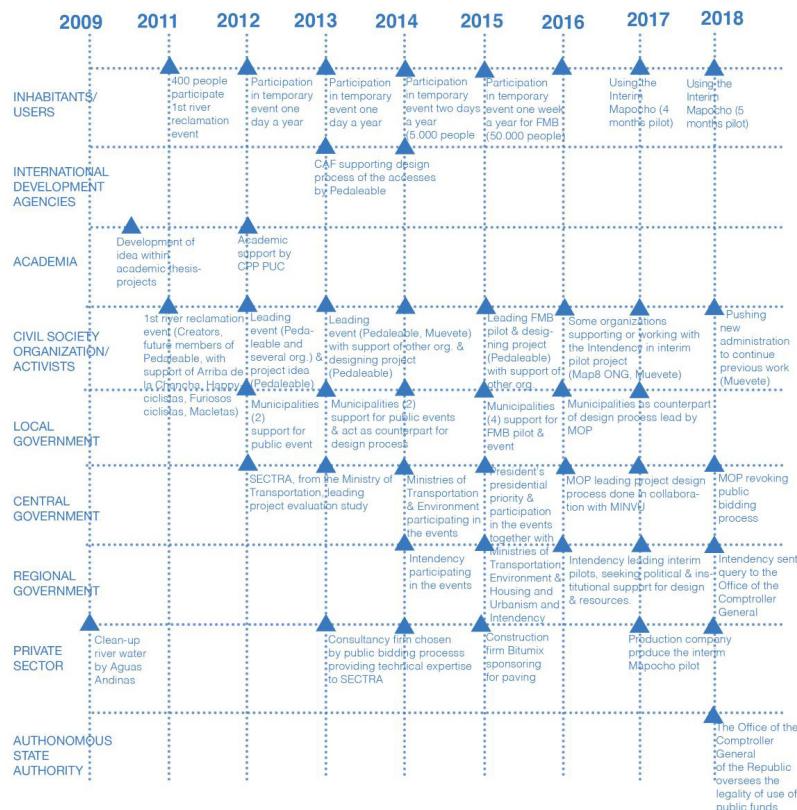


Figure 2. Mapping roles of actors in time. Source: Author's own based on interviews and secondary analysis data.

### Self-organization through the lens of the public sphere

What are the contradictory relationships between civic organizations and State institutions in the Mapocho Pedaleable practice? How those interactions are challenging the meaning

and value of the public? The discussions of the public sphere play a critical role in our understanding of self-organization as self-organization create spaces in which everyday citizens come together with a common purpose, in an intent to compel authorities to action, thus challenging the meaning of the public. The contemporary sociologist Manuel Castells defines the public sphere as «an essential component of sociopolitical organization because it is the space where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society» (Castells, 2008: 78). For him, the interaction between government and civil society through the public sphere is constituent of democracy. He argues the State flows away of its interests when there is not an «effective civil society capable of structuring and channelling citizen debates over diverse ideas and conflicting interests» (ibid.). The public sphere, as a space of communication of ideas and projects, is inseparable from the interaction between the civil society and the State (ivi).

Discussions about the public sphere have been approached from several disciplines such as philosophy and political theory (Arendt, 2013; Fraser, 1990; Habermas, 1989; Habermas, Lennox and Lennox, 1974; Staiger, 2009; Villa, 1992), rhetoric and communication (Goodnight, 1997a, 1997b, 2012; Hauser, 1998, 2001; Phillips, 1996), sociology and anthropology (Castells, 2008; Low and Smith, 2006), among others. However, the contemporary understanding of the term is founded in the work of the critical philosopher Jürgen Habermas who did a comprehensive analysis of its nature. In his influential publication *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Habermas define *Öffentlichkeit* (public sphere) as a sphere between civil society and the state, describing it as «the sphere of private people coming together as a public» (ivi: 27). His conceptualization considers a «model of a bourgeois public sphere emerging as a horizon of values and forms of rational critical communication» (Staiger, 2009: 311). Similarly, Hanna Arendt describes the public sphere as a space of tangible freedom where individuals are treated as equals (Villa, 1992). For both Habermas and Arendt the public sphere is an arena for political action separated from the state and the economy (ivi). The critical theorist Nancy Fraser (1990) rethinks the notion of the public sphere by questioning four key assumptions of the

bourgeoisie model of the public sphere as proposed by Habermas. First, the assumption that it is possible for the diverse publics in the public sphere to set aside their differences «to deliberate 'as if' they were social equals» (ivi:62), because in the bourgeois public sphere some members were marginalized and prevented to participate as peers. Second, the assumption that «a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics», because in a single arena subordinated groups or alternative publics will have no space for deliberation (*ibid*). Third, the assumption that discourses «in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that the appearance of 'private interests' [...] is always undesirable» (*ibid*), because through contestation and deliberation matters of common concern should be decided, and those could include matters normally labelled as 'personal' or 'private'. Finally, the assumption of the needed strong separation between the State and the civil society because as she argues, what indeed is needed is some form of interrelation to avoid the promotion of what she coins as 'weak publics' (ivi: 75). Therefore, Fraser claims for a valuable new non-bourgeois model of the public sphere that can allow us «to think about 'strong' and 'weak' publics» (ivi: 76) within an hybrid and multiple notion of the public sphere.

From the field of communications and rhetoric theory, Gerard Hauser take the public sphere as «a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them. It is the locus of emergence for rhetorically salient meanings» (Hauser, 1998: 21). For Hauser the public sphere is not just a theoretical conceptualization but also an historical construct that arose during the Greco-Roman period with the public engagement of individuals in the public life conducive to the formation of a sense of public opinion (1998: 22; 2001: 217). In his understanding, the rhetorical terms of the public sphere, the publics and the public opinion, have lost their intrinsic connection (Hauser, 2001). Goodnight (2012), also from communications theory, understands the public sphere as a realm for public argument. He distinguishes between a private, a technical and a public sphere. Exploring disagreements, he explains that arguments in the private sphere remain close to personal purposes and within personal relations, although those disputes occur in a public space. In the private sphere,

the statements made by the arguers to support the arguments remain ephemeral. In the technical sphere the conversation is preserved for analysis and the subject of disagreement will be narrowed down to the interest of a community of experts. When disagreements become a matter of public debate, then they enter the public sphere. He believes that the public sphere is being eroded by the pressure personal and technical discourses bring into the discourses of the greater good (Goodnight, 2012; Phillips, 1996).

The research is conceptually grounded on the aforementioned discussion of the public sphere as an arena for political deliberation and collective action. The research question together with this conceptual framework determined two criteria and indicators that frame the critical understanding of the relationships analysed. The first criteria of analysis deals with the process of production as both, a self-organized and an institutionalized process while the second criteria, deals with the public value of the practice, which relates to the interests and intentions of the actors involved (See table 1).

Concept	Critical Questions	Criteria	Indicators
<b>Self-organization</b>	How do practices of self-organization relate to institutionalized processes of public space production?	<b>Interpretation of the source of production of practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extent to which practices are self-organized by activists and civil society actors</li> <li>Extent to which practices are made through institutionalized modes of public space production</li> </ul>
<b>Public value</b>	To what extent do the different actors involved pursue common purpose through self-organization practices in the city?	<b>Interpretation of public interests and intentions of stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extent to which diverse government representatives relate to self-organization practices to pursue public purpose or private interests.</li> <li>Extent to which civil society representatives pursue public purpose or private interests through self-organization practices</li> </ul>

Table 1. Criteria and indicators | Source: author's own

This paper's methodology draws on an interpretive paradigm of qualitative research. I chose the qualitative approach since my intention is to understand people's perceptions, intentions and purposes and also because the research is exploratory by nature. Sixteen semi-structured interviews in relation to the *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice were conducted during fieldwork between December 2017 and May 2018 with civil society representatives,

activists, academics, planners, government representatives as well as current and former government authorities. These interviews are the main method used for the analysis and were selected from a wider number of interviews constituent of my PhD research.

### **Discussion: The dilemmas of self-organization**

«So this is like a process of seduction (...) that worked, in this case, and that is not regulated, is not within any pattern of how the State works, is not within any scheme within the National Investment System, is politics. It's politics in its purest state, probably. In the sense that it is groups of people influencing an authority that has the power to do things» (Interviewee 33, Central Government Representative).

Castell's (2008) conceptualization of the public sphere as a cornerstone of democratic politics is inherent in the definition this interviewee gives to the *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice. The policy maker explains this self-organization process is opening up a space for citizens to influence an authority that has the power to do things; hence, prompting a reaction of the State to a need raised by citizens themselves. As a process of seduction between engaged citizens and State actors, this self-organization practice evidences the ambiguity resulting from the interaction among the different actors involved and their conflicting interests.

What are the motivations and intentions behind the relations established in temporary self-organization processes? Relationships and interactions are established to pursue common interests, yet, are concurrently overlapping with personal interests such as the capitalization of a civic idea. The purpose of these discussion is to explore and intend to disentangle the tensions among these motivations and the ambiguity of the interests at stake. The aim is to share some lessons from the *Mapocho Pedaleable* practice that can contribute to the local discussions and to more extensively conversations about terrains of ambiguity in the field of self-organization today.

To do so, the framework of analysis will be the basis for exploring the perceptions of civil society actors about the relationships established with the State and other institutional actors (and vice versa). These perceptions are critical to understand self-organization through the lens of the public sphere as an arena for political action.

*The dilemmas of civil society*

For driving the transformation of the river bank, activists and civil society leaders have shown interest in establishing connections with institutional actors and at the same time have expressed their desire of keeping autonomy in their collective actions. This constant tension is critical at different stages of the process and is revealed in the conflictive relations different civil society actors establish with diverse institutional actors such as specific academic organizations, local government representatives, and central government representatives, among others. The sought of institutional support by civic actors is recognized by them as critical to gain visibility and to scale-up the initiative, however when common interests are at stake, they cling to these, defending the autonomy of the self-organized practice.

During the early years of the process the initiators of the practice establish relations with the Center of Public Policies of Universidad Católica (CPP), and with the local municipalities of Santiago and Providencia, among others. The CPP provided institutional support in order to fulfil its mission of contributing to the Chilean development by linking academic work to public policies. The need of an institutional support for raising the awareness of the idea was recognized by one the creators of the initiative, yet, he also acknowledges that working within the umbrella of an academic institution changed the character of the practice by rigidifying it.

«We started working with the Center of Public Policies (CPP) to see how to make it visible, because at that time [...] we were two guys recently graduated from university, if we did not have a certain support this idea was not going to go further and they said they will put the institutional support [...] Well from that work with the CPP I think we institutionalized a bit the thing and we rigidified it as well. I think that it was there [...] when certain things were gained, but the spirit it had was also a little lost» (Interviewee 15, Civil Society Representative).

He further explains the loss of autonomy was manifested when they proposed the CPP to keep doing collective actions to occupy the river to show the potential use of the river, but the institution perceived those actions as a threat to the current negotiations taking place with policy-makers. The fear of losing autonomy, made *Mapocho Pedalable* creators take distance from the CPP once they achieved their goal of reaching the

interest of the Central Government in the project, specifically, of the Transportation Planning Secretariat (SECTRA). This search for autonomy, probably derived from the feeling of the activists of having been losing the collective nature of the project by the limitations imposed by the academic institution. Using Goodnight's conceptualization, the subject was narrowed down to the interest of a community of experts, or to a technical sphere, thus eroding the discussion initially brought to the public sphere when a group of citizens occupy the river.

«When the thing of SECTRA came out [...] we worked on the terms of reference for the tender, the tender was going to be published, there was nothing else to do, the Public Policy Center fulfilled its objective, thanks, see you [...] » (Interviewee 15, Civil Society Representative).

The two central municipalities, Santiago and Providencia, provide institutional support to the creators to carry out the events for opening the river to the public. The municipalities are described by some civil society representatives as partners or supporters of the initiative. Additionally, they are described as counterpart during the process of design triggered by CAF's support. They are never described as controllers the process. Consequently, the relationship of the activists and civil society group with the municipalities during the early years of the process was fluent. Through this process of production, the activists were articulating their autonomous views for influencing political institutions actions.

«The municipalities were a great logistical support in the opening of the river pilot and they put themselves at our disposition, they did not bring an image too preconceived of what the event should be, and I think gave us space for more or less set out what the purposes, the objectives, the aesthetics and the contents were and (also) they were counterparts in the study process» (Interviewee 10, Civil Society Representative).

In 2013, a less fluent and rather tense relationship was established with the Transportation Planning Secretariat. SECTRA was running a feasibility study with a private engineering consultancy firm, which evaluates it under traditional transportation planning logics. The discourse of questioning the logic under which the project is evaluated is recurrent among representatives of the activists and civil society groups. During this institutionalized process of production of the practice, the discursive space was

not a matter of public opinion but restricted to a technical sphere, which was claimed to be limited by the activists and far from their collective demands.

«The conflict in particular was that SECTRA took the project and begin to evaluate it under the wrong technocratic parameters, with a transport consultancy a project that is a social, urban construction on the most important river bank in the city. What does transport consultancy have to do in evaluating and almost pre-designing a bicycle highway? That's not what we were asking for! » (Interviewee 9, Civil Society Representative).

However, some not just question the type of study done but the type of relationship established with the State. Some of the leaders of the activist group, that originally proposed the *Mapocho Pedaleable* idea, participated on SECTRA's public tender process for doing the study without success. Consequently, they were not considered as counterparts of the study. However, a member of a civil society organization claims for a reciprocal process of engagement.

« (...) photos appeared in some social network and they (government representatives and private consultancy team) were all like checking the plans, in the river, with the helmets and we were in the office seeing this because nobody considered us as one (counterpart) ... although we had to show our work to the governments, the government did not show anything to us» (Interviewee 10, Civil Society Representative).

A few years later, when the regional government takes part of the initiative, the leadership of the institution was perceived by some civil society representatives as a natural step to get the project materialized in the future. However, some show awareness about the political capitalization of the Intendancy resulting from their participation in the process. Although civil society representatives perceive the administration support to the project as a result of its public value, they also perceive their interest derives from its understanding as an arena of communication, and therefore powerful connection to the formation of public opinion, advantageous for gaining political capital.

«I think the problems that are (...) in this initiative that is transformed into a project is that of course, the Administration becomes a participant but takes this project for their own benefit too, that is undoubted. Because in the end the *Mapocho Pedaleable* ends up being a very good showcase and a very good launching platform, from a media point of view inclusively (...) Then politics are

there, and it is perfect, it seems very good to me» (Interviewee 8, Civil Society Representative).

However, the leadership established by the regional government authority was seen by others as a way of making civil society organizations invisible to the process. Although this is not a generalized discourse among civil society representatives is key to expose it as it shows the complexity resulting from the established mutual relations.

«It seemed strange to us that he had not made any mention of anything previous of the project, rather than it was a citizen's idea. This said as a side note: the subject of the citizens was something that at first excited me but I have been realizing that several politicians use it as to blur or create a grey area like is no ones, as to say this is backed by people but for us it was a bit absurd when they said that things were done by the citizens, because it was like a way of making us invisible» (Interviewee 10, Civil Society Representative).

The complex relationship of the civic organizations with the Regional Government produces divisions between civil society representatives. Although they have similar perceptions about the leading role of the Intendancy in the final stages of the ongoing process of production, they have divided perceptions about the meaning of transferring power to the State institution.

«Now what is happening, of course here (in Santiago) always happens, that any good initiative (...) is absorbed by someone, in this case the Intendancy, and they are made as part of the project, but they are also made as the project's directors, and it's a little natural that it's like that» (Interviewee 8, Civil Society Representative).

The strong authority and control over the process of production of space by the Intendancy tensioned the relations with some of the Civil Society representatives provoking a conflict of legal connotations with the State institution. However, this was not a shared perception among the different activists and civil society representatives and consequently create internal divisions among them.

« (Santiago's governor) had his edition of the Mapocho Pedaleable in which he was like the country estate landlord (...) but basically he, they controlled everything, they were responsible (...), they asphalted over our asphalt, and well, there we had our controversy with him, we complained to him on social networks, we even sue him because we thought it was a bad precedent in the

work with social organizations» (Interviewee 10, Civil Society Representative).

The dilemma between reinforcing autonomy and collaborating with State institutions is an expression of conflicting interests and values; a manifestation of an inherently political process. What is at stake is how to establish relationships that without negating dissensus in the process of production of space, establishes mechanisms for dialogue and collaboration with a focus on public value. Having described the tensions from the perspective of activists and civil society representatives, what follows is the exploration of the tensions from the angle of the State actors.

### *The dilemmas of the State*

State representatives perceive political leadership as key for making the proposed initiative flourish. Although acknowledging the leading role of civil society representatives in the process, a regional government representative perceives their role as key for scaling-up the impact of the initiative, claiming that without the State involvement the idea or project would not have succeeded into something else than an experiment.

«Mapocho Pedaleable is effectively driven by civil society but probably without the state joining it would still be in an experiment two days a year» (Interviewee 12, Regional Government Representative).

Moreover, a central government representative states that critical to the process was the leadership of a public authority, not only of a State institution. He explains that if the authority would have less interest or motivation in the issue the project will be probably lost going from one public institution to another.

«The project has raised its strength in the recent government, and I would say almost exclusively because there was an authority that is the governor which said I'm coming into play for this project. If that authority had not existed I do not know how much future the project would have had to reach the instances in which it is currently» (Interviewee 33, Central Government Representative).

Political capital gain is perceived by the government representatives as a form of gaining political support for driving the activist's initiative forward, rather than as perceived by some civil society representatives in the form of personal capital gain. Certain State representatives recognise public value is expanded

by the process of experimentation as they believe it is crucial for gaining public and political support.

« (...) this experimentation (...) virtuously part of a citizen initiative that occupies and colonizes a public space absolutely foreign to the city, then the state (...) continues with something more of temporality and experimentation, until we are in a position to say, and when I say conditions I do not only refer to normative, financial, but also political conditions. To which people say: Aha! This is what they want to do! Then (...) we dedicate this significant amount of resources because we understand what they (activists) are talking about. Otherwise, if these temporary and punctual interventions did not exist, there would never have been enough political capital to be able to approve it definitively» (Interviewee 12, Regional Government Representative).

A former public authority describes as paradoxical the conflict of legal connotations the Intendency has with some civil society representatives. The authority questions the public value of the *Mapocho Pedaleable* when treating the idea as a commodity. However, the implicit meaning he gives to the public is related to the 'pertaining to the State' meaning rather than to be a form of public deliberation.

«And that is paradoxical because there was a conflict with some of those who were originally involved in the issue, they demanded us because -of course, we want it to be an eternal pilot, we do not want it to be a definitive project- and when it is definitive, the idea was robbed. No way! It is a public idea. That is, you wanted to intervene in a public space, you made a pilot, you asked the State for help, the State helped you, took out the final project and today, of course, it's from the city, it's not yours. You cannot earn (money) with this project, because it's from the whole city» (Interviewee 12, Regional Government Representative).

The dilemma of providing leadership to build support to the initiative and gaining political capital is a double-edge sword. A predominant discourse relates to the gain political capital as a result from providing leadership and necessary for driving the transformative process. However, when raising political capital through the capitalization of civic processes or without the inclusion of the diverse actors interested in participating, the debate is detached from the public sphere; thus, the transformative potential of the practice weakened.

These discourses synthetized in figure 3 and linked with the framework of analysis show the ambiguity derived from the different actors' discourses and perceptions. This map is used strategically rather than theoretically to position the discourses

and tensions depicted through the discussion. For instance, the use of the concept 'political capital gain' has both positive and negative attributes. On one hand, it is understood as personal capitalization and on the other as a form for building political support on an initiative, thus differing in relation to the public value of the action. The discourse of a 'citizen idea', moreover, is perceived by some activists as a way to invisibilize them by an authority which commodifies a 'civic action'. Nevertheless, State representatives perceive the 'citizen idea' as a public idea questioning the commodification of the idea by some of the activists. Therefore, both discourses attempt to question the loss of publicness yet from quite different perspectives. Looking to the ambiguity of the discourses through the lens of the public sphere is critical for exploring how to construct meaningful relations for enhancing the transformative potential of self-organized actions.

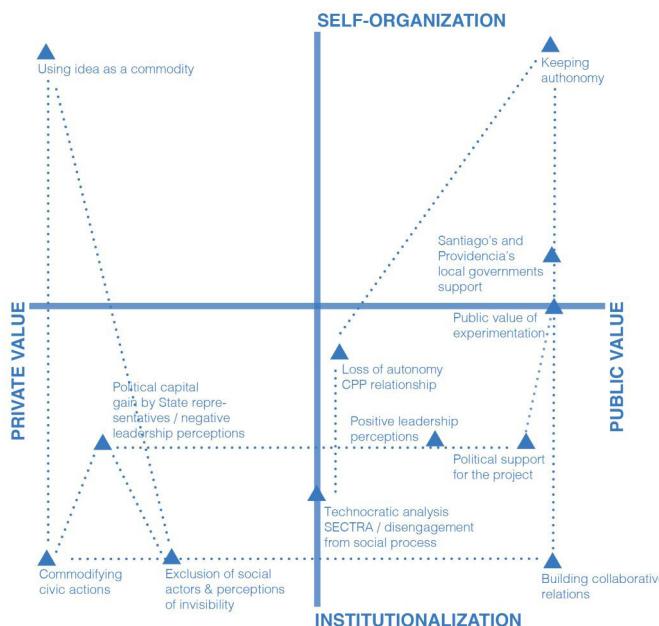


Figure3. Mapping discourses and tensions in relation to public value and self-organization.

### Conclusion: The politics of self-organization

Analysing the motivations and controversies behind the relations established between different civic actors and State representatives in the process of *Mapocho Pedaleable* can trigger a learning

process to both State institutions and the community driving this self-organization process. It challenges us to think how to reconcile urban collective actions with State processes of production of public spaces.

The goal of this process of activism and self-organization was to reclaim the public value of a neglected public space in the city. This exploratory study has shown that for expanding the transformative potential of self-organized practices, the contributions of the different actors at play need to be valued and embraced. Although self-organization and institutionalization are presented strategically as two opposed poles, the key is to narrow the gap among them and find ways in which institutionalization of practices does not produce feelings of 'invisibility' on civil society representatives, yet ones of inclusivity. In other words, ways in which to reinforce the autonomy of social organizations while building collaborative relations with institutional actors for pursuing common interests.

Self-organized practices have the potential to challenge the notion of a singular, comprehensive and codified notion of the public sphere while opening possibilities for a hybrid, inclusive and collective public sphere, in which a multiplicity of interests and publics come at play. As Nancy Fraser (1990) states, individual interests can be brought into the public sphere for deliberation. Nevertheless, if private interests conflict with public value, then the transformative potential of self-organized practices is weakened.

As Castell's argues, the State flows away from its public interests when limiting the participation of an active civil society. The dilemmas analysed through the paper shows the lack of mechanisms for bringing the State and social organizations to work together for the common good, and therefore, how this absence contributes to the erosion of the public sphere. I suggest if we want to expand the transformative potential of self-organization practices, we should seek to enhance forms of dialogue and collective collaboration for combining the interests and motivations of the different groups, focusing in the public value and working within the ambiguous boundaries between the public and the private.

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# OSSERVATORIO/OBSERVATORY

## Intorno al lago. La riappropriazione popolare dell'area dell'ex Snia Viscosa a Roma

Marco Gissara

### Abstract

L'articolo intende sintetizzare e ampliare le riflessioni contenute nella ricerca di dottorato, recentemente discussa, dal titolo Città immaginate: il Pigneto-Prenestino e la sua fabbrica. Rigenerazione urbana e pratiche dal basso (Gissara, 2018). Il testo tratta sinteticamente le tematiche generali riguardanti l'insostenibilità dell'urbanizzazione contemporanea (sviluppo metropolitano, cambiamenti climatici, 'diritto alla città', 'ricostruzione del territorio', ecc.), per poi analizzarle nel concreto all'interno del contesto romano, individuando un luogo e un processo specifico da investigare.

La scelta del caso-studio è conseguente al coinvolgimento diretto dell'autore nella battaglia locale per la riappropriazione popolare di un ex area produttiva, la fabbrica Snia Viscosa al Prenestino. Una lotta nata nei primi anni Novanta, quando un tentativo illegale di costruire un centro commerciale generò un evento imprevisto: la nascita di un lago naturale all'interno dello scavo di cantiere, quando le perforazioni rivelarono la presenza dimenticata di una falda in pressione. A seguito di ciò, la popolazione dei quartieri circostanti iniziò a rivendicare, nel contesto di un'urbanizzazione densa e inquinata, la destinazione dell'area a parco e servizi pubblici. La partecipazione e l'osservazione, negli ultimi anni, di questa battaglia locale auto-organizzata, così come le testimonianze riferite ai decenni precedenti, hanno restituito numerosi spunti di riflessione, riguardanti le condizioni passate, presenti e future di questo luogo e la 'comunità di resistenza' che si è riunita attorno ad esso. In particolare, sono emersi alcuni elementi importanti: l'approccio ecosistemico, il mix tra diverse conoscenze, le relazioni tra le persone. L'articolo vuole esplorare criticamente questi aspetti e, in conclusione, tornare a formulare considerazioni più ampie alla luce di tutti questi fattori, così da sottolineare l'esistenza di possibili percorsi alternativi all'urbanizzazione senza fine e alle conseguenti problematiche ambientali.

This paper aims to resume and amply the contents of a PhD research, recently discussed, called *Imagined cities: Pigneto-Prenestino and his factory. Urban regeneration and grass-roots practices* (Gissara, 2018). Moving from general issues about unsustainable urbanization (metropolitan development, climatic change, 'right to the city', 'territorial reconstruction', etc.), the text wants to contextualize them in Rome, Italy, in order to give them more substance, choosing a specific place and process to be investigated.

The case-study has been selected as result of the direct involvement of the author in a local struggle: the reappropriation of a former productive area, the factory Snia Viscosa. This fight has been going on since the early 1990s, when an illegal attempt to build a shopping mall has led to an unexpected outcome: a natural lake has born, in the place of the excavation site, when the drilled land has revealed the presence of an aquifer. After this event, the people of the surrounding neighborhoods has begun to reclaim the area as a public park, among a dense and polluted urbanization, and to implement public services. The self-organized local struggle

observed in the last years, as well as the evidences from the previous decades, has many points of interest to be analysed, regarding the past, present and future conditions of this place and the 'community of resistance' gathered around it. In particular, the crucial role played by ecosystemic approach, mix of knowledges, relationships between people.

This text aims to critically explore these issues and, in conclusion, to come back to broader considerations in the light of all these factors, in order to highlight the existence of potential alternative paths to the endless urbanization and its environmental implications.

**Parole Chiave:** movimenti sociali; partecipazione; ambiente; rigenerazione urbana; progetto locale.

**Keywords:** social movements; public participation; environment; urban regeneration; local project.

## Premessa

«Tu che sai fare? Tu che farai?». Sono le parole di un volantino distribuito ad aprile 2016, in occasione dell'apertura autonoma del lago ex Snia da parte del Forum Territoriale Permanente del Parco delle Energie. Con queste domande aprivo la breve introduzione alla mia tesi di dottorato, *Città immaginate: il Pigneto e la sua fabbrica. Rigenerazione urbana e pratiche dal basso* (Gissara, 2018).

In quell'occasione provavo a restituire il 'perché' di una ricerca: l'ambizione di contribuire, nel mio piccolo, a ridurre la distanza tra i bisogni ed esigenze espresse dalle persone (noi tutti), da un lato, e il patrimonio diffuso di conoscenze e passioni utili a soddisfarli, dall'altro. Il testo che segue riporta riflessioni svolte durante gli anni del dottorato, a partire da alcune questioni generali affrontate. Tra queste, in particolare, la lettura delle caratteristiche odierne degli insediamenti umani, la coscienza delle grandi problematiche ecologiche all'orizzonte e la conseguente affinità con le tematiche del 'diritto alla città' (Lefebvre, 2012; Harvey, 2013) e della 'ricostruzione del territorio' (Magnaghi, 2010). Ho approfondito queste tematiche con l'intenzione di dargli concretezza, leggendone le implicazioni in un contesto specifico. La scelta del caso-studio è stata naturale: una battaglia – la riappropriazione popolare dell'area dell'ex fabbrica Snia Viscosa a Roma – a cui stavo partecipando, insieme alla quale analizzare, sotto il profilo delle politiche urbanistiche, il trentennio neoliberista romano.

## Urbanizzazioni insostenibili

Le caratteristiche dell'urbanizzazione contemporanea hanno poco

a che fare con la sostenibilità degli insediamenti umani. Questa evidenza emerge con forza da qualunque prospettiva si osservino questi stessi insediamenti, analizzandone le caratteristiche proprie o evidenziandone il rapporto con le altre parti del territorio, urbanizzate o meno.

I dati globali (UN-DESA, 2011) restituiscono l'entità del progressivo travaso di popolazione verso le aree urbane – in meno di due secoli, i loro abitanti sono passati dal 2% a più della metà della popolazione mondiale – e la conseguente proliferazione e ampliamento dei centri urbani. D'altronde, possiamo considerare questi ultimi come una delle tante espressioni di una tendenza più ampia, leggibile confrontando l'urbanizzazione degli ultimi secoli e quella consolidatasi in precedenza. È ciò che Choay (2006) ha definito «la morte della città e il regno dell'urbano», evidenziando la difficoltà di rinvenire oggigiorno episodi di adattamento reciproco fra forme di tessuto urbano e forme di convivialità. La tendenza all'urbanizzazione diffusa e multiforme portò in passato all'elaborazione di altre ipotesi teorico-interpretative, quali la «rivoluzione urbana» di Lefebvre (1973), recentemente ripresa nei testi di diversi autori. Tra di essi, in particolare, Brenner (2016) ha introdotto negli studi urbani concetti quali «urbanizzazione planetaria», «spazio urbano senza fuori» e «paesaggi funzionali».

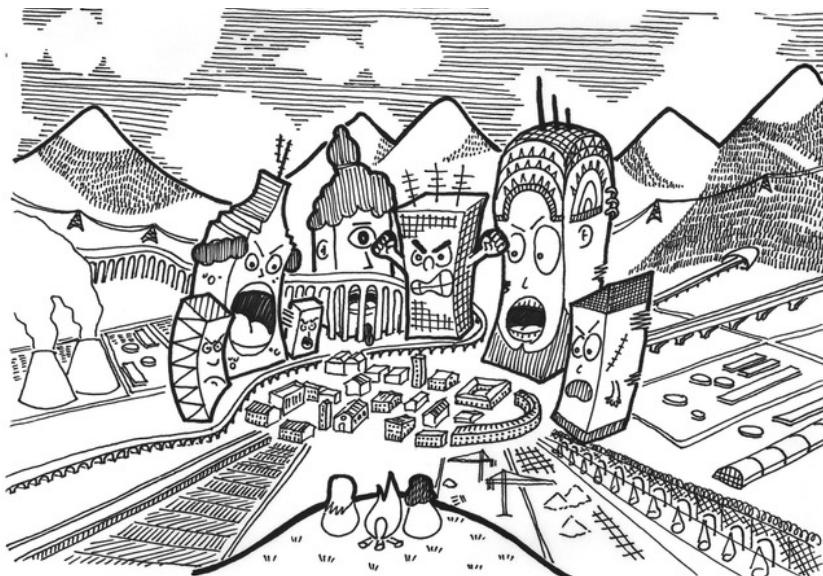


Fig.1. Tavola estratta da Vasi comunicanti. Una storia collettiva, striscia a fumetti presente in questo stesso volume.

Parallelamente a questa mutazione, nello stesso periodo si sono registrate variazioni climatiche capaci di incidere significativamente sull'ambiente dell'uomo. I fenomeni in atto sono stati recentemente analizzati e proiettati nel futuro mediante scenari probabilistici preoccupanti (IPCC, 2007). Le analisi riguardanti i consumi energetici (IEA, 2016) aiutano ad esplicitare il legame tra i cambiamenti climatici, le citate caratteristiche odierne degli insediamenti ed il concetto di sviluppo che soggiace ai modelli produttivi più diffusi, cioè una crescita economica infinita.

Intuitivamente, i contesti metropolitani sperimentati ogni giorno da molte persone sono percepibili come nocivi sotto diversi aspetti: la pessima qualità dell'aria a causa di diverse fonti inquinanti (trasporti, riscaldamenti, emissioni industriali); i rifiuti che assediano gli spazi pubblici e i parchi; il traffico e le auto in sosta che sottraggono aree utilizzabili per la socializzazione; e così via.

L'evoluzione del contesto romano corrisponde alle tendenze descritte: Roma è cresciuta incessantemente, dalla proclamazione a capitale del Regno d'Italia nel 1871 fino ad oggi. La città rappresentata nella celebre pianta di Roma di Giovan Battista Nolli costituisce un minuscolo frammento dell'odierna realtà urbana capitolina. Negli ultimi decenni, peraltro, tale espansione è continuata (Legambiente, 2011) sganciandosi dall'andamento demografico, ormai stabile, e seguendo motivazioni di carattere economico-finanziario. Le retoriche del policentrismo e della riqualificazione delle periferie hanno sostenuto le politiche in tal senso, portando all'odierno aggregato metropolitano a scala regionale ed accentuando le grandi problematiche già esistenti, per perseguire specifici interessi privati, come evidenziato da un'ampia letteratura critica (Berdini, 2000; 2005; Berdini e Nalbone, 2011; Cellamare, 2016; De Lucia e Erbani, 2016; Insolera, 2011; Moini e D'Albergo, 2015; Scandurra E., 2007; Sotgia e Marchini, 2017).

### **'Mondi altri' in movimento<sup>1</sup>**

Ho dedicato, nella tesi, un vasto spazio all'analisi delle recenti scelte di pianificazione nel contesto romano, per la consapevolezza del loro legame col modello di sviluppo

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<sup>1</sup> 11 Cfr. Zibechi, 2018.

complessivo e della loro forte influenza sulle caratteristiche di vivibilità dei luoghi. Le questioni problematiche a livello locale hanno dunque costituito una molla per la ricerca di 'alternative', ipotesi di trasformazione in via di realizzazione, capaci di alimentare il pensiero critico e, possibilmente, di gettare semi fecondi per altri contesti.

Mi sembra evidente, perlomeno nel contesto osservato, l'importanza di trovare l'espressione di tali alternative direttamente nella società. Le 'buone pratiche' portate avanti dalle popolazioni locali, le istanze su cui si fondono e le 'città immaginate' che prefigurano, mi sembra facciano molta fatica ad essere tradotte in politiche di portata più ampia, alla luce di questioni definibili come 'strutturali' che si manifestano sia nelle traiettorie di lungo periodo dell'urbanizzazione che negli orientamenti recenti delle politiche pubbliche. Ritengo, quindi, che sia utile dare più risalto e diffusione possibile alle tante esperienze 'dal basso', approfondendone gli aspetti virtuosi, con l'auspicio di contribuire ad alimentare e moltiplicare le pratiche esistenti, sottolineando le connessioni esistenti e possibili con le politiche.

Ho ragionato, a valle di un'analisi delle politiche urbanistiche romane dell'ultimo trentennio, sul rapporto tra 'territori' e spazio metropolitano, cogliendo la necessità di ripensare la capitale partendo dai singoli luoghi, dando la precedenza alla logica dell'abitare, espressione complessa che comprende luoghi, relazioni, saperi ed attività incomprensibili all'interno di mura domestiche. Lo ritengo un punto di partenza per 'rovesciare il piano': immaginare un policentrismo che, nell'ottica di accrescere la qualità complessiva del sistema urbano e metropolitano, si delinei a partire da ciò che esiste, implementando e diffondendo le centralità, integrandone la dimensione locale con quelle a scala più ampia, lasciando spazio al protagonismo delle persone. Una visione policentrica, dunque, mirata a (ri)costruire i territori dando spazio alle pratiche connesse all'abitare, ripartendo dal riconoscimento del ruolo degli abitanti e prendendo posizione nei confronti dei tentativi di usurparlo per mere ragioni di profitto.

Naturalmente, questo ragionamento può dirsi valido a patto di confrontarsi con i cambiamenti avvenuti nell'organizzazione sociale e nella struttura stessa delle città trasformatesi in metropoli. In questi contesti, è necessario integrare il

termine 'comunità': ad esempio, citando Sandercock (2004), appare appropriato parlare di «comunità di resistenza». Allo stesso modo, affrontare qui l'obiettivo della (ri)costruzione del territorio, richiede di ripensare l'aggregazione sociale necessaria a tale obiettivo, uscendo da una logica prettamente stanziale e abbracciando una visione fondata sulla mobilità (Crosta, 2010), nonché di ampliare il senso dell'espressione 'abitare i luoghi' fino a farla coincidere con viverli, trasformarli, renderli pieni di significati e relazioni.

Il caso osservato è un'esperienza collettiva che, nata e cresciuta nel cuore della metropoli, ha mantenuto e incessantemente ricostruito il proprio 'territorio' nella vita quotidiana, lavorando così sulla realizzazione di una propria autonomia, necessaria a poter interagire con altri soggetti, tra cui le istituzioni, fuori da ogni subalternità. Vi si riscontra quanto espresso finora: la presenza di relazioni significative tra pratiche e politiche, l'alternativa radicale alla logica dell'espansione urbana illimitata ed il rapporto profondo tra persone e luoghi.

Quanto segue è finalizzato a descrivere e interpretare il caso stesso, mediante la divisione in due paragrafi: la ricostruzione storica e l'esperienza diretta. Prima, durante e dopo la mia ricerca, infatti, sono stato implicato e partecipe nella lotta per la restituzione all'uso pubblico dell'area del lago. Ovviamente, l'esperienza diretta e le riflessioni che da essa sono scaturite hanno influenzato anche la 'storia' narrata, frutto di una lettura a posteriori, basata su quanto ho potuto conoscere nel tempo.

### **L'ex fabbrica della Viscosa al Prenestino**

Il luogo di riferimento del caso-studio osservato è un'area parzialmente abbandonata, con un passato industriale alle spalle: l'ex fabbrica chimico-tessile della Viscosa, insediatisi a Roma nel 1922, poco all'esterno delle mura storiche, lungo la direttrice di sviluppo verso est, caratterizzata dalla localizzazione di attività produttive, della via Prenestina e della ferrovia Roma-Sulmona. Lo stabilimento attrasse l'immigrazione dai paesi limitrofi e da altre regioni italiane, ampliandosi e arrivando a impiegare più di duemila persone, con una forte componente femminile. Una forte riduzione di organico, conseguente alla crisi economica internazionale, fu seguita dalla riconversione a favore della politica economica autarchica e di guerra del

fascismo. Di conseguenza, nel dopoguerra lo stabilimento si avviò verso la chiusura, cessando la produzione nel 1954 e cadendo in disuso.

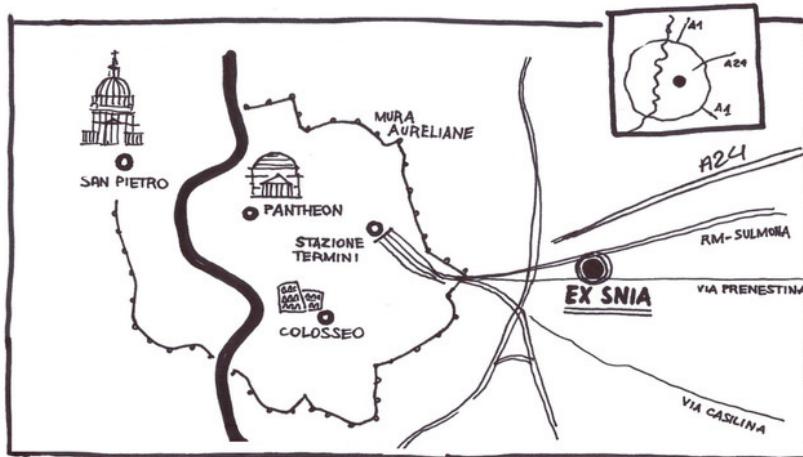


Fig. 2. Inquadramento urbano del caso-studio considerato.

La vicenda della fabbrica, con i suoi grandi scioperi (1924 e 1949) e gli atti di disobbedienza individuale durante il regime, rispecchia il 'corredo genetico' degli stessi quartieri limitrofi: una storia ininterrotta di conflitti e solidarietà. Gli episodi significativi di questa tradizione sono stati tanti (Severino, 2005), dagli scioperi e le occupazioni delle fabbriche durante il biennio 1919-20 fino ad oggi, passando per la Resistenza e le grandi mobilitazioni degli anni '60 e '70. Il Pigneto, primo quartiere a popolarsi, è stato da principio caratterizzato dall'aggregazione degli abitanti in comitati, dalle mobilitazioni per la realizzazione delle urbanizzazioni, dalle iniziative di solidarietà e mutualismo organizzate dal movimento dei lavoratori o da istituzioni religiose. Vi sono poi altre peculiarità originarie giunte fino ad oggi: la forte varietà sociale di quartieri – Pigneto, Prenestino-Labicano, Torpignattara – che, a partire da una variegata composizione di classe originaria, sono stati caratterizzati proprio dalle costanti mutazioni, ravvivando l'originaria conformazione mediante successivi cicli di migrazioni; l'analogia varietà spaziale, frutto di un disegno urbano per fasi, additivo, molteplice, disomogeneo e frammentario.

Nel tempo, la città è cresciuta intorno allo stabilimento, saturando gli spazi disponibili e rendendo semi-centrale il contesto, un

tempo periferico. Questa condizione ha innescato importanti cambiamenti (Postiglione, 2011; 2014; Scandurra G., 2007; Semi, 2015), tra cui un evidente processo di gentrification, peraltro incentivato da politiche pubbliche di rigenerazione urbana, materializzato in aumento dei valori immobiliari, espulsione degli abitanti meno abbienti, specializzazione commerciale.

Alla fine degli anni '80, l'area della fabbrica (ca. 12 ettari) venne liquidata e inserita nel circuito della speculazione immobiliare. La spinta alla valorizzazione economica e le condizioni critiche dei quartieri circostanti (forte densità edilizia, traffico, inquinamento, carenza di aree verdi fruibili e servizi pubblici), hanno determinato l'incessante conflitto sul destino della Viscosa tra la nuova proprietà e la popolazione. Quest'ultima, ritenendo prioritaria la conservazione della testimonianza storica della fabbrica e di un piccolo 'polmone' verde, ha portato avanti azioni e rivendicazioni finalizzate alla realizzazione di un parco e all'insediamento di servizi pubblici.

In seguito all'acquisto, la nuova proprietà provò subito a sfruttare economicamente l'area dell'ex fabbrica, progettando la realizzazione di un centro commerciale. A testimonianza di ciò, ancora oggi sono presenti uno scheletro edilizio e, soprattutto, il lago naturale emerso durante i lavori, quando gli scavi intercettarono una falda in pressione. Quest'ultimo avvenimento generò una catena di eventi: la proprietà provò a convogliare le acque nel collettore fognario limitrofo che, in occasione di un forte temporale, allagò i dintorni rendendo manifesto il problema. Sotto la spinta dei comitati, le istituzioni bloccarono il cantiere e, indagando sulle autorizzazioni, si scoprirono falsificazioni e irregolarità nel rilascio della concessione (Boccacci, 1995), che fu dunque annullata.

In seguito, vi furono altri tentativi speculativi (residenze universitarie private, impianti sportivi, torri residenziali), ogni volta sventati. Le mobilitazioni degli abitanti, inoltre, sono riuscite a far espropriare ed aprire al pubblico buona parte dell'area. Anno dopo anno, sono stati così inaugurati: il Parco delle Energie, area verde di quasi 4 ettari aperta nel 1997; la Casa del parco, realizzata con principi di bioarchitettura sui resti di un edificio preesistente, autogestita a partire dal 2011; il Quadrato, spazio teatrale polifunzionale gestito da cittadinanza e istituzioni mediante il Forum Territoriale Permanente, dal 2011. Un luogo, infine, costituisce il tassello a monte delle conquiste successive:

il centro sociale occupato autogestito ex Snia Viscosa, nato come presidio popolare nel febbraio del 1995.

La progressiva riappropriazione dell'area è andata di pari passo col formarsi di una centralità, grazie alla persistente azione degli abitanti. In questo processo, lungo e multiforme, ho trovato numerosi aspetti degni di interesse: la progettualità di lungo periodo che, nel tempo, ha agito da catalizzatore per la partecipazione di moltissime persone; l'importanza dell'azione diretta, quale strumento immediato di riappropriazione e restituzione all'uso pubblico dei luoghi; il ruolo della memoria storica e della sua condivisione per la costruzione di una 'comunità di resistenza'; l'autogestione come reale gestione partecipata di beni pubblici; le pratiche 'informali' e l'autonomia diffusa come strumenti per la moltiplicazione e diversificazione delle attività; il riconoscimento pubblico della natura 'contesa' dei luoghi e la conseguente presa di posizione nell'inevitabile conflitto tra utilità collettiva e interessi privati, mediante il contrasto esplicito allo sfruttamento economico dei luoghi; la dialettica, in termini di conflitto, mediazioni e convergenze, con le politiche istituzionali. Tutto ciò è leggibile attraverso l'immersione nella vita dell'area: il passato dei luoghi è riportato nel presente dalle attività dell'archivio storico autogestito della fabbrica, con i suoi obiettivi e il suo progressivo sviluppo e ampliamento in centro di documentazione territoriale; informalità e formalità convivono, ad esempio, nei nodi organizzativi del centro sociale e del forum territoriale permanente, 'vasi comunicanti' capaci di gestire direttamente i beni pubblici e insieme sollecitare le istituzioni, 'incubare' nuove pratiche, diffondere autonomia e al contempo riunire percorsi; la quotidianità si arricchisce di progettualità organizzate e attività spontanee, per l'infanzia, il gioco, lo sport, l'arte e la cultura, in luoghi costruiti collettivamente nel tempo (ciclofficina, orto, palestra popolare, scuola di italiano, teatro, 'ludofficina', e così via); emerge una costante presa di parola, collaborativa o conflittuale secondo i casi, nei confronti delle politiche istituzionali, nonché la costruzione di relazioni tra le vertenze territoriali. Per il giusto approfondimento rimando alla lettura della tesi, capace di approssimare maggiormente la ricchezza presente e fornire argomentazioni adeguate alle presenti sintesi interpretative.

Nel complesso, è emersa una centralità dal valore in primo luogo 'locale', permeabile e attraversata al contempo da flussi

di persone e questioni di portata più ampia. Il protagonismo sociale e l'attività di 'ricostruzione del territorio', determinano una comunità cangiante che si rinnova incessantemente, capace di cogliere, nelle questioni locali, significati e dinamiche 'globali'.



Fig.3. Corteo per l'istituzione del Monumento Naturale Ex Snia (14 ottobre 2018). Elaborazione su foto tratta dal profilo Logos Festa della Parola.

### Il 'lago che combatte'

Il capitolo più recente di questa vicenda è quello che ho potuto osservare direttamente, a partire dal primo ingresso al lago a fine 2013: la vittoria contro un progetto che, in variante al piano regolatore, cancellava le preesistenze sostituendole con quattro torri residenziali da trenta piani ciascuna. Dopo circa un anno di iniziative, convegni, manifestazioni, sit-in, 'invasioni' e pressioni di ogni tipo sulle istituzioni, il comune ha finalmente concluso l'esproprio dell'area del lago nell'estate del 2014. A tale atto, il governo cittadino non ha fatto seguire una reale presa in carico del luogo, tanto da spingere le organizzazioni degli abitanti ad aprirlo, attrezzarlo e manutenerlo autonomamente a partire dalla primavera del 2016.

In questo frangente ho conosciuto, per quanto possibile, la popolazione che sta proteggendo l'area dalla speculazione per recuperarla alla fruizione pubblica. Si tratta di un insieme di persone molto vasto, poiché attinge da quartieri abitati

da decine di migliaia di persone, permeabile, impossibile da mappare per via della sua composizione numerosa, eterogenea e variabile. I fruitori più o meno occasionali e, soprattutto, abitanti del quartiere, spesso attivi anche in altre battaglie, hanno contribuito in maniera differente nel tempo, secondo le proprie capacità e risorse. Si può parlare di una 'comunità di resistenza', in virtù degli obiettivi che si pone e del richiamo esplicito alle caratteristiche passate e presenti del contesto sociale di riferimento.

Mi è sembrato di cogliere in questa battaglia alcuni assunti decisivi, anche in relazione alle premesse generali della tesi: la necessità di adottare una logica ambientale integrata per cogliere il rapporto tra ambiente urbano e naturale, ragionando in termini 'ecologici' piuttosto che considerandoli – separatamente; il mix tra sapere tecnico-scientifico e altre modalità di conoscenza, il ruolo del progetto conseguente a una sua concezione rinnovata, l'importanza dell'agire pratico e diretto; la necessaria costruzione di un pensiero alternativo e di luoghi atti ad alimentarlo; le relazioni tra le persone come base di tutto.

Una premessa da ribadire è che la lotta di riappropriazione e restituzione all'uso pubblico dell'area è stata in primo luogo una questione riguardante gli abitanti dei dintorni. La vicenda del lago ha costituito, perciò, un caleidoscopio mediante il quale ho potuto osservare altre battaglie sul territorio, portate avanti per il rispetto delle diversità e in difesa di servizi pubblici, aree verdi, spazi pubblici. Ho notato il continuo rimando tra iniziative e vertenze, capace di diventare una convergenza in alcune occasioni quali assemblee, cortei territoriali, feste popolari. Queste connessioni mi hanno permesso di cogliere il forte protagonismo sociale ed il ruolo di 'vasi comunicanti' giocato dalle varie modalità aggregative di una società locale complessa. È evidente, poi, come il dispiegarsi nel tempo di innumerevoli 'atti territorializzanti', insieme alla continua azione di conoscenza, disvelamento e rivendicazione ad essi associata, abbia posto le basi concrete per l'esercizio del 'diritto alla città' da parte delle persone.

*Passare da una logica urbana autoreferenziale a una logica ambientale integrata*

Il carattere 'locale' della battaglia ha permesso il riconoscimento

delle preesistenze e del loro valore, a partire dalla falda acquifera sotterranea. L'evidenza dell'importante ruolo giocato dalla natura in questa vicenda ha portato ad approfondire la questione nel dettaglio, mettendo in luce il processo di rinaturalizzazione avvenuto a seguito della formazione del lago, con un progressivo incremento della biodiversità. Le analisi hanno evidenziato la qualità e la provenienza delle acque, la presenza di numerose specie arboree e gli specifici habitat degli animali avvistati nel corso delle osservazioni periodiche. Gli studi sulla geologia e l'idrologia dell'area, affiancati alle conoscenze storiche, urbanistiche e architettoniche, hanno poi determinato una connessione tra i valori riconosciuti e le scelte di pianificazione auspicabili. È emerso come l'area della fabbrica, con la sua ampia superficie permeabile, svolga servizi ecosistemici fondamentali per l'assetto idraulico delle aree circostanti: in particolare, la tutela della falda e la difesa dai rischi idraulici.

Questi approfondimenti hanno aggiunto un valore scientifico alla spontanea avversione della popolazione verso la cementificazione, permettendo di mettere al centro del dibattito la convivenza tra i possibili usi antropici e la conservazione dell'ecosistema stabilitosi nel tempo. Una questione pratica che ha ricadute significative: rende possibile immaginare di un differente rapporto con l'ambiente naturale, superando la classica logica urbana autoreferenziale in favore di una logica ambientale integrata. È in questa direzione che viaggia anche una recente rivendicazione verso le istituzioni: la proposta, inedita vista la localizzazione nel cuore di Roma, di dichiarare 'monumento naturale' l'intera area (parco, lago, archeologia industriale).

Un simile passaggio culturale può aprire la strada a considerazioni più ampie, che partono dal riconoscimento del conflitto tra la tutela ambientale, funzionale al benessere umano, e le logiche proprie dello sviluppo capitalista e industriale, per andare oltre. Sono ragionamenti che emergono anche grazie all'individuazione di nessi con altre vicende, all'intreccio e al rimando con lotte territoriali vicine e lontane, alla coscienza dei rapporti tra questioni locali e globali. Assume perciò importanza la costruzione di tempi e luoghi (discussioni, progetti, iniziative, festival) idonei per lo scambio di idee e lo sviluppo di un pensiero alternativo.



Fig. 4 – Il lago ex Snia innevato [febbraio 2018]. Frame tratto da un video di Ludovico Ragoni.

*Con ogni mezzo necessario: saperi locali e conoscenze tecno-scientifiche, progetto e azione diretta*

La consapevolezza dei valori presenti nell'area, necessaria a immaginarne le modalità di fruizione, è stata raggiunta grazie a un felice connubio tra saperi locali e tecno-scientifici, che qui finalmente si presentano nella loro unitarietà e complementarietà determinando nel tempo l'autonomia culturale della popolazione, anche in relazione alla capacità di leggere e interpretare la 'macchina' istituzionale senza rimanerne intrappolati. Ne consegue un uso 'politico' della tecnica, capace di tenere testa agli analoghi tentativi portati avanti dalle controparti, solitamente tesi a sfruttare la posizione consolidata di potere derivante dalla stessa conoscenza tecnica, e la possibilità di aprire a saperi pratici e contestuali altrimenti soppressi.

Nell'ambito di questi strumenti tecnici, mi sembra significativo il ruolo del progetto come tappa dell'azione, 'ritornello' (Decandia, 2000), per ribadire le decisioni consolidate e fare una sintesi degli spunti affiorati nel tempo. È una concezione rinnovata del progetto, come processo sociale complesso con una sua temporalità (Cellamare, 2011), che permette ulteriori sviluppi. Ho osservato proprio questo: i workshop con i bambini hanno coinvolto genitori e insegnanti; la zonizzazione in livelli di tutela ha riunito le indagini di studiosi di diverse discipline (storia, architettura, urbanistica, ingegneria, botanica, zoologia, idraulica e geologia); il concorso di idee per gli arredi ha stimolato contributi esogeni e avviato il

processo di autocostruzione; la definizione partecipata delle linee guida per la progettazione è stata utile a tirare le somme su diversi temi, mediante la sintesi, l'ampliamento e la divulgazione delle conclusioni raggiunte nel tempo. Infine, decisivo è il mutuo appoggio tra progetto e azione, in luogo del dominio del primo, attraverso il coinvolgimento di abilità pratiche, tempo e strumenti.

L'azione diretta, prendendo pubblicamente delle responsabilità e realizzando atti consequenti alle intenzioni, ha avuto un ruolo importante tanto a livello strumentale – concretizzare le rivendicazioni attraverso la riappropriazione e l'autocostruzione – quanto a livello politico, come mezzo di legittimazione sociale e pressione sulle istituzioni. La chiave di lettura fondamentale è l'importanza di raggiugere obiettivi parziali, vincendo singole battaglie. Gli orientamenti che hanno permesso di farlo sono riassumibili in 'non chiedere il permesso' e 'non delegare'.

*L'autorganizzazione si basa sulle relazioni tra le persone*

Neanche a dirlo, anche in questa occasione si è ripetuta la costruzione di un contesto autorganizzato, così come nelle precedenti fasi di mobilitazione e nella gestione ordinaria di attività e progetti. Gli strumenti sono sempre molti: lavoro condiviso e preparazione degli appuntamenti, assemblee e riunioni decisionali aperte, dinamiche informali quotidiane, interlocuzioni e relazioni con rappresentanti politici portate avanti pubblicamente e senza subalternità.

La modalità organizzativa di tipo orizzontale, analoga a quella per lo sviluppo e la gestione delle attività accennate nel precedente paragrafo, ha determinato un'apertura al contributo di fruitori più o meno occasionali, in relazione ai propri specifici interessi, necessità e desideri. Questo aiuta le persone a superare i meccanismi di delega, rendendole protagoniste, valorizzando l'espressione individuale nella combinazione collettiva. Tale attitudine permette dunque una fruizione aperta alla diversità, determina il formarsi di un senso di appartenenza ai luoghi e mette in moto dinamiche di autogestione che disegnano una quotidianità diversa, fatta di attività accessibili perché non mercificate. Tutto questo si basa sul continuo allargamento delle reti di relazione, a partire da presupposti di garanzia (antifascismo, antirazzismo e antisessismo) che si evolvono nella conoscenza reciproca, nel lavoro comune e nella costruzione di rapporti di fiducia tra le persone.

**Conclusioni**

«Un lago nel cuore di Roma è nato da un tentativo di speculazione da

parte di un grande 'palazzinaro', impedendolo». Così, in un frangente della tesi, riflettevo sulla ridondanza comunicativa della vicenda osservata, leggendo in chiave personale le considerazioni di altri autori (Maggioli e Tabusi, 2014). Questa constatazione, d'altronde, non toglie nulla alla lettura critica della vicenda e delle singole tematiche. Tra le conclusioni possibili, perciò, ho voluto coglierne alcune che più mi premevano.

Innanzitutto, è possibile 'generalizzare' quanto emerso il caso-studio, trovando alcune leve di trasformazione dei contesti urbani esistenti. Ritengo che quanto osservato suggerisca di partire sempre dal riconoscimento delle forze attive e, in particolare, delle tante esperienze 'controcorrente' che si oppongono alla mercificazione dei luoghi e alle dinamiche di frammentazione ed esclusione sociale, mettendo in pratica la 'partecipazione' nella sua vera essenza: l'autogestione.

I terreni principali sono, per forza di cose, i territori e la vita quotidiana, ambiti in cui dare spazio alle individualità inserendole in un contesto collettivo, cercando e costruendo nessi, 'coltivando' relazioni. In più, le tante sfaccettature del caso-studio, impossibili da riportare qui integralmente, ribadiscono che per trasformare la resistenza in proposta è necessaria un'attenzione alle pratiche e alle questioni locali che non perda mai di vista politiche e problematiche più ampie.



Fig. 5. Giornata di iniziative al lago per l'istituzione del Monumento Naturale Ex Snia (14 ottobre 2018). Elaborazione su foto tratta dal profilo Logos Festa della Parola.

In secondo luogo, si conferma la necessità di un rinnovamento continuo della disciplina urbanistica, con un'apertura ai tanti contributi disponibili. Credo di aver messo in luce come, nel contesto studiato, sia emersa un'intelligenza collettiva dalle esperienze degli abitanti e dei fruitori dei luoghi arricchite con le conoscenze delle diverse discipline 'parcellari'. In questo modo è stato possibile definire (rinnovare) l'idea di una trasformazione radicalmente differente, basata sulla conservazione del patrimonio presente e sulla fruizione pubblica dello stesso. Mi sembra evidente che le problematiche globali individuate, per la loro ampia portata, necessitino di un approccio analogo.

Infine, si possono individuare possibili prospettive future negli orizzonti di contaminazione fra politiche e pratiche, con la dovuta attenzione ai rischi connessi. In particolare, ipotizzando che la trasformazione delle aree urbane esistenti assuma la centralità finora riservata all'espansione e alla nuova costruzione, assume rilievo il terreno di incontro tra politiche di rigenerazione urbana e pratiche sociali presenti nei singoli territori.

Il caso descritto, così come altri frammenti di possibilità alternative rintracciabili in altri contesti, fa emergere degli orientamenti piuttosto chiari, in contrasto con le insostenibili caratteristiche dell'urbanizzazione contemporanea. Vi si intravedono scorsi delle città sostenibili del futuro: luoghi salubri, prevalentemente pubblici, collettivi, aperti e indipendenti dalle logiche di sfruttamento economico; ambiti adatti ad ospitare la creatività e la cultura; 'territori solidali', caratterizzati dalla diversità e dal confronto; insiemi di luoghi densi di valori – storici, culturali, sociali, ambientali – in cui le collettività e i singoli individui possano riconoscersi, capaci di offrirsi alla conoscenza e all'approfondimento continuo.

Questi orizzonti possono sembrare poco esplicativi, in quanto delineati mediante indirizzi strategici piuttosto che modelli univoci. Si tratta, d'altronde, di una qualità più che di un limite, derivante da una condizione necessaria: tali ipotesi di trasformazione dei singoli luoghi saranno applicabili solo mediante il contributo centrale di chi questi luoghi li vive.

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**Marco Gissara** è dottore in tecnica urbanistica presso l'Università Sapienza di Roma e ingegnere libero professionista. Si interessa di contesti urbani e metropolitani, nei loro aspetti fisici e sociali: riuso e rigenerazione dell'esistente, pianificazione, politiche pubbliche, progettazione partecipata e fenomeni relazionati ai movimenti sociali urbani. Ha esplorato queste tematiche, durante gli anni, portando avanti la ricerca in campo accademico, contribuendo direttamente a processi dal basso, fondando il laboratorio Dauhaus ed esercitando la pratica professionale.  
[marco.gissara@uniroma1.it](mailto:marco.gissara@uniroma1.it)

## Verso il parco urbano del Tevere

### Paola Cannavò

#### Abstract

Il recupero del bacino fluviale del Tevere nel suo tratto urbano richiede l'aggregazione collaborativa di tutte le forze del territorio, siano esse imprese o forme di "città collaborativa" composte da cittadini attivi, organizzazioni di volontariato e associazioni e imprenditori locali. Queste forze, aggregate, dovranno lavorare in sinergia con le amministrazioni pubbliche. Con questo obiettivo è stata costituita Agenda Tevere Onlus un acceleratore di cambiamento, collaborazione e assunzione di responsabilità condivisa. AT ha avviato azioni sul territorio per coinvolgere la comunità e le istituzioni nel processo di trasformazione delle sponde, e ha attivato il "Contratto di Fiume Tevere relativo all'asta fluviale da Castel Giubileo alla foce" che si avvarrà del contributo di uffici di scopo appositamente creati nelle strutture amministrative comunali e regionali. Solo così la città di Roma potrà raggiungere l'obiettivo di avere di nuovo un fiume vivo e vivibile, un Parco Urbano del Tevere.

The revival of the urban portion of the Tiber River requires a major collaborative efforts by public institutions and all the players active in the area, from private companies to associations of active citizens. To reach this objective Agenda Tevere Onlus has been active as an accelerator of change and promoter of civic collaboration. Agenda Tevere Onlus began several actions involving local community and institutions in the transformation process of the riverbanks and activated the so-called "Contract of Tiber River from Castel Giubileo to the estuary", which engaged public offices specifically created by various municipalities and the Region of Lazio. It is only in this way that the city of Rome could reach the objective of creating a new living and livable river, an Urban Park of the Tiber River.

**Parole Chiave:** riqualificazione fluviale; governance collaborativa; città come bene comune

**Keywords:** river restoration; collaborative governance; city as a common

#### Introduzione

Le aree lungo le sponde dei fiumi, dei laghi e del mare, sono importanti luoghi di interazione tra la rete ecologica e le parti di territorio densamente abitate. Catalizzatori della vita sociale, questi assi ambientali sono un'importante risorsa per la rigenerazione urbana: riconoscerne il valore è il primo passo verso la loro riqualificazione.

I cittadini delle metropoli occidentali sono oggi attenti alla qualità dell'ambiente in cui vivono e alla qualità della vita. A Roma il

lungofiume viene comunque utilizzato per praticare attività fisiche all'aria aperta, per passeggiare e pedalare, o anche per nuotare e palleggiare, ma solo all'interno dei numerosi circoli privati.

Ma gli abitanti sono solo in parte consapevoli del valore che il Tevere ha per la città e dunque non sempre riconoscono agli spazi degli argini quell'importante ruolo che potrebbero avere per il loro benessere.

Ben più grave è la limitata consapevolezza del valore del fiume per la città da parte degli amministratori pubblici, causa principale dello stato di avanzato degrado in cui si trova il Tevere oggi. Con tutto il loro impegno i singoli cittadini volenterosi non sono mai riusciti a frenare il declino dell'area fluviale urbana, causato principalmente dalla totale inadeguatezza della complessa struttura che lo dovrebbe amministrare. E' dunque necessario oggi, nello stato di emergenza in cui si trova la città, costruire un'alleanza (Carta, 2016) per salvare il fiume, un patto tra cittadini e innovatori sociali, associazioni, imprese, articolazioni della società civile organizzata, scuole e istituzioni amministrative, cognitive, culturali e scientifiche, una collaborazione tra tutte le parti disponibili ad impegnarsi, mettendo a servizio della comunità il proprio tempo, le idee, le competenze, le capacità e le risorse utili per salvare il fiume Tevere e le sue sponde dal degrado. Solo così quello che è oggi in molti suoi tratti uno spazio degradato e pericoloso, sfruttato dall'illegalità e in alcuni casi completamente inaccessibile, potrebbe tornare a essere uno spazio per la vita della città di oggi.

Con questo obiettivo nell'aprile 2017, su iniziativa di un gruppo di cittadini esasperati dal degrado della loro città e dall'incapacità delle strutture preposte di invertire il processo di decadenza del tratto urbano delle sponde del fiume Tevere, è stata costituita *Agenda Tevere Onlus* un acceleratore di cambiamento, collaborazione e assunzione di responsabilità condivisa ([www.agendatevere.org](http://www.agendatevere.org)).

Agenda Tevere Onlus aggrega diverse esperienze e competenze che, nell'ottica di perseguire un obiettivo comune e condiviso, si sono unite, confluendo in un contenitore unico, rinunciando a una parte di sovranità in cambio di una maggiore massa critica, credibilità e know-how, ma soprattutto di un rapporto robusto con i "responsabili di missione" delle varie istituzioni competenti. Questa fusione di esperienze, competenze e visioni comuni,

autorganizzate e unite da un forte spirito collaborativo e propositivo, hanno funto da calamita e da traino per il coinvolgimento di ulteriori professionisti, di figure di spicco della società civile, di istituzioni e membri di quest'ultime, di semplici cittadini non organizzati ma volenterosi di mettere le proprie energie a fattor comune e, non per ultimi, di privati e imprese lungimiranti.

Obiettivo di questa collaborazione multi-attoriale e infra-disciplinare (Perrone, 2011) è la costruzione di un progetto di riqualificazione urbanistico-ambientale del fiume Tevere e degli ambiti delle sue sponde, che si intende realizzare attraverso un percorso largamente condiviso in grado di rendere efficaci gli interventi studiati e realizzati. La realtà dimostra infatti che senza il coinvolgimento diretto di tutti gli attori in gioco è difficile raggiungere esiti apprezzabili e non effimeri.

Il risultato atteso è la realizzazione del *Parco Urbano del Tevere* partendo dalla bonifica e riqualificazione delle sponde, attraverso una pluralità integrata di soluzioni progettuali che comprendano il ripristino delle aree degradate e una migliore gestione delle attività esistenti come pre-condizione all'introduzione di altre più innovative.

## Contesto

Il Tevere è il principale fiume dell'Italia centrale, il suo corso si estende per 405 km ed il territorio del suo bacino idrografico, con un'estensione di 17.375 kmq, interessa 6 regioni, 12 province e 335 comuni. La popolazione residente nel bacino idrografico è di circa 4,5 milioni di abitanti di cui oltre l'80% in provincia di Roma. Per la città il fiume è la principale risorsa su cui investire per la riqualificazione dello spazio urbano, è l'occasione per creare nuovi luoghi accoglienti e inclusivi, collegare l'area urbana centrale con le zone ai margini, riconnettere la rete ecologica, sviluppare progetti artistici e coltivare l'esperienza culturale, migliorare il benessere della città e dei cittadini. Il fiume è lo spazio in cui praticare uno stile di vita più sano e attivo a contatto con un ambiente naturale.

Il Tevere è per la città di Roma uno spazio storico e identitario, lungo i suoi argini si trovavano i principali monumenti e luoghi simbolo della Roma Antica (mausolei, basiliche e templi) e le tracce delle innovative infrastrutture che ne garantivano il funzionamento (la Cloaca Massima, i porti e i magazzini, le ville

e le piscine). Tutti luoghi che oggi potrebbero essere trasformati in interessanti e attrattivi percorsi archeologici. Inoltre la città industriale ottocentesca, nata lungo il fiume, ha lasciato, dopo la sua dismissione, ampi vuoti che sono stati trasformati in spazi per la cultura del contemporaneo (il museo Macro nell'ex-Mattatoio a Testaccio e il Teatro India nell'ex-saponificio Miralanza). Gli argini stessi sono sempre più spesso utilizzati per progetti culturali temporanei come i graffiti di W. Kentridge a Piazza Tevere.

Gli argini del fiume offrono ancora delle sacche di incompiuto in cui è possibile costruire spazio pubblico di qualità utile a rendere la città un luogo più inclusivo e nodo cruciale delle politiche di inclusione e accoglienza.

Il fiume, attraverso le attività e le pratiche a esso connesse, che presentano spesso un carattere universale, si configura come un potente “annullatore” di distanze e differenze, un naturale “compositore” di conflitti e divergenze, un eccezionale “aggregatore” di usi, abitudini e funzioni (Gusmaroli et al, 2011).

Il Tevere, con i suoi principali affluenti in ambito urbano (Aniene e Almone), è il componente primario della rete ecologica di Roma Capitale (vedi PRG vigente). Lungo le sponde del fiume si trovano, anche nei tratti densamente antropizzati, oasi ecologiche e habitat naturali inaspettati. Attorno al Tevere, nel suo tratto urbano, potrebbero essere localizzate alcune strutture capaci di migliorare la qualità ambientale, utilizzare il suolo e la vegetazione per l’infiltrazione, l’evapotraspirazione e/o il riciclo delle acque di prima pioggia, abbattere gli inquinanti atmosferici e mitigare l’effetto dell’isola di calore urbana, trattenere ossido di carbonio, proteggere e migliorare i caratteri e l’identità dei luoghi tenendo conto dei tipi di paesaggio ed habitat presenti. Il lungo fiume, oggi utilizzato quasi esclusivamente per connettere il centro città attraverso il trasporto privato su gomma, è l’arteria lungo cui sviluppare un sistema integrato di mobilità ciclabile da connettere con la rete ferroviaria e con quella del trasporto pubblico su gomma. Inoltre, in alcuni tratti, la navigabilità del fiume potrebbe essere sfruttata per creare una rete di mobilità lenta alternativa (turistica, didattica o culturale). In quest’ottica, il Tevere entra a pieno titolo nel campo delle infrastrutture verdi e blu (Perini e Sabbion, 2016), intese generalmente come infrastrutture che sostengono il progresso di un territorio o di una regione verso il raggiungimento degli obiettivi dello sviluppo sostenibile e della resilienza urbana. Un fiume sano può infatti

contribuire a ripristinare le condizioni per lo svolgimento dei processi naturali in città, ad incrementare il grado di diversità biologica e le capacità auto-rigenerative, a costituire corridoi di connessione con gli habitat esterni favorendo i necessari scambi biologici, a ridurre l'impronta ecologica della città sul territorio e ad incrementare il grado di resilienza dell'ecosistema urbano, attraverso il potenziamento della capacità di carico e delle prestazioni ambientali delle aree costruite. Un fiume sano migliora il metabolismo urbano e l'eco-efficienza delle sue diverse componenti.

Il fiume è dunque per la città di Roma un luogo identitario, uno spazio per la cultura, l'asse principale della rete ecologica e l'elemento che connette la città in ogni sua parte, ma è anche lo spazio in cui i cittadini possono praticare le attività utili per il loro benessere ed in cui la città può rendersi più inclusiva e accogliente.

### Agenda Tevere Onlus

Roma può ripartire dal Tevere, il fiume che ha segnato la sua nascita e la sua storia, che attraversa la città - dalla periferia al centro alla periferia - un lungo nastro ambientale che si insinua tra case e monumenti.

Il progetto di *Agenda Tevere Onlus* vuole restituire dignità a Roma cominciando dalla cura del fiume, restituendo nuova vita alle sue sponde degradate per rimetterle in gioco e renderle di nuovo uno spazio comune da vivere. Per raggiungere il suo obiettivo *Agenda Tevere Onlus* si propone di «attivare soggetti pubblici, associativi, sociali e privati per farli lavorare finalmente insieme alla costruzione di un nuovo spazio pubblico fruibile a fini ricreativi, culturali e sportivi»<sup>1</sup>.

Da una prima cognizione la principale causa del degrado del Tevere nel suo tratto urbano sembra essere il sistema amministrativo che dovrebbe governarne le sponde e il bacino e che invece è assolutamente inefficiente.

Nel solo tratto urbano la competenza delle acque è ripartita tra due istituzioni statali: Autorità di Bacino del Tevere e Capitaneria di Porto di Roma (il Tevere è infatti l'unico fiume italiano le cui acque sono riconosciute marittime dalla foce a Castel Giubileo).

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<sup>1</sup> Dal documento programmatico dell'Associazione *Agenda Tevere Onlus*.

Sono invece a carico della Regione Lazio le concessioni per l'uso della superficie acquatica (e in parte della Capitaneria di Porto come guardia coste), mentre il Dipartimento Urbanistica di Roma Capitale è competente per la sicurezza e l'abitabilità dei balconi ormeggiati lungo il fiume. Per quel che riguarda invece le aree goleinali, appartenenti al Demanio dello Stato, sono competenti: la Regione Lazio (a cui è stata trasferita la gestione del bene), Roma Capitale, che sovrintende all'ordine pubblico e può gestire in concessione aree demaniali (come nel caso della concessione della superficie occupata dalla pista ciclabile) ed il Ministero dei Beni Culturali titolare con almeno un paio di direzioni (archeologica e architettonico-paesaggistica) del patrimonio per quel che concerne i reperti archeologici, i Muraglioni ottocenteschi ed il paesaggio fluviale. Sono di diretta competenza di Roma Capitale i ponti di attraversamento con le loro opere di sostegno. Nell'ambito regionale sono poi molteplici i dipartimenti che si occupano del fiume (ufficio concessioni, dipartimento patrimonio, dipartimento ambiente e difesa suolo, agricoltura e pesca, sviluppo economico, turismo e tempo libero e beni culturali).

Gli uffici di Roma Capitale ripartono la gestione del fiume tra dipartimento urbanistica, ambiente, mobilità, patrimonio e Sovrintendenza Capitolina. Non ultima bisogna considerare anche Roma Città Metropolitana che come ex-provincia ha sicuramente qualche competenza sull'ambito fluviale, l'Istituto idrografico e la Protezione civile.

L'amministrazione del tratto urbano del Tevere è distribuita quindi tra Stato (4 organi), Regione (almeno 8 uffici diversi), Comune (almeno 4 dipartimenti e 1 sovrintendenza) e una ex-provincia, per un totale di circa 18 soggetti diversi! Questa geografia amministrativa non può che essere caratterizzata da sovrapposizioni, stratificazioni e aree "grigie" e attualmente gli unici interventi che a vario titolo vengono svolti nell'ambito fluviale sono emergenziali o temporanei, con continui *stop and go* di attenzione e fruibilità.

Le sponde del Tevere, divise amministrativamente tra le competenze di troppe istituzioni, nella realtà sono gli argini di un unico corpo idrico, sono l'elemento ambientale che definisce i labili limiti del fiume nel paesaggio. Le acque del Tevere scorrono tra gli argini, attraversando il territorio e la città, con un flusso continuo, fatto di magre e di piene, assolutamente indifferente a

tutte le suddivisioni amministrative.

Ogni strategia di progetto per un *Parco Urbano del Tevere* deve necessariamente ignorare i limiti amministrativi e superare la frammentazione delle competenze per riconquistare la qualità del paesaggio fluviale come insieme coerente.

Nella convinzione che l'aggregazione sia l'unica strategia possibile, *Agenda Tevere Onlus* si è impegnata a far confluire il mondo associativo romano e le varie espressioni di cittadinanza attiva in un unico contenitore, una “associazione delle associazioni”, *Agenda Tevere Onlus*, con l'obiettivo di costruire un progetto per Roma e sperimentare un nuovo modello di *governance* per i beni comuni urbani. Contestualmente la prima azione dell'associazione è stata la richiesta a Regione Lazio e Roma Capitale di istituire “uffici di scopo” ad hoc all'interno delle rispettive amministrazioni, uffici direttamente responsabili per tutto ciò che riguarda il fiume e le sue sponde con il ruolo specifico di orientare, coordinare e guidare gli interventi nel loro complesso.

A oggi nella macro-struttura di Roma Capitale è stato inserito l'Ufficio Speciale Tevere<sup>2</sup> incardinato nell'ambito della Direzione Generale con le seguenti funzioni:

- formulazione di proposte per la realizzazione dell'indirizzo politico in ordine alle iniziative relative alla manutenzione, valorizzazione, sviluppo, tutela, ri-funzionalizzazione e fruibilità ottimale delle acque e aree spondali prospicienti il corso del fiume Tevere nel suo tratto urbano;
- coordinamento delle iniziative relative al fiume Tevere, in raccordo con le competenti strutture comunali e con altre Autorità e Amministrazioni;
- monitoraggio e controllo degli obiettivi da conseguire e dello stato di attuazione delle iniziative, anche di Associazioni, Fondazioni e Onlus;
- programmazione e pianificazione di opportunità di finanziamento di iniziative in tali ambiti;
- elaborazione e pianificazione partecipata del Parco Urbano del Tevere;
- vigilanza sulla coerenza e compatibilità delle iniziative relative alle acque e aree spondali proposte dalle strutture comunali;

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<sup>2</sup> Istituito con Ordinanza della Sindaca n. 173 del 30 ottobre 2017.

- organizzazione dei flussi informativi, interni ed esterni, inerenti i suddetti obiettivi<sup>3</sup>.

### Contratto di Fiume

*Agenda Tevere Onlus* ha avviato il processo per la costruzione di un percorso di collaborazione con le istituzioni pubbliche e con i soggetti privati, nell'ambito del quadro e degli strumenti normativi del Contratto di Fiume (CdF). Questo permetterà ad *Agenda Tevere Onlus* di lavorare a stretto contatto con le istituzioni nella definizione, progettazione e costruzione degli interventi necessari alla realizzazione del *Parco Urbano del Tevere*.

Il CdF è uno strumento che si sta consolidando in Italia con diverse applicazioni di successo in Piemonte e Lombardia. Si tratta di uno strumento per valorizzare, in un'ottica intra-disciplinare, il territorio e il paesaggio fluviale, definendo strategie alla scala del bacino e azioni puntuali di progetto. Il CdF è l'esito di un processo decisionale inclusivo integrato (Carter e Howe, 2006), che permette di scardinare le tradizionali forme di governo delle acque, basate su rapporti gerarchici top-down, e di superarne il carattere strettamente tecnico e settoriale (Eckerberg e Joas, 2004).

Sulla base di un accordo volontario, il CdF mobilita la partecipazione di tutti i principali attori di un territorio fluviale per la definizione e l'attuazione di un quadro strategico condiviso (Affeltranger e Lasserre, 2003). L'obiettivo del CdF è pervenire ad un disegno territoriale integrato dai contenuti ampi (tutela del suolo e delle acque, miglioramento ambientale, valorizzazione paesaggistica, sviluppo territoriale) per orientare la pianificazione e la programmazione (Ingaramo e Voghera, 2016), ed individuare le forme di finanziamento per le azioni previste (di grande potenzialità, in questo senso, i meccanismi di PSE – Pagamenti per i Servizi Ecosistemici - fondati su reti di partenariato pubblico-privato (Muradian et. al, 2010).

Il concetto di servizio ecosistemico è il nucleo del processo di valorizzazione del capitale naturale ed una ragione “forte” per la conservazione della natura e della biodiversità. In termini sistemistici tali servizi si possono considerare come i flussi erogati dagli stock di capitale naturale, e gran parte di essi sono indispensabili alla vita dell'uomo e della natura stessa. I servizi

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3 <https://www.comune.roma.it/pcr/it/newsview.page?contentId=NEW1802844>

ecosistemici (SE) sono costituiti dai flussi di materia, energia e informazione provenienti dagli stock del capitale naturale, che si combinano con i servizi dei manufatti antropogenici per generare benessere e qualità della vita (Costanza, 1999). Le infrastrutture blu e verdi, secondo la definizione comunitaria<sup>4</sup>, sono reti di aree naturali e seminaturali pianificate a livello strategico con altri elementi ambientali, progettate e gestite in maniera da fornire un ampio spettro di servizi ecosistemici.

La validazione del percorso condiviso e la responsabilizzazione dei partecipanti viene sancita attraverso la sottoscrizione di un contratto. Le forme contrattuali (ovvero patti) rappresentano un metodo di *governance* efficace per razionalizzare i processi, stabilendo di volta in volta le regole d'ingaggio e soprattutto determinando l'assunzione di responsabilità di tutte le parti in causa. La forma contrattuale, con declinazioni diverse, si presta all'impiego a scale differenti (dallo spazio pubblico di quartiere all'ambito paesaggistico territoriale) e al perseguitamento di finalità variabili (dalla rigenerazione, alla tutela, alla valorizzazione). La diffusione di forme di *governance* basate sulla sottoscrizione di contratti di varia natura può rappresentare la molla per favorire la nascita di organizzazioni collaborative (a geometria variabile) che possano anche andare oltre lo scopo specifico e diventare strutture permanenti di dialogo sullo sviluppo del territorio (ed è in questa direzione si sta muovendo *Agenda Tevere Onlus*). Le amministrazioni pubbliche potrebbero così dismettere il loro ruolo esclusivo di decisorи-attuatori e diventare principalmente dei facilitatori di processi (di trasformazione, rigenerazione, riqualificazione, tutela, valorizzazione, ecc.).

«I Contratti di Fiume si inseriscono nell'alveo di un nuovo paradigma di urbanistica, quello dell'urbanistica collaborativa. Questo nuovo approccio urbanistico è formulato nella convinzione che l'urbanistica contemporanea e la sua regolazione non offrano più una risposta adeguata alla realtà delle trasformazioni del territorio e che solo una reale inversione di tendenza potrà in futuro riuscire a rendere la normativa urbanistica effettiva, valida ed efficace. Il paradigma collaborativo in urbanistica si fonda su un'opera di rammendo istituzionale fra pubblico, privato e comunità per far mettere insieme e far lavorare in sinergia le amministrazioni pubbliche, le imprese private e la città collaborativa composta da cittadini attivi, organizzazioni di volontariato e associazioni innovative, imprenditori civici, imprenditori locali responsabili

<sup>4</sup> EU EC; 2013; "Infrastrutture verdi – Rafforzare il capitale naturale in EU"; Comunicazione della Commissione al Parlamento europeo, al Consiglio, al CESE e al Comitato delle Regioni; COM (2013) 249 final.

e lungimiranti, scuole di frontiera e altri soggetti portatori di conoscenze e competenze» (Dal documento programmatico delle CO-Cities di LaBGov)<sup>5</sup>.

Il CdF, così come definito in Italia dalla Carta Nazionale dei Contratti di Fiume (V Tavolo Nazionale dei Contratti di Fiume, Milano 2010), è uno strumento di programmazione volontaria strategica integrata e negoziata per i territori fluviali, che nasce con lo scopo di promuovere la riqualificazione ambientale e paesaggistica attraverso azioni di prevenzione, mitigazione e monitoraggio delle criticità idrogeologiche e della qualità delle acque. Obiettivo prioritario del CdF è il raggiungimento degli obiettivi di qualità dei corpi idrici (Direttiva 2000/60) e di prevenzione e riduzione del rischio di alluvioni (Direttiva 2007/60). Il CdF è un patto tra i diversi attori del territorio per la gestione integrata sostenibile di un bacino idrografico che percepisce il fiume come ambiente di vita (Convenzione Europea del Paesaggio - 2000).

I CdF perseguono principalmente la tutela e la corretta gestione delle risorse idriche contestualmente alla valorizzazione e salvaguardia dal rischio idraulico dei territori fluviali, nella convinzione che solo un territorio sicuro e salubre può garantire prospettive di sviluppo economico, sociale ed ambientale. I requisiti di sicurezza idrogeologica, di qualità delle acque, di tutela degli ambiti dei corridoi fluviali sono dunque prioritari su ogni altra azione.

Il Manifesto di Intenti “Verso un Contratto di Fiume per il Tevere relativo all’asta fluviale che va da Castel Giubileo alla foce attraversando l’area di Roma”, proposto da *Agenda Tevere Onlus* è un documento che “intende mettere insieme istanze legate ad una gestione partecipata ed efficace delle risorse espresse e inespresse lungo il tratto del fiume Tevere che attraversa la città di Roma e prosegue fino allo sbocco della foce sul Mar Tirreno e le cui sponde e le cui acque, versando in condizioni assai carenti, necessitano di azioni mirate e tempestive di recupero sotto tutti i punti di vista.”<sup>6</sup>

La visione condivisa, che unisce tutti i firmatari del Manifesto, è quella del fiume come “ecosistema da riqualificare e difendere”. Anche nei tratti fortemente antropizzati, ogni intervento dovrà

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5 <http://www.labgov.it/tag/co-cities>

6 Dal Manifesto di Intenti *Verso un Contratto di Fiume per il Tevere relativo all’asta fluviale che va da Castel Giubileo alla foce attraversando l’area di Roma* recepito dalla Regione Lazio il 29 novembre 2017.

quindi essere compatibile con l'equilibrio dell'ambiente fluviale. Dato il ruolo fondamentale che il Tevere ha per la città che attraversa e per i suoi abitanti un obiettivo prioritario sarà garantire, nelle zone abitate, l'accessibilità e la fruibilità in sicurezza dell'ambito fluviale restituendo alla città il suo fiume. Ogni azione dovrà tenere conto della sicurezza idraulica e dovrà considerare tutte le componenti ambientali nel loro rapporto con quelle antropiche, garantendo l'equilibrio tra queste con un equilibrio variabile a seconda dei contesti interessati.

Ovunque sia possibile andranno favorite le dinamiche naturali del fiume ricorrendo, se necessario, ad interventi di difesa idraulica in linea con l'approccio proprio dell'ingegneria naturalistica. L'ecosistema fluviale andrà recuperato e risanato quanto più possibile valorizzandone la biodiversità, connettendo i diversi sistemi della rete ecologica (acqua, aria, flora, fauna), ripristinando la funzione ecologica e protettiva delle sponde (ri-naturalizzandole dove è ancora possibile), riequilibrando la portata del fiume nei periodi di magra e di piena e soprattutto avviando interventi e politiche mirate per il recupero della qualità delle acque. Il fiume, rafforzato come corridoio ecologico, consoliderà il suo ruolo centrale nella vita della città di Roma.

Gli interventi previsti dal CdF dovranno far riferimento a uno strumento guida che definisca le strategie e le linee di azione per l'ambito fluviale coerentemente con le previsioni del PRG adottato da Roma Capitale, che riconosce nel Tevere uno degli ambiti di programmazione strategica territoriale fondamentale per la riqualificazione dell'intero organismo urbano<sup>7</sup>, e che consideri le previsione del Piano Stralcio del tratto metropolitano del Tevere da Castel Giubileo alla foce - PS5 - elaborato dall'Autorità di Bacino del fiume Tevere ed approvato con D.P.C.M. del 3 Marzo 2009. Questo *Master Plan* per il tratto urbano del fiume Tevere dovrà essere condiviso da tutte le istituzioni competenti.

## Cantieri

Il progetto del *Parco Urbano del Tevere* sarà realizzato con due linee di azione caratterizzate da tempi diversi: il piano di interventi coordinati ed elaborati nell'ambito del CdF, coerentemente con il *Master Plan* per il tratto urbano del fiume Tevere; una serie di azioni finalizzate alla trasformazione immediata di aree

7 <http://www.urbanistica.comune.roma.it/prg-adottato-i4.html>

particolarmente problematiche, i *Cantieri*.

*Agenda Tevere Onlus* intende infatti avviare il processo che porterà alla realizzazione del *Parco Urbano del Tevere* a partire dalla creazione di spazi di comunità in luoghi cardine, strategici per l'attivazione del processo di rigenerazione. Questi *Cantieri*, leggeri ma prototipici, serviranno per coinvolgere la comunità e le istituzioni nel processo di trasformazione. Attraverso degli incontri operativi saranno definite le destinazioni specifiche delle aree pubbliche, le attività da svolgere in esse e le modalità di gestione e di uso. L'obiettivo è di pervenire a uno scenario condiviso, nel quale tutti possano riconoscersi, coinvolgendo, inizialmente nella co-progettazione e successivamente nella gestione, le associazioni di cittadini attivi e le strutture pubbliche e private.

I *Cantieri* serviranno non solo a ristabilire un rapporto tra i cittadini di Roma e il loro fiume, ma anche a coinvolgere il territorio in un processo di trasformazione partecipativo finalizzato a studiare e mettere in campo le strategie utili a sbloccare le situazioni di stallo che hanno generato il degrado dei luoghi. Utilizzando gli spazi inculti lungo le sponde, i cittadini creeranno spazi pubblici, ribaltando l'immagine negativa dell'incuria e dell'abbandono. La città, riappropriandosi del suo fiume, avvierà la trasformazione delle sponde degradate in un luogo da vivere.

### **Mappatura**

Per avviare queste due linee di azione è indispensabile la costruzione del quadro delle conoscenze relative all'ambito fluviale del tratto urbano del Tevere, una mappatura organica dell'ambito fluviale che coinvolga necessariamente tutte le istituzioni detentrici dei vari frammenti di conoscenza, conseguendo la composizione del quadro informativo di base (Viganò 2010).

*Agenda Tevere Onlus* in collaborazione col DICEA, Dipartimento di Ingegneria Civile, Edile e Ambientale dell'Università La Sapienza di Roma, ha già avviato la costruzione del "DUT-Database Unico Tevere", una piattaforma di conoscenze che si avvale di strumentazione GIS, continuamente implementabile e integrabile nel tempo, che permetterà un utilizzo immediato ed efficace di informazioni inerenti al Tevere, informazioni esistenti ma attualmente non disponibili o fruibili. La metodologia definita

per sviluppare questo progetto scaturisce proprio dalla necessità di ricostruire il mosaico di informazioni disperse, mancanti, imprecise, fondamentali per orientare le scelte progettuali.

Nell'ambito del CdF si tratterà di creare una piattaforma in cui tutti i soggetti firmatari riversino le proprie conoscenze, le rendano disponibili agli altri e, viceversa, possano fruire delle informazioni fornite dagli altri. La piattaforma costituirà inoltre una base informativa da rendere disponibile alla cittadinanza, con un obiettivo di trasparenza, diffusione dell'informazioni e coinvolgimento dei diversi soggetti.

La mappatura rappresenta una pre-condizione indispensabile anche per procedere alla localizzazione dei *Cantieri* progettuali in aree chiave del sistema fluviale in cui attivare processi collaborativi attraverso il coinvolgimento della cittadinanza attiva e delle istituzioni competenti.

Per l'individuazione dei *Cantieri* sarà necessaria un'approfondita conoscenza della morfologia, dell'uso e dello stato giuridico dei luoghi.

La tipologia di aree lungo le sponde è stata suddivisa da una prima catalogazione in:

- aree virtuose, quelle già interessate da un uso, una funzione, una destinazione che ne garantisce la gestione e la manutenzione (più o meno efficace), possono essere aree già date in concessione a privati;
- aree disponibili, pur non essendo interessate attualmente da nessun uso specifico (e quindi da nessuna attività di gestione) presentano condizioni tali che le rendono pronte ad un uso immediato;
- aree da riqualificare, richiedono interventi di pulizia, manutenzione, messa in sicurezza, ma non presentano particolari criticità;
- aree eco-sistemiche, presentano elevata qualità ambientale, pertanto la loro tutela è indispensabile per mantenere il valore eco-sistematico complessivo dell'ambito fluviale;
- aree da risanare, presentano condizioni avanzate (o incipienti) di inquinamento, sia perché utilizzate come discariche abusive che per una eventuale criticità nella stabilità degli argini.

Oltre alla ricognizione dei caratteri morfologici e dell'uso attuale delle aree è necessario un approfondimento sullo stato giuridico-

amministrativo che le caratterizza. Questo passaggio prevede l'identificazione dello stato reale (amministrazione competente sull'area, presenza di concessioni, occupazione indebita, ecc.) ovvero dello stato di diritto determinato dagli strumenti di pianificazione vigenti. Si tratta di un adempimento indispensabile per comprendere, ad esempio, la reale disponibilità delle aree classificate come tali ovvero per verificare i modi per rendere più efficace la gestione delle aree identificate come "virtuose". Inoltre, la rappresentazione sistematica dello stato di diritto delle aree chiarisce quali sono i paletti da rispettare nelle successive fasi operative.

### Conclusioni

Il recupero del bacino fluviale del Tevere nel suo tratto urbano e la creazione del *Parco Urbano del Tevere* richiedono l'aggregazione collaborativa di tutte le forze del territorio, siano esse imprese private o "città collaborativa" composta da cittadini attivi, organizzazioni di volontariato e associazioni innovative, imprenditori civici, imprenditori locali responsabili e lungimiranti. Queste forze, aggregate, dovranno lavorare finalmente in sinergia con le amministrazioni pubbliche.

Per raggiungere questo obiettivo verranno avviati i *Cantieri*, azioni sul territorio che servono per coinvolgere la comunità e le istituzioni nel processo di trasformazione delle sponde degradate in un luogo da vivere. L'intero processo dovrà essere guidato dal "Contratto di Fiume per il Tevere relativo all'asta fluviale che va da Castel Giubileo alla foce attraversando l'area di Roma", uno strumento di programmazione volontaria strategica integrata e negoziata per il territorio fluviale che si avvarrà del contributo fondamentale degli "uffici di scopo" appositamente creati nelle strutture amministrative comunali e regionali.

Aggregando quindi i cittadini, attraverso i *Cantieri*, e le istituzioni, negli "uffici di scopo", ed in sinergia con i tempi e le azioni elaborate dal CdF, la città di Roma potrà raggiungere l'obiettivo di avere di nuovo un fiume vivo e vivibile, un *Parco Urbano del Tevere*.

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**Paola Cannavò** è Professore Associato di Tecnica Urbanistica presso l'Università della Calabria dal 2006, dove è la responsabile dell'Urban Design Lab, <https://diatic.unical.it/udlab>. Attualmente è membro del Comitato Scientifico del Laboratorio per la Governance dei Beni Comuni — <http://www.labgov.it> — e membro del Consiglio Direttivo e responsabile del coordinamento progetti di Agenda Tevere Onlus — [www.agendatevere.org](http://www.agendatevere.org). Per Agenda Tevere coordina la Segreteria Tecnica del Contratto di Fiume del Tevere nel tratto urbano da Castel Giubileo alla foce. Dal 2007 al 2011 è stata membro esperto di paesaggio del Comitato Tecnico-Scientifico per i Beni Architettonici e Paesaggistici del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali e nel 2014 è stata membro dello staff dell'Assessore alla Cultura di Roma Capitale. Nel 2004 le è stata conferita l'onorificenza di Benemerita della Cultura e dell'Arte della Repubblica Italiana dal Presidente della Repubblica Italiana per il suo contributo eccezionale alla diffusione della cultura del paesaggio nel Paese. Nel 2001 ha ricevuto il Premio Mario Ridolfi dell'Ordine degli Architetti, Pianificatori, Paesaggisti e Conservatori di Roma e Provincia e nel 2011 l'Honor Arward in General Design conferito dall'associazione dei paesaggisti americani ASLA.

È stata visiting professor presso la Harvard Graduate School of Design in USA, l'Université de Montreal in Canada, la Fachhochschule Lausitz e la Brandenburgische Technische Universität in Germania, la Universidade Moderna di Lisbona in Portogallo e l'Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia.

Ha diretto come socio co-fondatore lo studio.eu di Berlino, una struttura di sperimentazione progettuale, dal 2000 al 2010. Gli esiti di questa attività hanno ricevuto numerosi riconoscimenti internazionali. Con lo studio.eu ha organizzato tra il 2003 e il 2006, Ortus Artis, la prima manifestazione internazionale sui temi del paesaggio tenutasi in Italia. [paola.cannavo@unical.it](mailto:paola.cannavo@unical.it)



STRISCIA/STRIPE

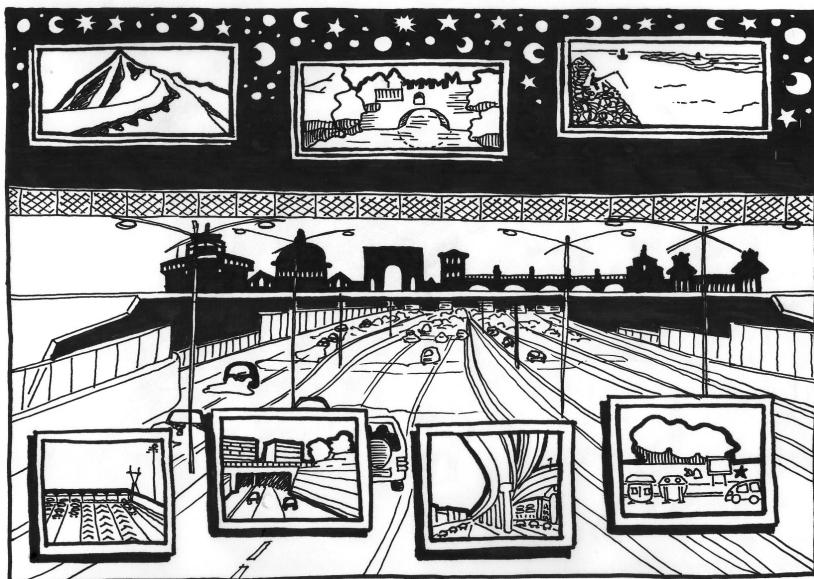
Vasi comunicanti. Una storia collettiva  
GSX

APPENNINI, ANIENE, TEVERE, TIRRENO...

... DALLE NUVOLE CHE LA TRASPORTANO,  
L'ACQUA CADE IN GOCCE E SCENDE PER I MONTI,  
VIAGGIA LUNGO IL LETTO DEI FIUMI,  
FINO A GIUNGERE NEL MARE...

~

... ALLO STESSO MODO, A BORDO DI VEICOLI  
MOTORIZZATI, MIGLIAIA DI PERSONE  
OGNI GIORNO TRAGUARDANO LO SKYLINE  
METALLICO CHE INCORNICIA LE  
ODIERNE PORTE DELLA CITTA'.



UNA CITTA' TRA LE TANTE  
CHE, NEL TEMPO,  
HANNO DIVORATO IL BORGO  
E GETTATO I LORO TENTACOLI  
ALL'ESTERNO





# VASI com'ONdANTI

*- una storia collettiva -*



NEGLI ANNI VENTI DEL NOVECENTO,  
FUORI LE MURA STORICHE,  
SI INAUGURA UNA GRANDE FABBRICA,  
LA VISCOSA AL PRENESTINO.

— · —

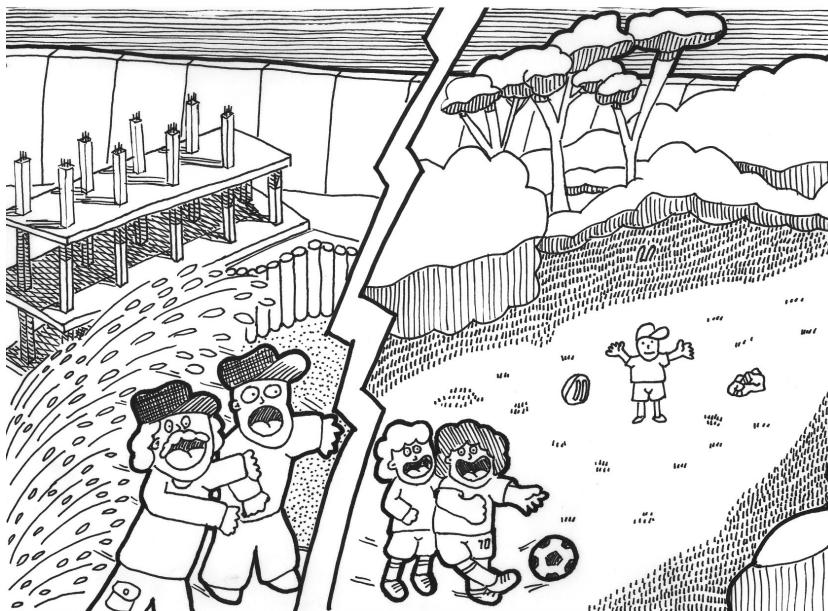
SARA' TEATRO DI TANTI EVENTI  
COLLETTIVI, DAGLI SCIOPERI  
DEL '24 FINO ALL'OCCUPAZIONE  
DEL '95, A QUARANT'ANNI  
DALLA SUA CHIUSURA, E POI  
ANCORA OLTRE...



TRA LE MACERIE DELLA FABBRICA  
SORGERÀ, REAGENDO ALL'AZIONE  
DI UOMINI INTENZIONATI A  
TRASFORMARE QUEL LUOGO IN DENARO,  
UN BACINO D'ACQUA LIMPIDA,  
ALIMENTATO DA UN FLUSSO SOTTERRANEO.



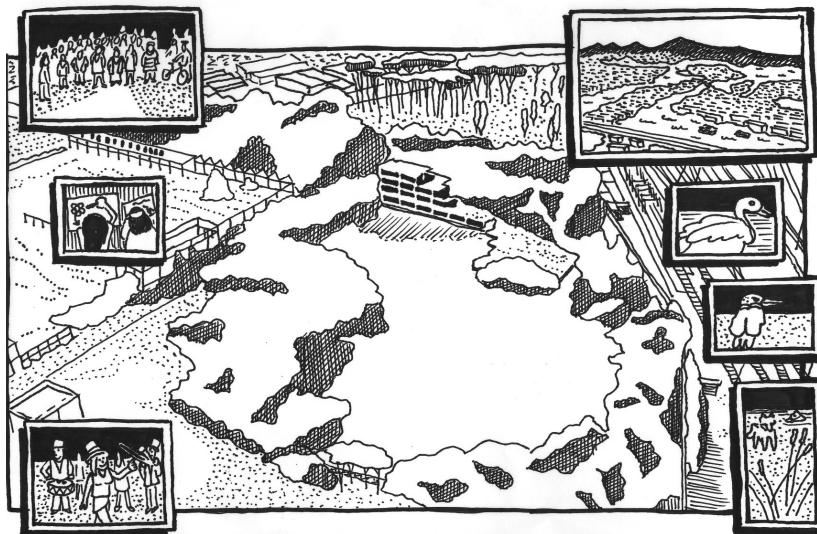
GRAZIE AD ESSO, NEGLI ANNI, SI  
RICOSTRUIRANNO LE MIGLIORI CONDIZIONI  
PER LA VITA DI PIANTE E ANIMALI...  
COMPRESI UOMINI, DONNE E SOPRATTUTTO...  
BAMBINE E BAMBINI!!!



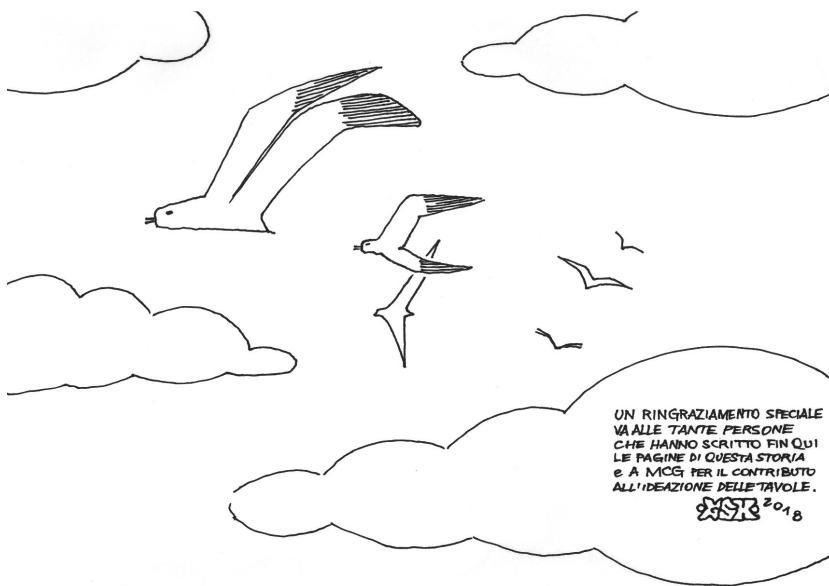
# GUARDANDO IL LAGO SE NE COLGONO I DETTAGLI...

— — —

... E SI INIZIA A SCORGERE  
L'AVENIRE POSSIBILE  
(NECESSARIO?)  
DI UN TERRITORIO PIU' AMPIO.



per carpire  
queste immagini,  
occorre avere il coraggio  
di alzarsi talvolta da terra...  
... e spiccare il volo.



Le tavole di “Vasi comunicanti. Una storia collettiva” intendono riassumere, con la scorta di alcune frasi e disegni, un percorso di ricerca e attivismo.

Le conoscenze derivanti da questo percorso hanno portato l'autore a scrivere una tesi di dottorato di centinaia di pagine e, come parziale restituzione dello stesso, un articolo presente in questa stessa rivista (“Intorno al lago. La riappropriazione popolare dell'area dell'ex Snia Viscosa a Roma”). Nessuno di questi ‘prodotti’ ha la pretesa di essere esaustivo dei tanti aspetti della realtà osservata, né delle riflessioni che se ne possono trarre. Ognuno di essi vuole però comunicarne una parte.

Una striscia a fumetti impone una sintesi. L'auspicio è che questa estrema compressione possa portare a una successiva espansione nell'interazione con il lettore.

La condivisione di un immaginario vuole perciò essere un punto di partenza per dare vita a nuovi pensieri e, soprattutto, azioni.

**GSX** è, da più di quindici anni, lo pseudonimo artistico e non solo di Marco Gissara, il cui profilo accademico e professionale è illustrato nell'articolo “Intorno al lago. La riappropriazione popolare dell'area dell'ex Snia Viscosa a Roma”, nella sezione “Osservatorio/Observatory”.



# PORTFOLIO/PORTFOLIO

**Per una iconografia della provvisorietà.  
Spazi urbani sospesi fra abbandono e rigenerazione**  
Luca Chistè

Queste immagini rappresentano un estratto visivo di una articolata ricerca fotografica dedicata ad alcuni luoghi la cui originaria vocazione, commerciale o industriale, è stata nel corso del tempo, per molteplici e differenziate ragioni, completamente abbandonata.

Si tratta di "reliquati urbani" la cui identità, una volta dismessa la primigenia funzione d'uso, rimane del tutto sospesa e indeterminata. Irreversibilmente segnati dall'incidere del tempo, dall'incuria dell'uomo e dall'abbandono, oltreché privati della benché minima manutenzione, questi manufatti subiscono spesso la sorte di essere socialmente "segregati", in attesa di un tempo, di beckettiana memoria, che indichi possibili soluzioni per la loro rigenerazione o riqualificazione urbana. Si tratta quindi di luoghi che, pur appartenendo compiutamente al corpus urbano di una città o ad uno specifico distretto produttivo, subiscono un coatto processo di rimozione collettiva sia sulla loro identità storico/economica, sia sulla loro possibile rifunzionalizzazione urbana.

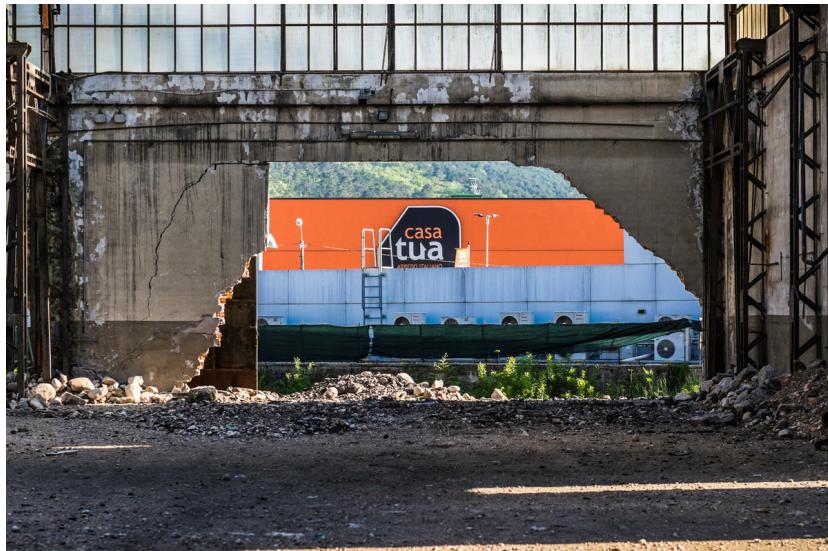
Esempi concreti e positivi di recupero certamente non mancano, ma per molti di essi ne esistono, simmetricamente, altrettanti di abbandonati e dimenticati. Su questi luoghi, divenuti templi di una modernità che si annuncia spesso in chiave decadente, incombono due evidenze: la prima, è quella di subire, in molti casi, un'occupazione da parte di gruppi sociali che, figli dell'immigrazione, se ne appropriano per trovare, per quanto instabile e precario, un ricovero logistico che dia loro una qualche forma di rassicurazione esistenziale. La seconda realtà, spesso interessante per gli esiti che ne contraddistinguono lo sviluppo, è da ricercarsi in una sorta di nemesi storica che, in modo straordinariamente caotico e disorganizzato, prevede, da parte della natura, la riappropriazione di quegli spazi che, un tempo lontano, le sono stati sottratti dai processi di antropizzazione dell'uomo.

Un messaggio, nemmeno troppo subliminale o simbolico, sugli accadimenti del nostro contemporaneo e sull'azione di trasformazione che l'uomo opera, spesso irreversibilmente, sul proprio habitat.













**Luca Chistè**, sociologo, ha pubblicato una tesi sulla storia delle tradizioni popolari, nella quale ha analizzato l'impiego della fotografia come prospettiva di ricerca autonoma nell'ambito delle scienze sociali e nell'antropologia culturale. Ha conseguito un master in formazione presso l'Università Cattolica di Piacenza. Si occupa di fotografia dal 1980 e ha all'attivo rassegne personali e collettive, sia in Italia che all'estero, presso importanti istituzioni museali (tra le altre, l'Istituto culturale Ladino "Micurà De Rü" di San Vigilio in Marebbe, il Centro Internazionale di fotografia di Verona Scavi Scaligeri, il Museo Diocesano di Trento, il Museo Storico di Trento, il MAG – Museo Alto Garda). La sua attività d'indagine si concentra sulla fotografia etno/sociologica e sul paesaggio, sia naturalistico/antropico che urbano. Per il proprio lavoro fotografico utilizza un metodo di ripresa basato sia sull'impiego di apparati in medio e grande formato analogici, sia di sistemi digitali. Attraverso un collaudato workflow, gestisce e produce da sé tutte le fasi riguardanti l'interpretazione dell'immagine e la conseguente stampa fineart d'autore. Nel 2009 ha fondato Phf Photoforma, con la quale si occupa di formazione sulla fotografia (corsi base e workshop specialistici) e la collaborazione con musei, istituzioni ed Enti per la realizzazione di progetti fotografici di natura tematica e la stampa fineart di fotografie d'autore ad uso espositivo o collezionistico. Dal 2013 è collaboratore free-lance con il Quotidiano Trentino, pagina "Cultura e Società", con reportage, recensioni e letture critiche sulla fotografia. [luca@lucachiste.com](mailto:luca@lucachiste.com)  
[www.lucachiste.com](http://www.lucachiste.com) | [www.photoforma.it](http://www.photoforma.it)





**TU** TRACCE  
URBANE