WITHIN THE LIMITS OF SCARCITY

RETHINKING SPACE, CITY AND PRACTICES

Edited by
Barbara Ascher
Isis Nunez Ferrera
Michael Klein

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1. Literature context

According to the Human Development Report in 2005, "the richest 500 individuals in the world have a combined income greater than that of the poorest 416 million" (HDRO 2005: 4). Meanwhile, in 2010, within a sample of 104 countries "almost 1.75 billion people, experience multidimensional poverty" (HDRO 2010: 96). When either considering simple monetary income or a multidimensional index of well-being (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). 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 inability of our environment to sustain its inhabitants, but rather as a 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 from 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: 29) 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 world so densely populated, for reducing waste and consumption, sharing resources, stopping sprawl and saving energy due 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[1]. In a society increasingly detached from nature in the "synthetic environment" (Bookchin 1995: 17) of the cities, both these

[1] As defined by Bookchin 2005.

theories recognise the importance of the link between environment and humanity, and the importance of power relations in understanding urban transformation and its potential. 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 and an awareness of 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 from the incredible technological level reached to-date that is able to give incredible help in redistributing resources, energy and reducing the global need for hard work, achieving a "balance between man and the natural world" (Bookchin 1995: 188), a post-scarcity society. In the original etymology of 'techne', rediscovered in the works of Mumford (1934), the connection of technology with art, human skill and dexterity (Downton 2008), would permit the building of an alternative to the current energy system that is dependent upon polluting and exploitative sources. The use of green technologies indeed, would 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 Social 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, the principal characteristics of this new kind of political organization become decentralization, statelessness, collective management and direct democracy (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', 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 into the international bodies' agenda (United Nations 2010). It, as "a transformed and renewed right to urban life" (Lefebvre 1996: 158), opens up the possibility of people shaping their own city. Harvey, defining it as "the freedom to make and re-make 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, three year after 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 hardly be 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 a 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 on an urban setting and, allying ourselves with Castells (1985) and Moulaert *et 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 (Fraisse 2011). The term 'grassroots' is a broad concept as well, but we can find general agreement on the idea that the actor has a deep origin in and connection with the community and has a relatively horizontal structure, compared to more institutionalized groups (Fraisse 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, what their objectives are 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 opportunity 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 a look at different approaches to the emergency that are able to translate the crisis into a rebirth for the community and a way towards 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 Rischi (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. After meeting for less than an hour, the committee declared that there was no reason to expect 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[2].

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 in a territory of the exceptional dimension of about 2.400 kmq, and the displacement of around 67,000 people, of a 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 territory and a city already in crisis. Almost ironically, L'Aquila's motto is "Immota Manet", that more than the original wish for absence of earthquakes, 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). This is probably a lasting effect on the collective psychology of a 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 90ies has left the city with a high level of unemployment (Berardi *et al.* 2008).

L'Aquila before the earthquake was in an exposed, economically and socially vulnerable situation, in a region in which the development corridor moved to the coastal area, irreversibly impoverishing the inner region. Between 2009 and 2010 this situation became critical: the agricultural sector, the industrial sector, the manufacturing sector and tourism all suffered a dramatic drop, at the regional level[3] and most dramatically in the areas affected by the earthquake. The economic, social and cultural impacts of this catastrophic event have been tragic in a territory that had already experienced "a dramatic destruction of the social fabric and an impoverishment of his personal ties and community" (Farinosi 2012: 32), together with a "considerable increase in new poverty" (ATTAC Italia 2011: 24) due to the increased unemployment rate and lack of employment security[4]. The fragmentation is spatial and social: "the loss of connection with the usual loci of identity destabilizes existences, communities and daily practices" (Calandra 2012b: 39). The former fragility and, especially away from the mayor centre of L'Aquila, the disconnection and vastness

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2 In October 2012 the six scientists and a former government official, members of the commission, have been charged with 6 years of prison, guilty of involuntary manslaughter. Not entering into the huge debate regarding the responsibility of the people involved (among 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.

3 They respectively decreased by 8.6%, 12%, 72.8% and 17.5% (ATTAC Italia 2011: 11-13).

4 "From the first first quarter of 2010, in the crater of the earthquake the total hours of layoffs increased by 423.4% compared to the same period the year before" (Puglielli 2010: 10).

of the territory exacerbates this: the phenomenon of marginality emerges as "the major social risk in a context of crisis" (Imperiale 2011: 14). Moreover, the lack of social organizations in the territory and of a strong sense of community over the parental relationships have been contributory causes to the slowness and weakness of its reaction, in a context in which new spaces of social reconstruction and connection are desperately needed, as for example demonstrated by the importance of schools and university as re-composition places (ATTAC Italia 2011).

2.2 Earthquake's effect and management

Despite a lack of preparedness and prevention (specifically meaningful is the lack of evacuation plan for the Regional Hospital), the Protezione Civile, 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 Augustus*[5], a heavy deployment of volunteers, firemen, military forces and officers transformed the devastated territory into a living experiment of 'Command and Control'. The Protezione Civile, a powerful machine able to act notwithstanding the current environmental regulations, working contracts and urban planning, started its work. After 48 hours more than 24,000 people were accommodated in tents or hotels, increasing to a maximum of 67,459 (Protezione Civile 2010) in the next months. This was "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 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.* 2012, 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 mostly 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 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 any coffee, tea or Coca Cola in the tents to avoid over-excitation of the guests). To this is to be added the effects of the 'dividi et impera' policy: the uneven treatment of different groups within the population, divided between 'the ones in tents' and 'the ones in hotels' and the merit ranking for accessing to the shelters definitely put every individual against the other, in a spiral of fear and hate that damaged the initial empathic reaction to the disaster (Imperiale 2013).

In analysing the social fabric in the post-shock environment it is thus difficult to di-

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5 "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).

stinguish between the damages and impacts of the traumatic event and the collateral effect of a peculiar management strategy, especially as there was no social impact assessment analysis that could have developed a clearer understanding of effects and responsibilities (Cottrell and King 2010). However, as stressed in the introduction, it needs to be said that "the 2009 disaster was, quite simply, 'bad'. It was bad, too, from a physical pain perspective, given the number of people injured and killed. Yet, there was also the unquantifiable cost of mental and emotional suffering" (Sargiacomo *et al.* 2014: 5).

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 and Bertolaso (the Italian Prime Minister and head of the Protezione Civile), appeared to make major effort to support the population, in reality from the first emergency there began a history of power games and bypassing of local authorities (Alexander 2010), whose effects were still evident in the region three years after the quake: the rebuilding process had not started, the centres of L'Aquila and surrounding villages were still fenced, the economy in desperate crisis. Moreover they gave space to mafia infiltrations, caused environmental damage and impeded the beginning of a proper reconstruction.
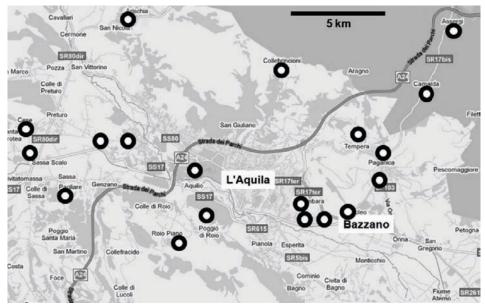
The situation is only slightly changed 5 years later (in 2014), when, according to data provided by the local council (Comune dell'Aquila 2014), in the town of L'Aquila and in the 56 municipalities hit by the earthquake there are still 14,320 people who live in housing solutions provided by the State, 4,054 people who benefit from the contribution of independent accommodation, while the number of people assisted inside hotels is finally null (while it was still 283 in 2012, Farinosi 2012). Moreover, the Protezione Civile also enhanced an overall external disinformation only partly uncovered by the huge amount of work of citizens and independent journalists through the Internet (Imperiale 2010; Farinosi and Treré 2010) 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 needs of the city that instead claimed at transparency, reconstruction and participation.

2.3 C.A.S.E.[6]

The scarcity of housing and the magnitude of the disaster gave the Government the possibility of implementing 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[7], 2,700 € per square metre were spent in order to build 19 permanent new towns. This misleading idea of giving temporarily-permanent solutions (Calvi 2010) provided the Government with easy publicity, building contractors with easy money and the population with the permanence in tents for almost a year. Even omitting an in-depth analysis of the environmental impact of the C.A.S.E. (such as the lack of a dirty water treatment plant) and the debate rising around the consumption of territory (Ciccozzi 2009), 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).

Figure 2. Location of the CASE post-seismic housing complexes in the L'Aquila area.
(Alexander 2010: 336)

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, boosting the car-dependency of inhabitants[8] 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 parts of society: elderly people, people with disabilities, women and migrants (ATTAC Italia 2011). The ideas of

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6 C.A.S.E.: Complessi Antisismici Sostenibili ed Ecocompatibili (Anti-seismic Sustainable and Eco-friendly buildings).

7 In particular are completely ignored fundamental planning regulations such as the Piano Regolatore and the Legge quadro nazionale n. 394/91 sulle aree protette.

8 Also due to the complete inefficiency of the public transport system, poor before the earthquake and after incapable of adequately covering the new long distances of the urban sprawl (Contreras *et al.* 2014).

common space and sociality seem to be dispersed, in a project that "trivialize the complex dimension of inhabiting to the sole dwelling (or even the sole house) and produces in the individuals the closure in the private space and a retreat within its family" (Calandra 2012a: 309).

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). However, the choice of building the C.A.S.E "actually affects the future construction of the new society of L'Aquila for at least three reasons: 1) because the 19 new settlements do not take into account in any way the pre-existing bonds, networks of solidarity and proximities; 2) because they affect the symbolic economic and organizational tightness of sociality; 3) because that choice is binding the future redesign of living, working and socializing spaces, to decisions taken in the full emergency phase to provide response to a need, the living, however temporary and transitory as it relates to reconstruction"(Calandra 2012a: 297).

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 cases, found a new house themselves, starting an incredible phenomenon of exodus strongly aided by the dramatic economic situation. Many citizens that still have not seen their houses rebuilt nor had any opportunity for rebuilding them by themselves have lost their jobs. The unavailability, indeed, of allocation for shops, industries and commercial spaces has made more than 26,000 people unemployed (Alexander 2010). Moreover, apart for the provision of shelters, there is a complete lack of good policies and infrastructural changes operated in order to improve transportation problems or urban services, commercial, educational and offices facilities (Contreras *et al.* 2014).

However, there are different approaches: in the following sections we will explore two of them, developed in the same context, following a completely different trajectory.

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 importance of citizen involvement in a post-disaster scenario has been recognised to be crucial in assuring a healthy rebuild for the community and a smooth reconstruction process (Davis 2007). However, this fact has been possibly forgotten in the special strategy adopted by the Italian Government in the L'Aquila Content. The complete absence of a mechanism for participation implemented in the usual political routine and especially in the commissariat of Protezione Civile forced citizens to find alternatives, finding powerful answers in the practices of self-management and direct democracy. In a city where the associationism level was historically really low, after the quake there was an explosion of grassroots initiatives that tried to make some noise to be heard. In particular, 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[9] (Citizens' Assembly) and, with a deep symbolic meaning, based itself 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 demonstrations that involved the city, such 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 (Farinosi and Treré 2010), 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 had come to the main stream media's attention[10]. For the first time, on the 21st of February 2010, the population violated the red zone during a symbolic event for reclaiming the city centre in which the citizens tied on the gate the keys to their houses of which they were deprived access (figure 1). Again on the 28th of February 2010 more than 5,000 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 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 attract the attention of the media and local institutions.

The participation both to the Assemblea Cittadina and to the so-called Popolo delle Carriole (People of the Wheelbarrow) has been 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 was 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 involved large parts of the population from the villages of the destruction zone.

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9 For further information www.facebook.com/assembleacittadina.

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

Figure 4. The human chain of the Popolo delle Carriole, 28/02/2010.

The Assemblea Cittadina tried to respond to the need for participation and information as well as monitoring the situation of the territory, putting pressure on the institutions. Because of 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 election to 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, seemed to be more practical: in particular their actions aimed at the problem of ruins that had 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. It is the place wherein different actors in the society met, planting seeds for different future initiatives like the project C.As.A., acronym for Comunicazione per l'Ascolto Attivo (Communication for Active Listening) (Italian for 'home') (Calandra 2012a). This project, utilizing active listening techniques, tried to build a process of communication to open spaces of participation on the problems connected with the reconstruction and start that process of citizen participation that will result in the experiment of participatory budgeting in the city and the institution of the "Department of Participation" in the local council.

In 2014 the Assemblea Cittadina, despite having lost its central role in the political life of the city, continues existing, organizing initiatives and monitory the situation of the reconstruction.

The Assemblea Cittadina can be easily analysed in terms of Social Ecology, comparing it with the idea of Libertarian Municipalism, as being a concrete experiment of a reconstructive approach to the reality based on direct democracy. The decision to run in the local election 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 a process of depopulation since the '50's. However, the small community showed in the years an innate vivacity evident in the projects of the Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore[11] (Committee for the Rebirth of 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"

11 For further information www.pescomaggiore.org.

(Pescomaggiore 2012a). 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 aspects of life with a clear eco-sustainable point of view, taking care of the concept of community. At first 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, a project to build an entire eco-village, made up of 5 buildings, started, together with the management of a permaculture allotment and the organization of various events, including community meetings in order to rebuild the nearby historic village. The eco-village has been called EVA (from the Latin for '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 "arraiutasse"(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 neighbouring 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 in 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 emphasis is on 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 handicraft laboratories and the promotion of new forms of green tourism play an active role in promoting this policy.

All of Pescomaggiore's projects base their beauty not only on a DIY approach, but also on the recognition of the incredible importance of local traditions 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, (the Comitato also rebuilt the local common bread oven) they thus promoted a process that could bring "a renewable endogenous co-production 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, together with five other 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)

Today, in 2014, the project in Pescomaggiore continues: 5 houses have been built and various economic activities are carry out such as the cultivation of saffron, a typical product. Unfortunately, the still lacking reconstruction of the original village demoralized the participant of the project, that however continue to create projects with the local community.

3. Latest events

In this analysis we focussed only on the post-shock primary phase (restoration), that, in the specific case of L'Aquila, lasted for at least 3 years (Contreras *et al.* 2014). However, it is worth mentioning how the development of the events in the following 5 years and thus approaching a proper recovery phase, reconfirmed most of the assumptions made, exacerbating most of the themes highlighted.

First of all, a mention is due to the corruption problem that started emerging with the phone tapping in 2010[7], and continued with the arrest of 4 local politicians for corruption in 2014 and several investigations on mafia infiltration in the reconstruction works. Court proceedings have taken place throughout the post-shock phase, from the condemnation of the Commissione Grandi Rischi in 2012, to the sentence against the engineers that worked on the Casa dello Studente, University accommo-

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dation that killed 8 students, and with 189 investigations with 18 subsequent court proceedings. Finally also UE criticised the L'Aquila post-quake policies, with a report denouncing the waste of public money which often ended up in the hands of criminals and the low quality of the shelters provided (Søndergaard 2013).

Secondly, it is important to recognise that the reconstruction, material and immaterial, is still in its early stages: "almost five years later some areas of the city centre of L'Aquila remain off limits to citizens, and plenty of buildings are supported by electro-welded buttress" (Contreras *et al.* 2014: 127). The dramatic situation of the surrounding territory, and the decades of villages in a state of neglect should also be considered. The emigration and unemployment rates are somewhat higher than before the quake, as well as the social fragmentation that persists together with the medical critic situation and suicide rate.

These elements, adding to the social damages of the rehabilitation, the corruptive focus on individual needs of the policies implemented (starting from the Decreto Abruzzo - Puglielli 2010), the lack of resources for the physical rebuilding[12], and the persistence of elevated poverty, have made progressively ending the initial self-management explosion.

Nonetheless, the necessity of public participation made it possible to start a variety of new different projects in the city that, even having lost the initial energy charge of self-management and become more institutionally focussed, often guided by international associations or the local university, are still trying to propose a different approach for the reconstruction, that not only looks at the physical aspect on living, but also at the cultural, economic and social potential of the territory[13]. They are still showing how, to a certain extent, "nations and communities typically demonstrate amazing toughness and resiliency in absorbing and coping with the disintegrative effects of disaster. And disaster-struck societies not only quickly rebound from disaster but often reconstruct and regenerate their social life with added increments of vitality and productivity" (Fritz 1996: 19).

4. Conclusions

In a growing context of crises, induced both by Climate Change and by shock capitalism, the considered case study, that can be easily translated into 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 is 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 (Fritz 1996). The challenge is thus to give the opportunity for these effects, that are evident in the incredible explosion of "freely chosen cooperation" (Solnit 2009: 91) in the primary emergency (Imperiale 2013), to last into the future. The prospective included within the experiences of Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore and Assemblea Cittadina dell'Aquila, are examples of how Grassroots Urban Initiatives are concretely able to plan the existence of spaces of utopia and include them in everyday life. Despite the fact that, in the specific context of L'Aquila, they have not been able to sprout to reach a significant dimension, it is important to stress their existence, their peculiar innovative stands and their ability to prepare the terrain for similar initiatives to be structural seeds of change in our societies.

It is important to stress how they have been able to propose a physical as well as

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12 "There are more projects than available founding" (Comune dell'Aquila 2014: 1).

13 Among the several others is interesting the project "Save the Plane" (www.salviamolapiana. org), that focusses on the economic rebirth of the rural territory of the crater.

social, cultural and economic reconstruction, based on different models. From an economic point of view, they propose a '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, that the existence of a social network is deep-rooted and active in the territory and the importance of the assembly as a locus for building social fabric and self-management is recognised.

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

Their temporary, realized decision making process gives a clear example of how to create new spaces of direct democracy. As experiences that last for a considerable period of time and have the ability to modify 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 the overcoming of Temporary Autonomous Zones (Bey 1991) and the realization of clear examples of direct democracy. It is clear how all those characteristics 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 of our analysed experiences are clearly going in 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 attempts to build a different society.

It is also necessary to acknowledge their limits and problems, often peculiar to a territory never hospitable for these initiatives in the past, in which "looms a disturbing continuity between pre-event and post-event which manifests itself in the perpetuation of the mechanisms of non-communication between representative institutions and inhabitants of the territory represented, but also between instances of so-called organized civil society and people, and between associations, groups and committe-

es" (Calandra 2012a: 309).

These limits stress again the importance of constant work in preparing the terrain for different initiatives to be born and of future research that could deeply assess and confirm the importance of grassroots initiatives and self-management practices in generating valuable alternatives in a situation of scarcity.

To conclude, recognising the history and process behind post-scarcity initiatives, as well their limits and the circumstances that hindered their flourishing, it is a first step to recognise and support, in any situation, post-disaster or not, the existence of new open space for discussion and realized utopia.

Note

All quotes from Italian sources have been translated by the authors of this paper.

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