

Scarcity, post-scarcity and local community: L'Aquila as a case study.

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Keywords: post-scarcity, city, disaster.

Abstract

This work analyses the problem of scarcity using the Social Ecology framework as defined by Bookchin (2005). It shows how through a process of community discovery it is possible to build a 'post-scarcity' society (*Ibid*).

We take the position that the today scarcity of resources is mainly caused by the current political and economic system (Swyngedouw 2004; Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw 2006). This capitalistic system is progressively intensifying, both in the 'developing' and 'developed' countries, social unbalances and environmental problems that are increasing scarcities effects and threatening human existence. On the other hand, nowadays, the concrete availability of resources and the incredible technological advancement could greatly contribute to build a post-scarcity society, where it is possible to imagine "the fulfilment of social and cultural potentialities" (Bookchin 2004: iv). However, in defining this concept we recognise that the technocratic approach to the scarcity problem is not effective: the fundamental problem arises from both the legacy of man's domination over nature and over humanity (Bookchin 2005). In order to reduce scarcity, deep social changes are required, rooted in a new relationship with nature that is aware of how resources are affected by our consumption rates (Bookchin 1988; Hopkins 2008; Hern 2010). We stress that the key factor of this change is the local community, the root of the social system (Moulaert at al. 2010). In this context, post-scarcity is not understood as a merely material status: the possibility of having enough quantity of goods for all the people to survive in a decent way opens the doors to a deeper possibility: the achievement of freedom (Bookchin 2004: xvi).

Evidence of these concepts is easily found in our selected case study: the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake. The Italian government's management of the lack of shelters after the disaster has created a permanent scarcity of housing as well as a progressive fragmentation of the local community, perfectly matching the principles of a 'shock economy' (Klein 2007; Messina 2010; Puliafito 2010). Phenomena like forced displacement, permanent 'red zones', land consuming and the construction of 'new towns' completely disconnected with the previous city have led to a deep negation of the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1968) and to important

examples of gentrification (Ciccozzi 2009). Moreover, the condition of “‘produced’ scarcity” (Swyngedouw 2004: 60) has increased in the community an internal egoistic competition for resources and restrained the possibility to utilize this crisis as an opportunity to enlarge social solidarity and build a better city. However, we are still able to find some positive examples (e.g. Assemblea Cittadina dell’Aquila, Asilo Occupato, 3e32, Comitato per la Rinas-cita di Pescomaggiore) of the community’s attempt to assert itself as the main actor of the reconstruction. This underlines the importance of the empowerment of the community and its connection with its territory.

We are interested in rethinking the city’s processes of recovery which instead of focussing only on scarcity as economic and engineering issues, recognizing the power of a Social Ecology approach, values the role of local communities and the importance of the relationship between citizens, nature and urban space.

1. Literature context

According to the Human Development Report in 2005, “the richest 50 individuals in the world have a combined income greater than that of the poorest 416 million” (HDR 2005). Meanwhile, in 2010, within a sample of 104 countries “almost 1.75 billion people, experience multidimensional poverty” (HDR 2010). When either considering simple monetary income or a multidimensional index of wellbeing (which considers education, health and living standards) the results are the same: we live in a world of global inequalities and poverty that fosters “an inevitable social disintegration, violence and national and international terrorism” (Makwana 2006: no page). However, as openly recognized even by United Nations (2005), this global scarcity of resources, both physical and social, is not understood as a consequence of a natural impossibility of our environment to sustain its inhabitants, but rather as result of global policies based on globalization, deregulation and liberalization where unequal distribution of resources, corporate interests and increasing practice of shock threaten human life.

It is precisely the current capitalistic system that bases its growth and understandings of “wellbeing” on exploitation of the environment, and social inequality (Swyngedouw 2004; Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw 2006), ever increasing the incredible polarization between a small and wealthy elite who benefits of its policies, the ‘haves’ and the ‘haves-not’, as recently underlined by the slogan of the Occupy Movement, “We are the 99%!”.

All these effects can be easily traced in an urban context “that was crucial to the survival of capitalism” (Harvey 2008) and that is still shaped by its needs: an incredible socio-spatial transformation emerges, where cities are and will be the main stage, the place where the majority of the population lives (United Nations 2008) and the main source of

environmental and social problems (Klein and Tremblay 2010; Low and Gleeson 2006). However, they can also be understood as major sites for re-imagining a sustainable future (Hern 2010). Living in cities is indeed the only way, in a so densely populated world, for reducing waste and consumption, sharing resources, stopping sprawl and saving energy thanks to the increased density that reduces everyone's footprint (Hern 2010).

Following this idea, different traditions have focused their attention on cities, like Urban Political Ecology and Social Ecology as defined by Bookchin (2005). In a society increasingly detached from nature in the "synthetic environment" (Bookchin 1995: 17) of the cities, both these theories recognise the importance of the link between environment and humanity, and the importance of power relations in understanding urban transformation and its potentiality. In particular Bookchin goes further and stresses how "the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human" (Bookchin 2005: 65). Thus the realization of a different society that can overcome scarcity and inequality should be based on social change able to deeply criticize hierarchy and domination and developing new forms of political and social organization, rooted in a new relationship with nature that is aware to how resources are affected by rates of human consumption (Bookchin 1988; Hopkins 2008; Hern 2010).

This process, as again recognised by Bookchin, can also benefit of the incredible technological level reached today that is able to give incredible help in redistributing resources, energy and reducing the global need of hard work, achieving a "balance between man and the natural world" (Bookchin 1995: 188), a post-scarcity society. However, recovering the etymology 'techne' and the works of Mumford (1934), technology should not be considered by itself, but rather as a neither good nor bad (Downton 2008) part of technics that is shaped by social and cultural environment and include art, human skill and dexterity. An important example of this is the availability of new energy sources such as wind, solar and tidal power that Social Ecology recognizes as fundamental to human survival. These technologies stand in stark contrast to the current energy system that is dependent upon dirty and exploitative sources that contribute to pollution, create health problems and destabilize the planet's climate. Their use, indeed, really permit "the fulfilment of social and cultural potentialities" (Bookchin 2004: iv) and "to reconstruct urban life along lines that could foster a balanced, well-rounded, and harmonious community of interests among people and between humanity and nature" (Bookchin 1986: 162). In this context, post-scarcity is not understood as merely a material state: the possibility of having a large enough quantity of goods for all people to survive at a decent level opens the doors to a deeper possibility, namely, the achievement of freedom (Bookchin 2004).

In order to proactively move society in that direction, from a political prospective So-

cial Ecology proposes Libertarian Municipalism (Bookchin 1995; Biel 1997; Hawkins 1993) as a new political system that allows people to return to the heart of political debate, suggesting an organization which should encourage public participation and democratic decision making. Drawing from Proudhon and Kropotkin's idea of 'communes' led by principles of self-management, complementarity, and mutual aid, decentralization, statelessness, collective management and direct democracy become the principal characteristics of this new kind of political organization (Bookchin 1986, 1995). The first objective of Libertarian Municipalism is thus to gradually "advance a perspective for extending local citizen-oriented power at the expense and ultimately the removal of the nation-state by village, town, and city confederation" (Bookchin 1995: 1).

This new political form, on a larger scale, proposes that each municipality should be self-governed in a confederation. This 'Commune of Communes', concretely becomes "a dual power that contest[s] the legitimacy of the existing state power" (Bookchin 1995: 264). The importance of the urban space is stressed also by the concept of right to the city, firstly introduced by Lefebvre in 1968, that has become a powerful slogan both for academics and urban movement to the point that it has been recently introduced also in the international bodies' agenda (United Nations 2010). It, as "a transformed and renewed right to urban life" (Lefebvre 1996: 158) indicates the possibility for people to shape their own city. Harvey, defining it as "the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves" (2008: 23), puts the emphasis on the collective aspect and also on the "connection between urbanization and surplus production and use" (2008: 40).

As we will see, our case study, L'Aquila, is a perfect example of the negation of the right to the city: for example still today, after three year from the earthquake, the population of L'Aquila do not have the 'right' to enter many parts of the city and the voice of the people for an equitable and sustainable reconstruction can be hardly heard in the corridors of power. However, we recurred limitedly to this framework, because results "vague and radically open" (Attoh 2011: 670); in our opinion, the focus on the idea of rights can lead to a dilution of radical demands or to form of co-optation, in a practice of de-construction by the system to the movement (Souza 2012).

For our research we thus decided to concentrate our attention to an urban setting and, allying ourselves with Castells (1985) and Moulaert at al. (2010), analysed an actor able to transform local community and able to challenge the political-social status quo: the Grassroots Urban Initiative. The adjective 'urban' clearly indicates the focal point of these initiatives: the city. The term 'initiatives' refers, on the one hand, to the autonomy of the actors, and, on the other, to the evolution and the undecided future of these actors (Fraisie 2011). The term 'grassroots' is a broad concept as well, but we can find general agreement on the

idea that the actor has deep origin and connection with the community and has a relatively horizontal structure, compared to more institutionalized groups (Fraisie 2011).

Our research is based on analyses of broad literature, collection of original material through fieldwork, and personal experience in L'Aquila, an Italian city heavily damaged by an earthquake in 2009. We took this site as a context of induced scarcity and of some Grassroots Urban Initiatives developed within it. After giving a broad narrative of the earthquake and institutional emergency management, we will concentrate on two Grassroots Urban Initiatives: the "Assemblea cittadina dell'Aquila" (City Assembly of L'Aquila) and the "Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore" (Board for the Rebirth of Pescomaggiore). For each initiative analysed, we decided to take into account why and in which context they developed, who is involved, which are the objectives and finally the main similarity with Social Ecology.

For space reasons, we omit the analysis of other interesting groups such as two social occupied spaces (Asilo and 3e32 (Figure 6)) and several local organizations.

2. Case study

A deep shock is an incredibly powerful lens for understanding the specific inequalities and contradictions embedded in our society: the sudden collapse of most of the ordinary social, economic and political structures not only leads the population to a global scarcity of primary resources, but also to a temporary vacuum of power and a subsequent race to fill it.

The L'Aquila earthquake, an incredible example of Italian disaster capitalism (Puliafito 2010), acts to underline all those incongruities, with particular regards to the importance of induced scarcity for the flourishing of the 'shock economy' (Klein 2007). This case study will give us the occasion to consider a well-known malignant mechanism of produced scarcity, both physical and social, that overlaps the damages induced by the disaster and its devastating effects on the local community. Moreover, it will also permit to look at different approaches to the emergency that are able to translate the crisis in a rebirth for the community and a way toward a post-scarcity society.

2.1. The context

On the 31st of March 2009, in Rome, the national department of Protezione Civile (Civil Protection) convened an extraordinary meeting of officials, scientists and politicians, the Commissione Grandi Rischi¹ (Commission on Major Risks), to discuss the situation in the nearby city of L'Aquila where after more than three months of repeated minor earthquakes, a stronger, magnitude 4.1, shock happened that day. However, the committee

¹ Not entering in the huge debate regarding the responsibility of the people involved (among the others see Hall 2012), we stress the main reason of their judgment: not a lack of prevention but a lack of information for the population.

declared that there was no reason for expecting a major shock, reassuring residents that otherwise, “in similar past instances, would typically have slept in their cars, just to be sure” (Lewick 2012) trusting a centuries-old fear, historical memory and connection with the territory that maybe would have been able to save some lives.

At 3:32 on the 6th of April, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake occurred, causing 309 deaths, the destruction of the centre of L'Aquila and of several surrounding villages and the displacement of around 67.000 people, of a usual population of roughly 73.000 citizens, resulting in “the most important disaster to happen in Italy in the 30 years” (Farinosi 2012: 27) and “the first great disaster in the Era of communication” (Gatti 2012: 28).

The earthquake surprised a city already in crisis. Almost ironically, its motto is “Immota Manet”, that more than the original wish for absence of shocks, seems to indicate a trend on the cultural political and economic life of the city in the last centuries “marked by impotence and resignation” (Salvatore 2012: 209), probably a lasting effect on the collective psychology of an history sprinkled by earthquakes whose biggest, in 1703, definitely stopped an incredibly lively community. The rural and commercial economy based on the close contact with the surrounding territory, that saw L`Aquila`s magnificence in the Middle Ages, was lost in the following centuries, as well as its political and cultural role, that could not compete with a labour and economic crisis that since the `90`s left the city with a high number of unemployed (Berardi et al 2008). L`Aquila before the earthquake was in an exposed fragility situation: the lack of social organizations in the territory and of a strong sense of community has been contributory causes to the slowness and weakness of its reaction.

2.2. Earthquake's effect and management.

Not prepared in preparedness and prevention (specifically meaningful is the lack of evacuation plan for the Regional Hospital), the Protezione Civile, however, revealed itself to be incredibly able to impact a “big event”, acting undisturbed while “exercising a power not derived by any form of democratic delegation” (Puliafito 2010: 72), bolstering the idea that “democracy is not possible in emergency” (Puliafito 2010: 72). Following the direction of the Metodo Augustus², an incredible deployment of volunteers, firemen, military force and officers transformed the devastated territory in a living experiment of “Command and Control”. The Protezione Civile, an incredible machine able to act notwithstanding the current environmental regulations, working contracts and urban planning, started its work.

² "If its institutional counterpart will be sufficiently authoritative and determined, most citizens will be willing to abdicate their decision-making autonomy, to undergo hardship and limitations, to "obey" to the guidelines. This attitude, once manifesting itself, can be of great help in the provision of evacuation plans, of mass health interventions, of restriction on the circulation, of rationing of food, water and medicine" (Galanti 2008: 47).

After 48 hours more than 24.000 people were assisted in tents or hotels, reaching a maximum of 67.459 (Protezione Civile 2010) in the next months, within “the first time in modern Italian history that a major city had been completely emptied of its population by government decree” (Alexander 2010: 332). Assisted by a multitude of volunteers, the residents were for more than six months not only unable to access to the city and the surrounding villages that were declared “red zones” (Figure 1), guarded by the army and fenced, but also to carry out independently ordinary living skills. Groups of psychiatrists and psychologists started working with the population, diagnosing it to be mostly “apathetic, depressed, unable to plan for the future and imagine positive and tending to the delegation” (Sirolli 2012: 62). The rate of consumption of drugs, alcohol and medicines increased incredibly after the 6th of April, as well as episodes of anxiety, depression and insomnia (Stratta et al. 2011; Dell’Osso et al. 2011; Pollice et al. 2011; Torsello 2012). However, instead of ascribing these collective symptoms as post-traumatic stress syndrome, as usually happens in post-disaster contexts, the experts most likely described the population as being affected by institutional syndrome (Sirolli 2011): the L’Aquila inhabitants were “over assisted”, obligated to live in an over controlled situation that impeded any attempt to get back to a daily life. In this context, the decision to host the G8 2009 in the same city enhanced the militarization of the territory and the control (it is interesting that the order was given to not serve in the tents any coffee, tea or coca cola). To this is to be added the effects of the “dividi et impera” policy: the uneven treatment of different group of the population, divided between “the ones in tents” and “the ones in hotels” and the merit ranking for accessing to the shelters definitely puts every individual against the other, in a spiral of fear and hate that completely damaged the initial empathic reaction to the disaster.



Figure 1. Policemen guarding the red zone, on the gate the keys of the houses whose inhabitants were deprived of access as symbol of protest

While in the main stream media, following the typical style of an “embedded communication” (Petrei 2012: 43), the Government, in the binomial Berlusconi & Bertolaso (the Italian Prime Minister and head of the Protezione Civile), appeared to make major effort to support it, in reality from the first emergency began a history of power games and bypassing of local authorities (Alexander 2010), whose effects three years after are still evident in the region: the rebuilding process is even now not started, the centres of L’Aquila and surrounding villages are still fenced, the economy is in desperate crisis. Moreover they gave space to mafia infiltrations, several environmental damages and impeded the beginning of a proper reconstruction.

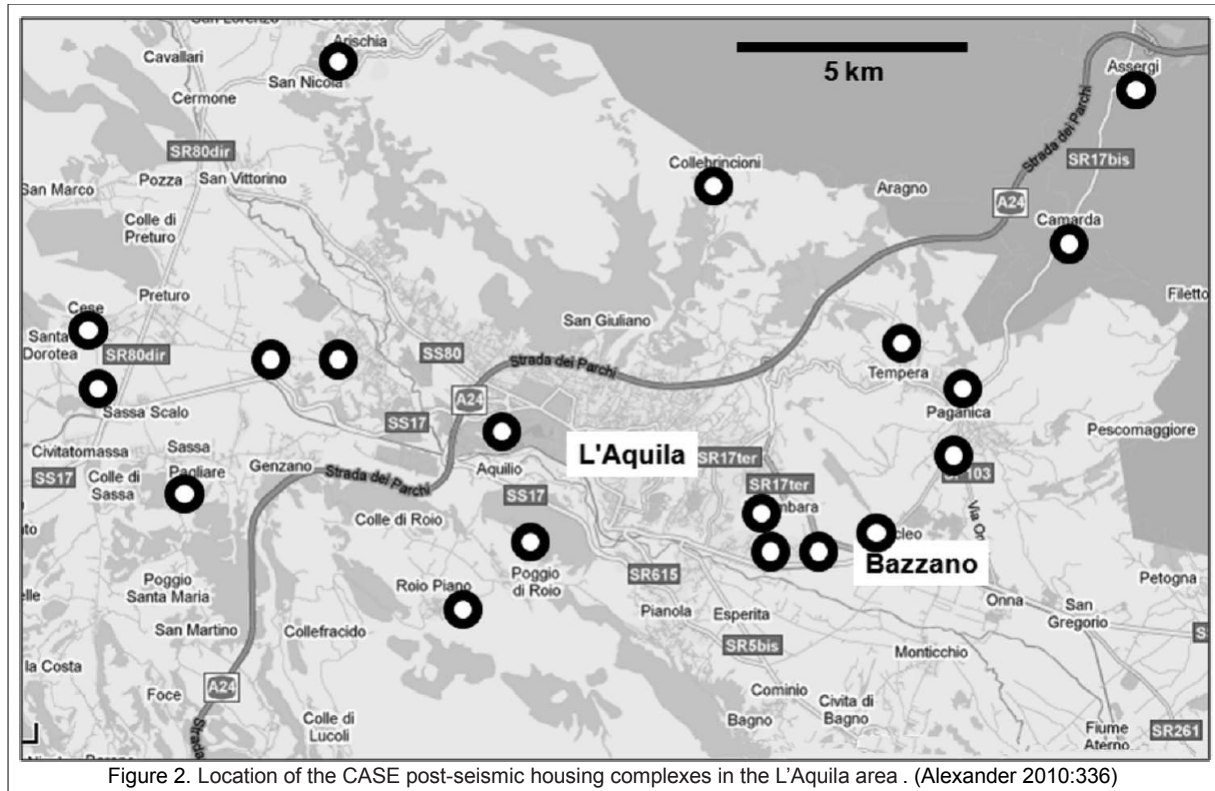
It is worth noticing how “according to the latest report published on 29 May 2012, in the town of L’Aquila and in the 56 municipalities hit by the earthquake there are still 21.387 people who live in housing solutions provided by the State [...], 10.988 people who benefit of the contribution of independent accommodation and 283 which are assisted inside hotels or temporary accommodations” (Farinosi 2012: 30). Moreover, the Protezione Civile also enhanced an overall external disinformation only partly covered by the huge amount of work of citizen and independent journalist through the Internet and stopped only by the inquiry from the public prosecutor’s office of Firenze on the Protezione Civile that lead to a persistent dramatic silence on the situation.

All these details stress again the lack of attention towards the need of the city that instead claimed at transparency, participation and reconstruction.

2.3. C.A.S.E.³

The scarcity of housing and the magnitude of the disaster gave to the government the possibility to implement a new interpretation to the emergency: the C.A.S.E.. Skipping any intermediate solution of provisory shelter or accommodation (Alexander 2010), thanks to the innate power of the Protezione Civile to jump some natural passage of environmental and landscape protection, 2.700 € per square metre were spent in order to build 19 permanent new towns. This misleading idea of giving temporarily-permanent solutions gave the Government the possibility of easy publicity, to building contractors easy money and to the population the permanence in tents for almost one year. Even omitting an accurate analysis of the environmental impact of the C.A.S.E. (as the lack of a dirty water treatment plant) and the debate rising around the consumption of territory (Ciccozzi 2010), it is worth underlining its urban effects and how the new city has been shaped by capitalism, that historically found in housing one of the best ways for absorbing surplus (Harvey 2008).

³ Complessi Antisismici Sostenibili ed Ecocompatibili (Anti-seismic Sustainable and Eco-friendly buildings)



Despite the fact that most of the new towns are completely detached from the previous urban centres and from any kind of services or amenities (Figure 2), they permanently reshaped the territory, fragmenting the urban dimension, incredibly enhancing the car-dependency of inhabitants (due to the complete inefficiency of public transport) and obstructing any possibility for the population to re-establish its connection with the territory and affirming its ability to live it in the first step of rebuilding, their right to the city. This effect has been enhanced by the total absence of social spaces within the new towns and its substitution with shopping centres and the complete neglecting of the city centre, historically the vital core of the community, affecting the more fragile part of the society: elderly people, people with disabilities and migrants.

It is worth noting how the Protezione Civile, in this entire project, never referred to an attempt to initiate the proper reconstruction process while widely supporting “a logic that sees in the emergency an opportunity for make enormous capital circulate” (Puliafito 2010: 163): the final results have been the “over-sizing the supply of services-residential” and the “dispersion / fragmentation settlement” (Bazzucchi 2010: 60).

Moreover, the C.A.S.E., despite an incredible expenditure, did not host all the evacuated. All the others were either accommodated in temporary shelters or, in most of the cases, provided by themselves to find a new house, starting an incredible phenomenon of exodus strongly aided by the dramatic economic situation. Citizen that still have not seen

their houses rebuilt nor had any opportunity for rebuilding them by themselves, also loose most of their job places. The unavailability, indeed, of allocation for shops, industries and commercial spaces have made more than 26.000 unemployed (Alexander 2010).

However, there are different approaches.



Figure 3. C.A.S.E. post-earthquake housing at Bazzano on the periphery of L'Aquila city (Alexander 2010:335).

2.4. Assemblea Cittadina

Since immediately after the earthquake, citizens of L'Aquila started feeling a deep need to participate in civic life, recognizing the crucial importance of any decision taken. The complete absence of a mechanism of participation implemented in the usual political routine and especially in the commissariat of Protezione Civile forced them to find an alternative, based on self-management and direct democracy. In a city where the associationism level was historically really low, there was an explosion of grassroots initiatives that tried to make some noise to be heard. One of them had the peculiarity of trying to coordinate all of them, becoming a meeting point for the citizens. It was called Assemblea Cittadina and, with a deep symbolic meaning, settled its seat in a big tent in the main square, in a permanent presidium. It represented an important locus of debate, internal or with the local institutions and a starting point for several initiatives. In particular, from the tent of the assembly all the

main demonstration that involved the city as the “Sundays of the wheelbarrow” departed and the organization of the demonstrations carried out in Rome took place. It is worth noting how these episodes, corresponding to an enormous increase of self-managed information and desire of participation, started to happen only 9 months after the earthquake, when the Protezione Civile had left and when the corruption of most of the people involved has come on the main stream media’s attention⁴. For the first time, on the 21st of February 2010, the population violated the red zone during is a symbolic event for reclaiming the city centre in which the citizens tied on the gate the keys of their houses of which were deprived of access (Figure 1). Again on the 28th of February 2010 more than 5000 citizens, armed with shovels and wheelbarrows infringed the red zone, self-managing an efficient way of removing ruins: while some shovelled, others carried, passing buckets hand to hand, building a human chain 1 Km long. Children, elderly people, adolescents, all together for the first time in the city centre, working as a symbol of rebirth.

The incredible event is only the first of a long series of violations of the red zone: every Sunday the citizens continued to get inside and tried to recall the attention of the media and local institutions. The assembly is still working nowadays, mainly through the Internet.

The participation both to the Assemblea Cittadina and to the so called Popolo delle Carriole (People of the Wheelbarrow) was particularly transversal and horizontal. The Assemblea Cittadina, as a container of all the other groups born in L’Aquila, was representative of all the main civil actors, even if the most active role were taken by people usually involved in politics letting it be mainly the expression of a certain middle-class cultural elite of citizen, tied to the L’Aquila city centre. On the other hand, the Popolo delle Carriole, representing an event more than a locus of debate, had the ability to be completely intergenerational and of involving also large part of citizen from the villages of the destruction zone.

⁴For example the scandal of a phone tapping of businessmen that were laughing about the earthquake (Puliafito 2010)



The Assemblea Cittadina tried to respond to the need of participation and information as well as monitoring the situation of the territory, putting pressure on the institutions. For their peculiar composition, they mainly concentrated on issues regarding the city centre reconstruction and the economy recovery. Some of the people involved also ran for the election for the city Council in May 2010 within the Civic List “Appello per L’Aquila” that was able to elect a candidate. The requests of the Popolo delle Carriole, instead, seem to be more practical: in particular their actions aim at the problem of ruins that have not been removed for years. However, to this hands-on meaning should be added the clear rebellion against the universal management of the emergency, the closure of the city centre, the lack of participation and transparency, the corruption and social and economic crisis.

This case can be easily analysed in terms of Social Ecology: the Assemblea Cittadina could be easily compared with the idea of Libertarian Municipalism, as being a concrete experiment of reconstructive approach to the reality based on direct democracy. The decision made of running in the local election is again resembles the objectives of Libertarian Municipalism and of the creation of Dual Power.

2.5. Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore

Pescomaggiore is a typical rural village of Abruzzo. Before the earthquake it was inhabited by less than 50 people, mostly elderly, having experienced after the ‘50’s a process of depopulation. However, the small community showed in the years an innate vivacity evident in the projects of the Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore, constituted in 2007 by residents, natives and property owners in the attempt to “improve the quality of life and regain the historic village centre with information campaigns, enabling participatory processes and starting micro-projects in agriculture, tourism and conviviality art”

(Pescomaggiore 2012a: no page). One of the key points of this group is to defend the 'bene comune' (the commons) and its main goal is to reach the ALMA (Pescomaggiore 2012b) (Latin for 'soul'), acronym for Abitare, Lavorare, Memoria e Ambiente (Inhabiting, Working, Memory and Environment): a particular approach to all the aspects of life with a clear eco-sustainable point of view, taking care of the concept of community. Firstly they actively opposed the extension on the village's territory of a quarry only 500 metres from the town that produces significant quantities of dust, increasing air pollution and distorting the landscape (Cure et al. 2012).

After the earthquake the existing social framework constituted within the Comitato was the natural loci for a struggle against the plan of the Protezione Civile that foresaw a complete displacement of the inhabitants to a different village. Opposing that, they built an entire eco-village, made up of 5 buildings, managed a permaculture allotment and organized various events, including community meetings in order to rebuild the nearby historic village. The eco-village is called EVA (from Latin 'mother of the living'), acronym for Eco Villaggio Autocostruito (Self-made Eco Village): it is built implementing Alternative Technologies solutions, like the use of straw for the walls, solar panels, phytopurification system, etc.. It has been self-rebuilt and self-founded on plots close to Pescomaggiore, recalling the tradition of houses built "arraitasse"(helping one each other): the building of a new house is a collective joyful moment wherein all the community, anyone bringing its skills and having as payment just food to share and conviviality (Carnelli 2012).

The actors involved in the project are mainly Pescomaggiore's inhabitants, citizens of neighbourhood villages or from L'Aquila but also an incredible network of hundreds of supporters and volunteers from Italy and abroad.

The objectives are primarily those inscribed in the idea of ALMA and are a response to the induced scarcity of houses and to the economic crisis that historically threatens small countryside villages. The focus is on memory, as consciousness of the importance of the historical heritage, and on the environment. The importance is of the local territory with its biodiversity and local resources, of the use of historical ability and technology linked to the soil and nature that are getting lost. The recovery of orchards and native seeds, the edible landscape projects, a series of laboratory of handicraft and the promotion of new forms of green tourism play an active role in promoting this policy.

It should be mentioned how all of Pescomaggiore's projects base their beauty not only on a DIY approach, but also on the recognition of the incredible importance of the local tradition and on the connection of people with their environment. Most traits of the ALMA projects recall Social Ecology principles, despite this not being openly acknowledged by the group. Their use of Alternative Technologies, in particular, in overcoming the housing crisis

recalls the possibility of building a post-scarcity society: using the modern approach of bio-architecture, the houses are built using local and low-impact/low-cost materials like wood and hay, heated by a wood stove and equipped with photovoltaic.

In a conscious remark on the significance of the re-appropriation of the “commons”, foundation of the community, (Comitato also rebuilt the local common bread oven) they thus promoted a process that could bring “a renewable endogenous coproduction of human groups and resources that keep them alive, the capital and the neoliberal economy historically determined leverage with both hands, trapping the subjective existences, forming them” (Cure et al. 2012: 82).

The whole project is based on a genuine “interpersonal relationship and relationship of cooperation, solidarity and sharing” (Cure et al. 2012: 82) that can be easily linked with an attempt to build dual power and a moral economy. In particular their decision making process is strictly connected with the recognition of the power of the community and of the importance of the assembly. Furthermore, Pescomaggiore has been chosen, among other five towns, for a project, called Borghi Attivi (Proactive Towns), of participatory construction (Pescomaggiore 2011) that has involved interviews, focus groups, questionnaires (Pescomaggiore 2012c) and after one year of community work, stated the community for reconstruction, based on permaculture principles and focussed on the importance of the landscape and the nature and of common spaces for the community.



Figure 5. EVA@Pescomaggiore in 2011 (Robazza, Savini 2011, no page)

3. Conclusions

In a growing context of crises, induced both by the Climate Change and by shock capitalism, the considered case study, that can be easily translated with any other context of shock and deprivation, showed how a disaster is an opportunity for the economic growth of certain elites (Klein 2007), but also as an open door to re-found a city on a different basis. As a starting point, it could indeed give the chance to change the social mechanism implemented, to the point that we can consider disaster as a way for liberating people psychologically. The challenge is thus to give the possibility to these effects, that are evident in the incredible explosion of “freely chosen cooperation” (Solnit 2009: 91) in the primary emergency, to last into the future. This could be done following the proactive approach to the emergency of Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore and Assemblea Cittadina dell'Aquila, clear examples of how Grassroots Urban Initiatives are concretely able to open spaces of utopia and include them in everyday life.



Figure 6. 3e32, an occupied social space in L'Aquila.

From an economic point of view, they are proposing a so called ‘moral economy’ (Bookchin 1987) based on collective responsibility and moral complementarity, trying to go beyond a market economy. As ecological utopias they “represent a most pertinent form of social critique; they can truly function as a rich source of ideals for a different arrangement of contemporary society” (De Geus 2002: 198). Moreover, they embody a potential approach to any future emergency and an input for starting understanding how it is fundamental, in any

process towards post-scarcity, the existence of a social network that is deep-rooted and active on the territory and the importance of the assembly as a locus for building social fabric and self-management.

Their realized decision making process gives a clear example of direct democracy. As experiences that last during the time and have the ability to reshape the urban and social fabrics, they are much more than simply movement democracy and constitute an answer to the critiques moved by Chodorkoff (2012), being clear examples of reconstruction beyond the protest moment (Chodorkoff 1983; Biel 1997; Heller 1999). Both of the examples analysed represent both the overcoming of Temporary Autonomous Zones (Bey 1991) and the realization of clear examples of direct democracy. It is clear how all those characteristic can be linked to Libertarian Municipalism that, based on the same potential of the assembly, could give a clear direction on how to build a dual power that can really challenge the current dynamics. Both our analysed experiences are clearly going towards that direction. Bearing in mind that our effort to change society is, with a slogan reminiscent of Holloway, "together with the state, despite the state, against the state" (Souza 2006: 327), the examples from L'Aquila represent different, valuable approaches to building a different society. Despite the fact that they can be associated with the aims and the goals of Libertarian Municipalism, is not clear to which extend these groups are challenging the existence of the State. However, objective of our work is not to evaluate the radicalism of an initiative but rather to show the existence of new open space of discussion and realized utopia.

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our gratitude to Samuel C. J. Wade and Eleanor Finley for their comments on early draft of this article and to the photographers Fabrizio Colagrande and Claudio Cerasoli for their help. All mistakes and weaknesses are attributable only to us.

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