



Amnis

Revue de civilisation contemporaine Europes/
Amériques

15 | 2016

**Mouvements sociaux et pouvoirs : distances et
espaces**

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Publisher

TELEMME - UMR 6570

Electronic version

URL: <http://amnis.revues.org/2787>

DOI: 10.4000/amnis.2787

ISSN: 1764-7193

Electronic reference

Tommaso Frangioni, « Squatted houses and city politics: communication and contention in Firenze », *Amnis* [Online], 15 | 2016, Online since 01 September 2016, connection on 18 October 2016. URL : <http://amnis.revues.org/2787> ; DOI : 10.4000/amnis.2787

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Prologue

- 1 Imagine landing at the airport of Firenze: it is squashed between the mountains and the motorway. This small airport is just 20 kilometres away from the city centre, but going from there to the downtown forces the visitor to cut across half of the city. This crossing, before finally getting to the showcase beauty of the town centre, implies for the viewer a sort of epoché : he has to put in brackets the doubt that this city could be otherwise than advertised¹.

Contested public space

- 2 Public space in Firenze has undergone a series of changes in recent years, as a result of two intertwined processes: the attempt to attract international tourism and to build a city identity based on the Renaissance; and an eager commodification of public spaces, resulting, e.g. in the practice to rent historical public spaces to privates. Following Kohn², public space could be seen as a cluster concept, the categories of which are ownership, accessibility and intersubjectivity³: a place should meet these three criteria to be considered public. If we look at Firenze town centre, we see how there are some spaces that could be conceived in such a way, while the area as a whole cannot be considered accessible and intersubjective, as this space is more and more dedicated to the exploitation of tourism, building an image of the city that is believed to meet the expectations of touring families and groups. Firenze, as Italian cities in general, is not yet being subjected to the totalizing experience of disneyfication and gentrification that is

lamented by some U.S. based scholars⁴: as a matter of fact, neoliberal governing-strategies are much more nuanced in Italy, and the process of expulsion from the city centre is subtler⁵. Notwithstanding, reading through the city fabric, we can recognize similarities with these patterns. There are authors that speak of “showcase-city”⁶: thus defining the process of building city centres as a mixture of historical/cultural branding and global shopping boutiques. Firenze could therefore be, at the same time, the “cradle of Renaissance” and a place where global brands expose their dreamscape. This process is one of the major driving forces that shapes the urban centre, resulting in a silent and collateral expulsion of inhabitants, with a tiptoeing of municipal decrees, laissez-faire towards tourism and elaboration of the category of “decay” for labelling behaviours such as sleeping, eating and drinking in public, exposing misery and poverty, selling unauthorized and counterfeited goods. This process is actually contested in a variety of ways, from committees asking for the expulsion of ethnically denoted shops, panhandling people and multinational companies’ stores, to the everyday returning presence of panhandling people, from street-artists to social movements for the right to housing. The Movimento Lotta x la Casa (“Fight 4 the House movement”, henceforth called “Movement”) operates mostly in the suburbs, where the majority of people affected by housing-related hardship lives. The city centre is used more as an expressive space, in which rallies and acts of protest seek a greater visibility. We can think of this space as a stage where movements express their perceived right to the city, while peripheral spaces are the field in which the right to the city is performed in everyday acts of resistance and contention.

Right to the city as ideology and as analytical concept

- 3 The concept of right to the city was first used by Henri Lefebvre⁷ as both a cry and a demand [...] [to] a transformed and renewed right to urban life⁸. This concept might be seen as ideology, as a colloquial tool and as an analytical viewpoint on urban struggles. It is ideological in its lefebvrian formulation, expressed as an idea which aims to sustain the conflictive action of the creation of the urban fabric from below, against a supposed death of the urban life⁹, caused by the commodification and the subordination of the use-value of the city itself to the logics of industrial production. Directly connected with the performative usage of this concept, it might also be seen as a colloquial tool for movements and academics, in the sense that it has been used as a catchphrase for expressing various claims, as also it seems to happen with the interrelated concept of social justice. Moreover, the right to the city might be used as an analytical tool, as I am indeed doing here. In this perspective, it is a point of view, a manner to frame urban movements whose claims are addressing the quality of urban life.
- 4 Social movements organizations are associations of persons making idealistic and moralistic claims about how human personal or group life ought to be organized that, at the time of their claims-making, are marginal to or excluded from mainstream society¹⁰. This definition highlights the radical cleavage between what is accepted within a given social order, and what a movement organization states through its theoretical and discursive production and through the exercise of its everyday practices. This results in a marginalization of movements’ rhetoric: the focus of movements is on a contrast between social life how it is and social life as activists think it should be. As an example, the Movement advocates for a greater amount of social lodgments, therefore, a greater

amount of state-controlled housing : a rhetoric that is countercyclical with respect to recent orientations in social housing¹¹.

- 5 For Castells¹² urban movements are born in reaction to the State's failure to engage the inherent contradiction between the organization of production and the organization of consumption. Failing to maintain some balance between these opposing forces has led to the development of social movements, which should involve, in Castells' theoretical assumptions, trade-unionism addressing collective consumption (asking for more or better services) ; the production of collective identities, aiming at cultural codes able to challenge the homogenization of popular culture ; and the claim of a right to imagine and produce the urban space¹³. For Castells, these three features have to be simultaneously present to allow the definition of an urban movements as transformative : if on the one side he sketched some traits of yet-to-come new social movements, on the other side, the rigidity of the definition and the relevance attributed to the alliance with traditional (communist) party brought about the necessity of further expansions of the concept. A humbler definition is that of Prujit : urban movements are social movements through which citizens attempt to achieve some control over their urban environment¹⁴, which encompasses the built environment, the social fabric of the city, and the local political process¹⁵.
- 6 From an academic point of view, urban movements have been neglected by the New Social Movements approach, given the materiality of their grievances¹⁶. This may be interpreted, as Pickvance does, as an underscoring of the mobilizing potential of urban movements : the adoption of the right to the city as analytical frame favours the emergence of the intertwined nature of material and post-material attitudes and praxis urban movements are capable to exert. Contemporary urban movements are both local and global, both materialist in their claims and aiming at a cultural transformation of individual identities¹⁷. The right to the city may, then, be a useful concept, capable of bridging everyday activists' practices with the academic lexicon. The right to the city is framed along struggles that are local articulations of a global discourse on the quality and equity of urban living. This discourse is born within and for cities, touching themes as public space, housing, environment, cultural productions and circulation. The list is not (and could not) be exhaustive, as more issues could emerge and claims be made. The right to the city is a collective right to change and re-invent the city on the basis of our needs¹⁸, intersecting the theme of social justice¹⁹ and being strongly coordinated with a substantive view of democracy²⁰. When the Movement advocates for a different organization of housing, it is implicitly claiming a right to shape the city, i.e. by finding a different way of using vacant buildings. Similarly, the wide presence of immigrants in the Movement – deriving from a relative over-representation of those subjects among the housing-deprived – reflects itself in the development of narratives that are centred on the reception and integration of immigrants as a goal for local and Italian society as a whole.

Squatting Europe, squatting Firenze

- 7 The practice of squatting is not the only repertoire used by the Movement, and not only housing movements adopt such a practice. Nonetheless, the peculiarity of the Movement is its ability to develop its own framing of squatting, finding a balance between structured resistance, appropriation of space and transient usage of squats. Urban squatting may be

defined as the non-situationist occupation of buildings (not only inhabitable ones), without the consent of the owner of property rights. Three elements are to focus : firstly, the fact that those occupied are buildings, thus differentiating urban squatting from rural movements for the collectivization of land and from such movements as #occupy or #15M, mostly occupying urban spaces ; secondly, the fact that the squat is non-situationist, meaning that it is not a short-period occupation, as those of rave concerts, of demonstrative actions and of fugitives ; finally, the lack of consent, unlike in agreed forms of temporary use of buildings, as in the case of institutional activities of revitalization of city centres (e.g. pop-up shops) or of informal contracts between owner and beneficiaries.

- 8 In the above definition, there is no reference to the exertion of political goals, because of the presence of “invisible squats”²¹, produced by individuals or small informal groups, hence difficult to locate. From these squats, there is often no political claim, and, at the same time, not every squat is politicized. The rhetorical frame in which such experiences are exerted is that of the “disadvantages of honesty” : paying a rent is costly, so families or subjects in need may occupy vacant houses to ease their budget. In Firenze we can find this phenomenon mirrored in squats of social lodgements and in those people, mostly immigrants, who are living in old, dismissed industrial complexes. This kind of praxis is echoed also in other forms of micro-resistance, such as eluding the rent, its self-reduction, and self-construction without necessary permits²². Yet, every squat is, indeed, political in its nature, as it calls into question private property. Squatting with a political connotation serves three purposes. A material purpose, to produce housing solutions for people in need, even if precarious ones. A symbolic-communicative effect, because occupations highlight the existence of a problem and favour the development of bonds within the urban texture and neighbourhoods. Squatted houses thus expose a short-circuit between empty houses and sub-efficient response from public bodies to housing shortages. Only in some cases squatting may serve the third purpose, to lead to the insurgence of transformative acts upon the urban surface²³, by producing narratives and practices able to aim at the production of an enclave, an autonomous space.
- 9 Regarding the Italian context, most academic attention has focused on the *centri sociali occupati* (squatted social centres) phenomenon²⁴, as counter-cultural and aggregative bases, but marginally involved in housing. The occupation of social centres has a strong demonstrative character, as the conflict is embraced as a modality of the interaction with others (labelled as “bourgeoisies”, “owners”, “the neoliberal state”). Squatted spaces thus become an infrastructure, a physical ground from which governmentality can be attacked. Squatting for housing movements is more of an instrument (to tackle an “objective” deprivation situation) and a repertoire. The foremost difference between these two types of squatting is the perception actors have in what concerns the time-frame of the occupation : for social centres the squat has to maintain itself for a long period to be effective in functioning as a hub of counter-cultural networks, and institutionalization may be well-accepted (even if it may trigger a debate on the risks for the antagonist nature of the place) ; in the case of housing, squats are temporary from the very beginning, as squatters see them as a moment between “evicted/homeless” and “social housing accommodation”, and institutionalization is more rare and does not downplay the mobilization. Squatting is seen as both a mean and as an end in itself. Drawing on Aguilera²⁵, Prujit²⁶ and observations from the author, it seems useful to distinguish squatting in social centres from that of housing movements : we may

conclude that squatting is both a mean and an end when aimed at the counter-cultural production of spaces, while the temporary framing of squatting houses favours an instrumental comprehension of it.

- 10 The problem with housing in Firenze is multi-faceted. While I do not have the space to carry out an in-depth analysis of roots and developments in the field, I think it is useful to sketch what are the main questions the Movement addresses. In comparison with a broader European context, Italy has three peculiarities: the dominance of private ownership, coupled with a widespread single-family residential model; a persistent inadequacy in policies tackling poverty and social exclusion; the importance of the family as a life-vest, granting the intergenerational persistence of housing patterns and assuring the reproduction of the social structure²⁷. The share of social housing is quite low, as it is estimated to be around the 5.3 % of the total housing stock²⁸. The Movement has some major claims, which also are partly assumed by more institutionalized actors. Firenze is a city with high rents, coupled with the growing phenomenon of evictions for rent arrears²⁹. Pickets for blocking evictions and/or contracting residential solutions with social workers and institutions have become a major repertoire of the Movement. This interaction is moulded by a double dynamic, which deals at the same time with materialism and symbolism. On the one side, the picket involves the bodies of activists, while sending a symbolic message of strength to institutions. On the other side, it is a symbolic expression of solidarity, which in turn has the material effect of postponing the loss of the house, or finding the tenant a new accommodation through bargaining with public officers and social workers. The bigger frame, in which these micro-practices are inserted, is that of the claim for a greater amount of social lodgements. Social lodgements are fewer than the requests, and assignments have been withheld for about three years, the measurement applied for calculating income brackets is considered unjust. Last but not least, the criminalization of squats, particularly those in social lodgements, have led to a discrediting of the Movement, and this couples with tighter rules for squatters asking for social lodgement assignments.

Urban governance and urban regime

- 11 The policy network of social housing arena is crowded³⁰, the main actors are: three levels of government (State, Region and Municipality), each one with its political views and administrative practices; a (vast) array of tenants' and renters' associations; urban movements for housing rights; charities, bank-funded or Church-owned, with disposable lodgments; judicial organisms, prefectures and the police; cooperatives in the building sector and agencies for the management of social lodging; scholars, both in university and research institutions, with their capacity to offer guidelines, recommendations and interpretations.
- 12 I use the framework provided by urban regime theory to understand the interplay between these actors. Stone defines an urban regime as the informal arrangements by which public bodies and private interests function together in order to be able to make and carry out governing decisions³¹. These choices situate themselves in a conflictive dynamic environment, due to endogenous and exogenous pressures: regime governing is a game of conflict management and adaptive (and incremental) answers to social challenges³². In this perspective, business actors and other private interests (as labor unions, civil society organization or social movements organizations) are strongly

intertwined with formal governing structures : the capacity to place themselves inside a policy network permits them to exercise some degree of power on policy-making processes. At the same time, local governments are not able to provide services or otherwise develop autonomous policies, if they are not able to attract investments from other governing levels and private bodies. The definition is clearly stated in a way that aims at emphasizing the interdependence of formal and informal powers in decision-making. Regimes are thus empowering meso-structures : networks through which some things are done and some do not. Regime theory differs from both elitist and pluralist approaches in what concerns the main tool actors use to reduce the complexity of decision-making processes. If the mechanism in elitism is hierarchy, and in pluralism it is open-ended bargaining, regime theory develops a multi-centered network approach. The interaction develops in multiple arenas, and a great importance is given to relational resources, such as solidarity, trust and mutual need³³. As relational resources build slowly, this approach tends to emphasize the stability and growth of regimes. They therefore are not a fortified, inaccessible structure disconnected from grassroots politics. A last interesting point raised by Stone is that of resistance to change. Regime theory inherently focuses on how persistence is a social byproduct of active behaviors : the capacity to address changes in the context without (or just partly) changing the structure, composition and ideational profile of the regime derives from a double process. On the one side, actors that are inside the regime have the power to restrict access, but need to negotiate and balance strategies. On the other hand, challengers have to build a comprehensive strategy, which should be able to replace (part of) the existing regime, by producing selective incentives and a counter-narrative strong enough to gain access to the arena³⁴.

- 13 The multi-level governance concept added depth and dynamicity to the interplay between various articulations of State and govern arenas. Multi-level governance could be defined as the capacity to integrate, to shape local interests, organizations and social groups and, on the other hand, to represent them in a broader context, to develop more or less cohesive strategies concerning the market, the state, other cities and other levels of government³⁵. The euro-centric approach to governance permits us to blend the regime theory approach with the specificities of the analyzed city : in European cities, both dialogue and conflict between local institutions and civil society organizations are broader than in the US, due to a greater articulation of government levels and to a strong tradition of both dialogue and contention. The various levels are not to be seen as concentric, there is instead some degree of overlapping among interested levels : while the European Union has an indirectly directive paper, the state level has the responsibility for the macro-frame of housing policies, while the very implementation is demanded to regional and city level, in coordination with public houses management agencies. In the studied policy arena, the role of the municipal and regional governments is pronounced : the policy network is centered on these two actors, which have a capacity to include and exclude subjects. They also have a great capacity of excluding even included subjects from the decision-making and policy-building.

Communication and contention

- 14 Communication between actors in the policy arena is regulated through specific channels of negotiation and discussion. The main distinction is between actors, which have been

recognized as legitimate actors, and those who have not. The configuration of the arena allows conflicts arising between legitimated actors to be mediated and addressed in a way that is not disruptive for the network itself. Even the episodic judiciary actions are more a symbolic tool than the expression of an irreconcilable conflict. Outsiders, such as the Movement, are ignored, fought or partially included in the arena. Ignoring the presence of the Movement seems to be the main strategy adopted by the majority of institutional actors, with an occasional declaration of contrariety, which addresses the repertoire of squatting more than the Movement itself. While in Firenze the phenomenon of squatting in social lodgements is not a widespread feature, local public bodies have taken a restrictive stance towards it. These “invisible squats” are not an emanation of the Movement, though. The Movement began to frame this activity as unfair and generating a “battle of the have-nots”. Notwithstanding, in previous years, both local governments and the prefecture had a much more repressive stance towards the activists of the Movement, resulting in a wide trial, whose reverberations are still affecting the everyday-life of the Movement today.

- 15 The Movement dialogues with some actors, which are quite peripheral (e.g. a research centre, a more radical tenant’s association), thus being granted with an informal access to a part of the arena, without being allowed to enter it. From the standpoint of the Movement, the communication repertoire is developed in a conscious and adaptive way. In some contexts, like during evictions, dialoguing with institutional representatives is considered to be important, as activists are focused on finding a satisfying solution to the housing issue. In a certain sense, the Movement represents an answer to those people that are less treatable³⁶ within institutional procedures, alleviating the pressure upon the legal social housing system. The relationships with “political” subjects are characterized by a greater emphasis on conflictual stances, instead.

Conclusions

- 16 The New Social Movements paradigm needs revisitation and re-framing, due to the emergence of multiscalarity in social justice glocal movements and due to the return of the physical and the material, a sort of “resurgence” of the body as a tool and a field of contention. There is a bifurcation : on the one hand we have movements which are (often unwillingly) functional to the politics of the creative city, thanks to their production of cultural and symbolical capital, while, on the other hand, there are “outcasts” movements, which are fighting on the harsh terrain of austerity measures and budgetary cuts, facing an increasing privatization of spaces and a growing repression and/or exclusion from the public debate³⁷.
- 17 The right to the city asserted (and exerted) by these movements posits itself as both a recuperation of working-class struggles of the ‘50s and ‘60s and as a diversion from some of the post-material issues typical of new social movements. However, the NSM approach is not to refuse completely, even in this case, as the Movement has a strong identity and advocates for some cultural goals, such as immigrant integration, social justice and, ultimately, the right to the city.

NOTES

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22. See : Saitta, Pietro, *op. cit.*

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32. *Ibid.*
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34. Stone, Clarence N., *op. cit.*, p. 228.
35. Le Gàles, Patrick, «La nuova political economy delle città e delle regioni», *Stato e mercato*, 52, 1998, pp. 53-92. Original quote : «capacità di integrare, di dare forma agli interessi locali, alle organizzazioni, ai gruppi sociali e, d'altra parte, in termini di capacità di rappresentarli all'esterno, di sviluppare strategie più o meno unificate in relazione al mercato, allo Stato, alle altre città e agli altri livelli di government.»
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ABSTRACTS

This paper is a study on the housing policy arena in Firenze. During the last years, local city governments have been focusing on fostering international, high-profile tourism. The local SMO, Movimento Lotta per la Casa (literally, Fight for the Housing Movement) has some traits of NSMs. At the same time, there are elements that remind « old » Social Movements. It is addressing a material issue, it exercises a very physical resistance and its grammar of disobedience relies on

the appropriation of urban spaces. Through the lens of the « Right to the City », I discuss here the relation between urban movements and the urban regime.

Cet article étudie les politiques du logement à Florence. Au cours de ces dernières années, les autorités locales ont favorisé le développement d'un tourisme de luxe international. L'organisation locale, Movimento Lotta per la Casa (Mouvement de lutte pour le logement), a des points communs avec les NMS (nouveaux mouvements sociaux), mais elle rappelle aussi les mouvements sociaux traditionnels. Elle exerce une véritable résistance physique et son discours sur la désobéissance propose une réappropriation de l'espace urbain. A travers la notion de « Droit à la Ville », j'analyse donc la relation existant entre les mouvements urbains et les régimes urbains.

Este artículo estudia la política de viviendas en Florencia (Italia). A lo largo de estos últimos años, las autoridades de la ciudad han promovido un turismo internacional de alto perfil. La organización local, Movimento Lotta per la Casa (Movimiento de Lucha por la vivienda), presenta rasgos que se asemejan a los NMS (nuevos movimientos sociales) pero, al mismo tiempo, conlleva unos elementos que recuerdan los « viejos » movimientos sociales. Su objetivo es muy concreto : ejercita una resistencia marcadamente física y su discurso sobre la desobediencia se basa en la re-apropiación del espacio urbano. A través de la noción de « Derecho a la Ciudad », analizo pues la relación entre movimientos urbanos y régimen urbano.

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Mots-clés: Italie, Florence, Movimento Lotta per la Casa, l'espace urbain

Palabras claves: Italia, Florencia, espacio urbano

Keywords: Italy, Firenze, urban spaces

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