

Cities and Grassroots Urban Initiatives: a Social Ecology Approach

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"The crisis in our time as expressed in the decline of political life and citizenship, of community and individuality in the classical sense of these concepts, stems from the invasion and colonization of culture's subterranean domain by a highly metastatic capitalistic technics and its commodities" (Bookchin 1995: 199)

"Good Bye

Winds of changes
a gate will open
we navigated in dreams
and expectations

every place
must bring enchants for the eyes
and touch the heart

dear Prestes Maia
symbol of many fights
and knowledge
we brought your name for the world
but it will remain in our hearts

there is a giant bird
that underneath of its wings
received us

here's the life's mirror
It's time to leave
good bye, dear Prestes Maia
we must leave you

the doors are closing
they cease the applauses
but it will be forever
kept in our memory."

(Roberta Maria da Conceição in Cardeal 2007: no page)

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1. Introduction

My project aims to explore the relation between modern cities and Grassroots Urban Initiatives, using Social Ecology (as defined by Murray Bookchin) as a research framework.

The starting point is to understand the contemporary urban crisis, the role of Grassroots Urban Initiatives and how Social Ecology's approach helps to comprehend further the urban crisis. I want to explore my case studies as symbols of alternative modes of social organization in urban spaces; these will be addressed specifically in relation to three topics: 'the relationship with power and institutions', 'technics, resources and post-scarcity' and 'governance and urban planning'.

In this document I firstly state the context from which I start my research. Secondly, I present and explore my research questions. Thirdly, I outline the literature context of my research. Fourthly, I sketch my methodology. Finally, I explore two initiatives that I have identified as potential case stud-

ies: the Sem-Teto (Homeless) movement in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore (Board for the Rebirth of Pescomaggiore) in Italy, developed after L'Aquila (Italy) 2009 earthquake.

Compared to the RSG 1 document, I changed the research questions, developed a methodology and focused on two case studies. Moreover, despite the fact that I decided to maintain a Social Ecology focus to base solid foundation for my research, I started to explore other thinkers and integrate their socio-political views in my work.

2. Context

Nowadays, it seems clear that we are facing two different kinds of crises: an environmental and a social one and they are deeply linked together. Contemporary capitalism, the current dominant socio-economic system, is indeed experiencing a deep crisis which is affecting the life of large sections of Western society: high rates of unemployment, dismantling of the welfare system, tax increases and difficulty to access to credit are just few of the effects that we are facing. However, contemporary society had been in crisis before the current economic crisis, especially in term of the pressure that humans are putting on nature and anthropogenic Climate Change. Globalization has not only created a world market but also worldwide issues and struggles. My aim is not to analyse all the environmental problems that we are facing, this has already been done by other authors (Giddens 2006; Homer-Dixon 2006; Monbiot 2006; Lynas 2007). I want, instead, to introduce the importance of climate change's impact on the everyday life of those living in cities and to state the starting point for my research.

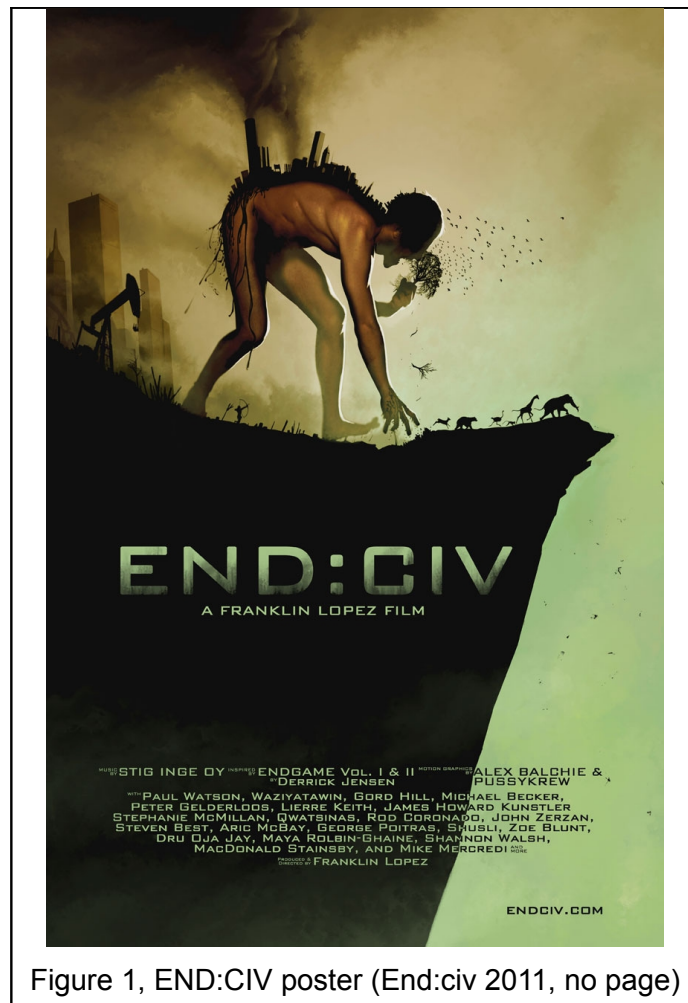


Figure 1, END:CIV poster (End:civ 2011, no page)

The poster of the film END:CIV (figure 1) is an emblematic representation of today's society, personified by a giant human figure. He is literally eating Nature while bringing on its back the silhouette of a modern city with the typical black fumes; on the background an oil well (the base of capitalistic society); only one human is resisting (with an ineffective bow); the animals (symbol of the nature) are escaping; all are running in the same direction: towards a precipice.

"Climate change is one of the most complex challenges of our young century. No country is immune. No country alone can take on the interconnected challenges posed by climate change, including controversial political decisions, daunting technological change, and far-reaching global consequences.

As the planet warms, rainfall patterns shift and extreme events such as droughts, floods, and forest fires become more frequent. Millions in densely populated coastal areas and in island nations will lose their homes as the sea level rises. Poor people in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere face prospects of tragic crop failures; reduced agricultural productivity; and increased hunger, malnutrition, and disease." (The World Bank Group 2010, xiii)

This quote is not from a radical climate militant or from a catastrophist publication: they are the fore-words of Robert B. Zoellick, the president of The World Bank Group, for a work with an emblematic

title, "Development and Climate Change". It is difficult to remain serene facing this kind of statement from a person who led one of the biggest organizations in the world that helped to create the current capitalistic system and today's crisis: if even he has understood the seriousness of the situation, we should start speaking about climate change as a reality instead of a forecast disaster.

It seems difficult, for a system based on growth, to grow forever within a world where resources are, by physical definition, limited. In this context, global warming, caused by increasing CO₂ concentration, seems to be the major driver of Climate Change. The subject is complex and controversial, but the year 2030 is a key date for avoiding the 2 °C increase which is considered a warning level, which has to be not overtaken in order to avoid worst and unpredictable changes. As an old slogan of Murray Bookchin says: "If we do not do the impossible, we shall be faced with the unthinkable" (Bookchin 2005: 107). At first glance this statement could seem to be to apocalyptic: throughout the history we always had struggles and big changes. However, today we are facing something new:

For example, if you are working to decolonize your country from a European occupier, you fight until you win. The ecological crisis we face has that dimension, *plus* a science-based timeline that we can't negotiate with. What we do in the next two years will determine the landscape for the next ten years, which will determine the landscape for the next one hundred years. (Russell and Moore 2011: 9)

The situation is serious and one would expect that people would act immediately but, unfortunately, this is not the case. Lynas (2007) calls this "states of denial" (282): today people are usually aware of the problems, but, instead of acting, they deny them. This effect underlined in the picture is also enhanced by the presence of a denial industry that works to deny climate change (Armitage 2005; Monbiot 2006).

The current economic crisis, now lasting several years, is also exacerbating these social problems (like the cuts to social welfare, the work exploitation, the incredible unemployment rate, etc.) which are, for example, represented and highlighted in the UK by the students protest in 2010-2011, the Occupy Movement in 2011 and the 2011 riots.

Cities seem to be the main stage of this crisis: Klein and Tremblay (2010) clearly states that "cities and mega-cities [are] at the forefront of globalization" (6), putting the social cohesion in danger.

Since 2008, for the first time in history, the urban population is higher than the rural one: this urbanisation trend is not likely to change and it is known that, by 2050, the world population living in cities will dramatically increase up to the value of 70% (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division, 2008). We are thus facing an incredible socio-spatial transformation where cities are and will be the main stage: they are not only the place where the majority of the population lives but also the source of many environmental problems and the locus of many social problems. Even NATO is aware that the arena of the most conflict of the future will be urban (RTO/NATO 2003).

In this situation, across the world, grassroots groups are trying to elaborate new forms of resistance and after the failure of many international summits (e.g. the COP 15 in Copenhagen) the demands of global social movements seem to be the only feasible way to a climate justice (Bullards and Muller 2012).

To conclude, I find pertinent the slogan used by activists in recent years: "social change not climate change" (Bowmann 2010: 173), meaning not only a change in the social structure but also in "human relationships" (Krzanaric 2010: 158). Additionally, as pointed out by Chatterton (2009), referencing to Bookchin: "people will stop exploiting the environment when people stop exploiting each other" (no page). However, this social change has to be defined, especially when we are able to find questions like these in the Australian Government's own documents (Hatfield-Dodds 2009): which kind of social change do we need? Can the State be re-organized or do we need a total new social structure? What is role of the community in this process?

3. Aims, objectives and research questions

This project aims to explore the relations between modern cities and Grassroots Urban Initiatives, using as a research framework the Social Ecology defined by Murray Bookchin. To assess the extent to which they can overcome the urban crisis the following research questions will be addressed:

(1). How do we understand the contemporary urban crisis?

(2). What are Grassroots Urban Initiatives and how have they been understood and conceptualised previously?

(3). How are Grassroots Urban Initiatives responding to the urban crisis?

Do contemporary Grassroots Urban Initiatives illuminate the concerns of Social Ecology in terms of:

(3.a). the relationship with power and institutions?

(3.b). technics, resources and post-scarcity?

(3.c). governance and urban planning?

(4). To what extent does Social Ecology help us to understand responses of Grassroots Urban Initiatives to the urban crisis?

(5). Overall, how effective are Grassroots Urban Initiatives in responding to the urban crisis?

3.a. Structure and definitions

The importance of my work is emphasized by the historical lack of works using Social Ecology from a geographical perspective or for analysing the city (Souza 2012b), something that has recently begun to change (e.g. Chatterton 2010; Hern 2010; Souza 2010, 2012a). In any case, we should re-

cognize how the use of Social Ecology in a lively field like the urban studies can be potentially innovative.

The questions (1) and (2) can help to shape all my research, through a careful literature review: (1) is focused on the city, the locus for my research, (2) on the role of Grassroots Urban Initiatives, the main actor that I have identified for a social change. My starting point is to use Social Ecology as preferred framework (Tokar 1992). However, I not only consider some other authors who are using the terms social/ecology in different meanings, but I have also to engage with other authors and traditions: I am not assuming that Social Ecology is the best approach and I want to explore other points of view. This process, highlighting possible insufficient explanations given by Social Ecology, can bring to a cross-contamination for improving my research. Otherwise, I can explain why I prefer a Social Ecology perspective, justifying my choices. To sum up, this kind of approach gives strength to my research.

Moreover, (1) and (2) help me to lay down the foundation of my research framework and to define key terms like urban crises and Grassroots Urban Initiatives.

Furthermore, the interest nested into bridging the Social Ecology with other thinkers and philosophies, is connected also with specific issues contained in (1) and (2) that deserve to be explored. In the detail, (1) helps to delimit the current situation of the Social Ecology: many authors said that Bookchin was narrowing the Social Ecology focus so it is useful to take stock of the situation six years after his death.

I think that (3), (4) and (5) are the core of the elaboration of my research. With (3) I focus my attention on Grassroots Urban Initiatives and my field work. Moreover, I decided to narrow (3) on three vast topics, related to Social Ecology and other libertarian theories; these three sub questions are connected logically.

(4) is a critical assessment of a Social Ecology approach. It will be very helpful the insight from the previous (1) and (2) and the analyse of (3). Furthermore, from (4) I can engage critical aspects of Social Ecology and propose a different interpretation, for a renewed Social Ecology.

In (5) I examine the effectiveness of Grassroots Urban Initiatives: how Grassroots Urban Initiatives are effective in addressing current crises and in re-appropriating or creating new spaces in neoliberal cities?

Through my research, I want to develop an analysis framework as an investigative tool for Grassroots Urban Initiatives, applicable to other projects or contexts.

I choose to consider the Grassroots Urban Initiatives in order to include a varying range of activity and to not be limited to the 'pure activist' experiences: my focus is not just on 'urban social movements', even if there are strong connections with them. Despite works that do take for granted the world (e.g. D'Cruz and Satterhwaite 2005 do not define the similar term 'grassroots urban organization' as well as Middlemiss and Parrish 2010. that do not define grassroots initiatives) I think that the

term Grassroots Urban Initiatives needs a clear definition (an important starting point is Castells (1985)). First of all, the adjective 'urban' clearly indicates the focus point of the grassroots initiatives, indeed they all treat themes about the city. Defining 'grassroots initiatives' is more complicated and there is not a general agreement on it. Fraisse (2011) is very useful in this debate.

The term 'initiatives' refers, on one hand, to the autonomy of the actors, and, on the other, to the evolution and the undecided future of the actors (Fraisse 2011). The term 'grassroots' is a broad concept as well, but we can find general agreement on the idea that the actor comes from the roots, it has deep origin and connection with the community and it has a more horizontal structure, compared to more institutionalized groups (Fraisse 2011). To sum up, "within the context of urban development, 'grassroots initiatives' can be likened to 'residents initiatives' and more generally to actions in which the people are directly involved in the decision-making and implementation processes." (Fraisse 2011: 7)

I think that the term Grassroots Urban Initiatives could give me enough freedom of movement in my research and at the same time it is able to sufficiently circumscribe my research field.

Until now I have encountered only one other example of use of 'urban grassroots initiatives' in Ram (2012): there is a slightly different word order maybe to underline the different order of importance of the words. This work is only a poster (she is a PhD student) and I want to explore more her works when they will be accessible.

In this document, while I recognize that my attention is concentrated on Social Ecology, I start a preliminary work for mapping other authors and traditions, answering to (1) and (2). In the future months it is fundamental that I expand my views, taking in to account other thinkers. My aim is to concentrate my attention of other approach, like the anarchist (e.g. Lewis Mumford, Colin Ward, John Zerzan), the non-orthodox Marxist (Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castell), the Eco-Marxist (Joel Kovel, Erik Swyngedouw) and the Eco-Feminist (Vandana Shiva, Myrna Breitbart).

4. Literature context

In this part I outline the literature context of my research. First of all, I sketch the main feature of Social Ecology, secondly which I concentrate my attention on cities analyses and thirdly I move to examine in more details the three main concept areas linked to (3). My approach is to start with framing the Social Ecology position, using different authors, and then try to widen the discussion with other authors and philosophies.

4.a. Social Ecology: an overview

The aim of this section is to outline the characteristic features of Social Ecology, founded by Murray Bookchin (1921-2006). In this first part I introduce some authors associated with Social Ecology together with their descriptions of what Social Ecology should be, define my position in this debate and finally present some other eco-philosophy pertinent to my field research.

Although Bookchin is the most prominent author of Social Ecology, we can see Social Ecology itself as a coherent political/philosophical school of thought (Marshall 2008; White 2008a), within which many different authors and internal currents have shared foundations and objectives. I would like to cite, aware of the undercurrent differences between them, Daniel Chodorkoff, Brian Tokar, Chaia Heller (these three are still closely working with the Institute of Social Ecology) John Clark, Janel Biehl (despite the fact that she has recently broken with the Social Ecology (Biehl 2011a)), Dimitri Roussopoulos, Damian White and Matt Hern. These authors can be considered part of a coherent current of Social Ecology. Even if, indeed, in the last period of his life Bookchin narrowed the focus of the discussions on Social Ecology, closing the debate (White 2008a), after his death most researchers have found in its work concepts of inestimable modernity and actuality, leading to a new revival. For example, since the 2010, the Institute of Social Ecology (ISE) is running courses again after few years of discontinued activity, the New Compass (a Norwegian Social Ecology-based press project) is growing with new publications and a new European experience has been launched: the Transnational Institute of Social Ecology (TRISE). Moreover, as stated before, there is growing attention on Social Ecology from a geographical perspective by independent scholars.

In order to contextualize and present my research, I would like to cite the following work that I consider essential to understanding Social Ecology and [for] the development of my research framework. They all concern the main author of Social Ecology, Bookchin: key general books are Bookchin 2004 and 2005, while his principal texts about the city are Bookchin 1986 and Bookchin 1995. I found also fundamental studies about Bookchin thought in Light 1998, Marshall 2008 and White 2008; at the same time, from a geographical perspective, the analysis of Geus 1999 and Souza 2012 is relevant.

Coming to the core of this section, I would like to define the term Social Ecology. Merely examining the meaning of its each word, we can conclude that Social Ecology is a way of linking social and ecological concepts. More specifically, in a recent interview, Chodorkoff has defined Social Ecology as an "interdisciplinary perspective, drawing primarily on anthropology, philosophy, history, and the natural sciences, that examines people's relationship to the natural world" (Hoang 2011: no page). Social Ecology has its roots in the Left tradition and it combines many aspects from Marxism and Anarchism.

Chodorkoff continued saying:

"Social ecology opposes hierarchy and domination in all of its forms; racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, Capitalism, etc. as inherently anti-ecological. [...] On a practical level social ecologists engage in protest, political action, the creation of alternative institutions, and community development, largely around the development of ecologically sound forms of energy and food production" (Hoang 2011: no page).

The key point for Social Ecology is the idea of social hierarchy and social domination, elaborated by

Bookchin in an attempt to go beyond the Marxist idea of social class and state. He stressed that "the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human" (Bookchin 2005: 65). Indeed, "nearly all our present ecological problems arise from deep-seated social problems" (Bookchin 1993: no page) and we can solve environmental problems only by solving problems within society: environment and society are inextricably linked to each other. According to Bookchin, we need a change in our conception of domination, a new scale of shared personal values (Bookchin 2005). Nevertheless, the determination of a new life-style is not auto-sufficient for dealing with the capitalistic system: it is necessary to build collective actions and social movements in order to achieve a radical change.

Many western thinkers offered a dichotomy between non-human nature and human society, but according to Social Ecology we have to accept that humanity is a product of a natural evolutionary process. In this way Social Ecology critiques both the tendencies of anthropocentrism (where the humanity is considered better and superior than the nature) and deep ecology (where the human has to return to nature). Social Ecology stands alone, understanding the uniqueness of human progress along the way of the natural evolution and proposing, at the same time, an organic point of view in analysing the problem (Staudenmaier 2005).

As recently pointed out by Biehl (2012), among the most important contribution of Bookchin to the Left, there are the introduction of the importance of ecology and the re-discovery of the power of popular assembly.

Bookchin 1965 is one of the first works that states the link between pollution and human disease: there is a decrease of human health conditions with the increasing of pollution. In general, modern development is creating an incredible number of problems: a wide use of private transport, factories, cities' sewage, pesticides, is leading to air, water and ground pollution, urban congestion, sedentary habits, stress, and so on (Bookchin 1965). These problems are also sprawling into rural communities: pollution and lifestyle do not know geographical borders. Moreover, the so-called "environmental disasters" (a nuclear power plant problem, an oil spill in the environment, a chemical leak, etc.) are happening more and more regularly, worsening the situation. However, all these documented episodes are clearly not industrial accidents or episodes caused by freak weather conditions, but the logical result of our development: the problem was not a conjunction of events but it was caused exactly by a development without caring about pollution (Bookchin 1965, 1989).

Recovering the link with nature is fundamental for building a new society: Bookchin is against the classical Marxist concept of contrast between city and countryside and between nature and human. In his opinion this contrast has shaped through history the development of our society, enhancing unbalances and deployment. In order to make a substantial change, thus, we need to speed up a process of profound reconciliation between nature and human, pointing at the birth of a new non-hierarchical society based on concepts of freedom and cooperation. Only within a unity between nature

and man there can be a complete development of all the human possibilities and potentialities. Most of the Bookchin's work considering this and others topic is heavily influenced by the Kropotkin's idea of Mutual Aid (Kropotkin 1902), forged on the principle of 'unity in diversity': the recognition of the power of diversity and cooperation are necessary for human evolution. Bookchin develops this idea, using many biological examples, and pointing out that the evolutionary process is not only led by the 'law of the strongest': cooperation appears in several different natural environments and situations, between members to the same species and also between different species (Bookchin 2005). However, for Bookchin, as we already stressed, biology is not only a locus wherein finding inspiring example for human behaviours: as Marshall (2008) suggests, in Social Ecology "Nature itself is not an ethics [...] but it is the 'matrix' for an ethics, and ecology can be a 'source of values and ideals'" (610-611).

Concerning this, Bookchin identifies two different kinds of nature to which humans belong: the 'first nature' and the 'second nature', where the first is related to the biological evolution and the second to a unique human social evolution (Bookchin 2005). Social Ecology is focused on analysing rationally the human 'second nature' and understanding, within it, the origins of social hierarchy and domination. Humankind appears to play a multifaceted role within nature, being a unique expression of it, still part of it, but often acting in an antagonistic way; the real role of the human should be instead to act as a "human stewardship of the planet" (Marshall 2008: 612).

I believe that the Social Ecology can present to who is sceptical in front of the anarchist project, a new answer, justified not from an anthropological perspective, as Graeber 2008, but from a biological-ethical point of view. This approach can finally support the idea that, even if throughout history a 'legacy of hierarchy and domination' (Bookchin 2005) has developed, the principle of domination is not innate inside the human project and that there exists a powerful legacy of freedom; continuous eruptions of freedom from the domination path during human history witness that fact. However, the revolution consists not only in a 'mass' liberation but also in an individual research for sustainable relationships: it starts from the self-administration through sustainable ethics. My research intends to fit in this approach, outlining at the same time the role of the power, or, to call it in a better way, of all the 'not ecological' social dynamics existing in the city. Here the Grassroots Urban Initiatives are seen not only as a possible and effective alternative to the 'normal' mode of production, but also as a place where to build different and more genuine forms of interactions.

Moreover, most of their common struggles are developed facing global crisis that in magnitude remember easily a recurring theme in Social Ecology works: the perception of an imminent apocalypse, where human life is in great danger. It is necessary to take action as soon as possible for preventing a catastrophe: "at its deepest level, social ecology is a utopian sensibility which suggests that a new world is not only possible, but that it is necessary" (Hoang 2011: no page). Social Ecology thus appreciates the power of Utopia (Chodorkoff 1983; Bookchin 1988, 2004) and its way of

creating "a vision of a new society that questions *all* the presuppositions of the present-day society, [...] its inherent ability to see the future in terms of radically new forms and values" (Bookchin 1988: 280). Geus (1999) well summarises the precondition for an 'ecological society': starting from the assumption that capitalism is anti-ecological (Bookchin 2004), a new society should be no-hierarchical, based on ecology, ecotechnology (Bookchin 1988) and decentralization. Furthermore, a strategy to change should be based "on education, the cultivation of a new consciousness, and organization with the help of 'direct action', 'affinity group' and counter-institutions" (Geus 1999: 199).

It is with this kind of approach that I want to look at the today reality, searching for rhizome and practical examples. Utopias projects pose big challenge and are problematic (Geus 2002), however "ecological utopias 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" (198). Unfolding the potentiality of Social Ecology (Tokar 2010), my research is so based in analysing what for me are libertarian 'spaces of utopia' (Harvey 2000) created by the Grassroots Urban Initiatives: space endowed with both with a spatial and a psychological dimension, where I can focus my attention on great example of "community, assemble, spontaneity" (Bookchin 2004: 13).

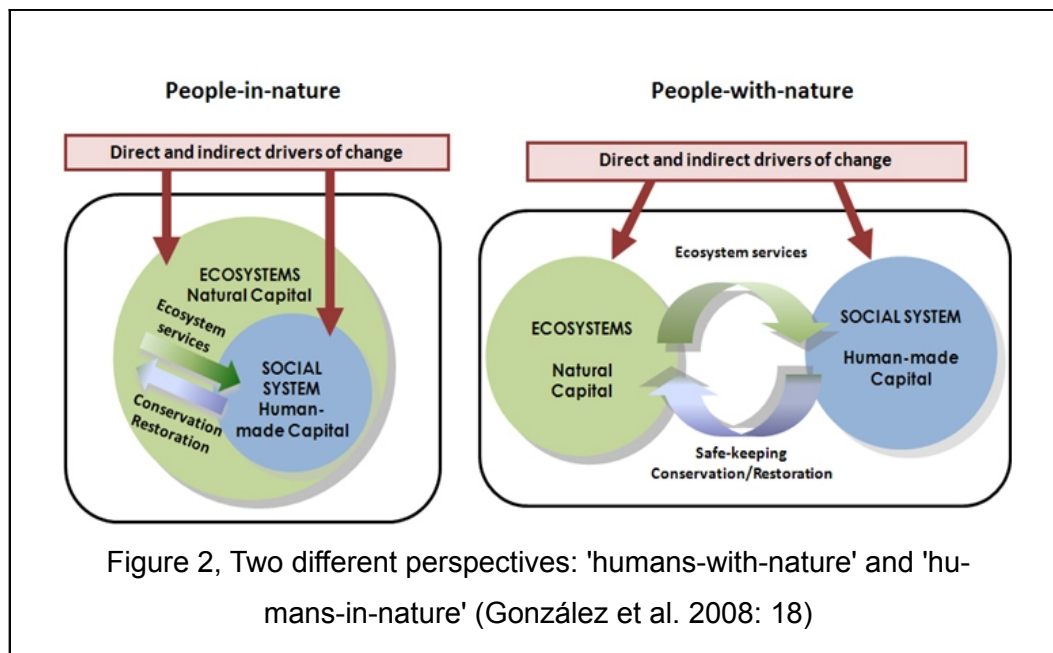
To conclude this section, I would like to light on several other thinkers and association that are currently utilize the term Social Ecology and that I came across when I started my research in Social Ecology. Among the others, in the academic context there is Stuart B. that runs a course in of Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney (Australia) and is the proponent of a "Social Ecology's Australian Metamorphosis" (Schroll 2011: 113). After collaborating with Bookchin for many years, since 1999, Hill took distance from 'MB's' Social Ecology and started to define a different 'social ecology'. He came to a new definition that addresses social ecology to be: "the study and practice of personal, social and ecological sustainability and progressive change based on the critical application and integration of ecological, humanistic, relational, community and 'spiritual' values" (Hill 2005: 1). In his work Hill outlines the necessity of a new relation human/nature for reaching a sustainable future; nevertheless, he does not explore the concept of dominance as Bookchin does. At the same time, his political project results not well define, asking just for a generic 'participatory democracy' (Hill 1999, 2005) and hoping in a world defined generally by "health, wellbeing, equity, humane behaviour, caring, mutuality, meaning and sustainability" (Hill 2009: 8). As emerges from the previous analysis of the political position, the Australian approach is profoundly different from the Bookchin's one having roots in Emery and Trist (1973) (for a brief account of Trist's work and his Social Ecology, see Pasmore, Khalsa 1993) and also links with deep ecology (Shroll 2011).

Continuing speaking about the Social Ecology presence in the academic world, it is worth to notice a department called School of Social Ecology at the University of California – Irvine which is using a total different approach from Social Ecology, developed from the ideas of Binder, Stokols and Catalano (1975). This approach is multidisciplinary and aims at exploring the relations occurring

between the people and their environments (Huff 1999).

This experience is linked with the so called 'human ecology' theory developed at the University of California - Davis, whose interest regards the human development and behaviour, considered with a mainly biological and quantitative approach and not really connected with the questions about nature: for example the word 'nature' is never mentioned in Richerson, Borgerhoff Mulder and Vila (2001). Their definition of human ecology is "*Human ecology is the study of the interactions of humans with their environments, or the study of the distribution and abundance of humans*" (13). Moreover, their project does not consist in creating a new philosophy being more focussed in providing "a framework for synthesizing the many disciplines that contribute to understanding *Homo sapiens*" (Richerson, Borgerhoff Mulder and Vila 2001: 528). However, we have to recognize the broad diffusion and variety of currents existing within the field of human ecology; among them, for examples, the Society for Human Ecology, starting from the relation human-environment, pays more attention to the environment/nature side (Borden 2008).

Another experience to cite is the Stockholm Resilience Centre (its emblematic subtitle is "Research for Governance of Social-Ecological Systems"), which vision is "a world where social-ecological systems are understood, governed and managed, to enhance human wellbeing and the capacity to deal with complexity and change, for the sustainable co-evolution of human civilizations with the biosphere." (Simonsen 2011 :4). Even if they highlight concepts like resilience and sustainability that well matches with the Bookchin approach, their use of the terms `social` and `ecology` comes from a completely different background, being nested in the Socio-ecological System theory (Glaser 2008; Berkes 2003). So far it seems to be a respectable project, with clear ideas, interesting data, collaboration with grassroots initiatives and attention to the use of technology (Leach et al. 2012); however, the framework of these intervention or critique is very institutional.



Starting from a research about Galapagos Islands habitat, the figure 2 shows two different view of the relationship human-nature, on the left the dominant perspective, on the right a more sustainable and balance suggested approach.

What I have found similar in all these aforementioned approaches is their interdisciplinary approach, the consideration of the link human/environment, a general hope for participatory democracy and a certain importance of nature. Moreover, in all these approaches there is a sharing of the concept of ecology, as firstly developed by Ernst Haeckel (1866). However, only within the Bookchin's work there is, linked with other socialist authors, a profound social and political critique of the current system, a totally rupture with the State, while others 'Social Ecologies' considered as plausible less radical alternatives like green capitalism or generic sustainable system. Moreover, other two aspects underlined by Bookchin are generally missing in the others: the consideration of the role of domination and its link with the relationship nature-humans. Among the different approach there is also a fluctuation between quantitative/qualitative and/or physical/human approaches.

The same analysis carried out with the couple of term 'social' and 'ecology' could be done with the idea of 'urban ecology', giving a similar result: despite the vast usage, the expression lacks of a fully coherent definition (Mcintyre, Knowles-Yanez and Hope 2000).

To sum up, the experiences here presented are only examples of how the terms social, human, urban, ecology could be used with different meanings and nuances. Paraphrasing and interpolate the words of Heller (2011), despite the fact that I found few interesting cue in other social ecologies, my research

"is focused on the Social Ecology that began with Bookchin and is continued by those interested in building on that body of work. The fact that people around the world use

the term social ecology to refer to anything related to the relationship between society and nature is irrelevant to this [research]. There are so many other eco-friendly [re-searches] where folks may write about various other interpolations of social ecology. Let's agree to use this one to discuss Bookchin-derived SE" (Heller 2011: no page).

4.b. The city

In this part I outline some major characteristic of Social Ecology's city analyses: firstly, I present a critique to the today situation, after I sketch some possible solution and finally I engage a discussion with the concept right to the city.

For my research I follow Chodorkoff (1980) and Hern (2011) whose works about cities stress the importance of the community as a base not only for a more advanced urban planning, but also for a new form of society. Thanks to their work, the classical concept of anarchist/libertarian 'fear' of city seems to be resolved and the widely accepted idea that for anarchist it is impossible to bring the change in heavily urbanized environments is finally refuted.

Also Bookchin is totally aware of the importance of the city for human development and he deals with the idea of urbanization (Bookchin 1965 and 1995), in contrast to citification: these two terms that even are usually accepted as synonyms, are perceived as antagonistic; only the last term pre-suppose the idea of society, while the first is referring to a urban environment that absorbs all the space. It is thus important to point out how the aforementioned concept of citification, as well as the concept of 'civilization', come from the Latin word 'civitas' that means city; fact that is evident also in the use of these terms by Bookchin: he underlines how the social life and civilization are developed in cities thanks to the proximity to the marketplace and of living quarters that helps social interactions; the city is humanity's core, the place where culture and human beings are developed.

The city is defined "as a space a place in which we work and engage in everyday consociation [...] [and] as a public arena" (Bookchin 1995: 4). Moreover, the city has two different domains, the living one and the political one which together form the truly social life.

However, the concept of 'civitas' has been lost in modern metropolis where the major effect of urbanization is to reduce the citizen to 'taxpayer', 'constituent' or a part of an 'electorate' (Bookchin 1995). In today's cities the people are highly individualized, losing social relation and reduced to standardized individuals: the characteristics of citizenship seem to be lost and the city is becoming the space where the state affirms itself power and control. To sum up, we are reaching a point where city negates itself and its own idea of society (Bookchin 1986).

Clearly, having recognized that cities are the core of our society, returning to a rural life as suggested by many deep-ecologist thinkers, is not the solution for solving our problems. For Bookchin, we need a revolutionary movement that should be not only a class movement, but (agreeing explicitly with Lefebvre) an urban movement; by this time, indeed, the proletariat has lost its revolutionary role (Bookchin 1986, 1995).

At the same time, we need to recognize how problem arises because of a historical dichotomy between land (as nature) and the city (as social): it is widely believed that the first is unstable, the second is stable. This idea created an antagonism between land and city that, nowadays, has reached a breaking point (Bookchin 1986): nature is totally negated and "urban environments are highly synthetic rather than natural" (Bookchin 1995: 17). In the past, this 'conflict' between city and countryside saw on one side the city's world, with its cosmopolitan culture and institutions, and on the other the town's and village's worlds, with their provincialism and constrictive kinship. However, there were many examples of balance occurring between city and countryside, leading to social improvements (Bookchin 1995): only when a good relation occurred, human life did develop and flourish. However, today, this conflict seems to be over: the city appears to completely dominate the countryside. Nevertheless, this is not completely true: the cities' expansion is "absorbing adjacent towns and village into sprawling metropolitan entities-a form of social cannibalism that could easily serve for our very definition of urbanization" (Bookchin 1995: 16). This is not only a spatial engulfing but also a cultural one: all of society seems to conform to the values of 'city life', spread by the mass media. Furthermore, urbanization is not only subverting agrarian life but also contaminating those values and institutions born from civic relationships, replacing them with values of anonymity, homogenization and institutional gigantism (Bookchin 1995). Ultimately, "the conflict between city and country has largely become obsolete. Urbanization threatens to replace both contestants in this seemingly historic antagonism" (Bookchin 1995: 17).

Since the '60s Bookchin has used the concept of 'city unlimited': if in the past there was a border between the city itself and nature, now the city's expansion has reached a level never achieved throughout history and the city has incorporated everything; the increasing urban sprawl has gone beyond individual comprehension. As to the question "what are the limits of the modern city?", Bookchin gives two answers. The first limit in capitalistic society is "that the more there is of urbanism, the less there is of urbanity" (Bookchin 1986: 113). Secondly, even if people pretend that there are no limits, "the natural world raises a decisive ecological limit of its own [...] that may not be felt until the damage has been irreparable and the recovery of a balanced ecology irreversible" (Bookchin 1986: 117). More recently we should add also add that ethno-national and/or religious conflict can lead to the creation of border in the city itself (Pullan 2011).

For Bookchin it is necessary to recover the relationship with nature and produce a new urbanism "that combines the features of urban and rural life in a harmonized future society" (Bookchin 1986: xi) (e.g. this was tried by some experience of permaculture (Mollison 1988; Mollison, Slay 1991) and of the Sem-Teto (Souza2012c) Today there is the "emergence of the megalopolis, the absolute negation of the city" (Bookchin 1986: 160). Today urban belts and megalopolis cannot be considered within the classical and widely accepted concept of 'cities' (Bookchin 1986, 1995). Especially regarding the situation in North America but not only, today "we live in a world marked by rampant urb-

anization-but one that lacks real cities" (Bookchin 1986: viii). During modern times the city has lost two important features: its human scale and its communitarian dimension (Bookchin 1986).

To sum up, key problems in today society are (Bookchin 1995)

- ✧ an increase of public surveillance and military repression;
- ✧ an increase of individualism;
- ✧ social or civic commitment dissolved in private life;
- ✧ the intelligentsia retreat to academy
- ✧ "consumption, not only production, has become an end in itself" (194).

The question is, how can we have real cities?

A better life in a city depends not on a new urban design but on fundamental changes that should occur in the society (Bookchin 1986). Today the cities not only are the dwelling of the majority of the population, but they can also be seen as a major means 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 spreading out and saving energy. This is due the increased density that reduces everyone's footprint (Hern 2010).

Geus (1999) well summarises the more important features of a Social Ecology ecotopia: organic farming and horticulture, widespread of solar energy, importance of bioregion, face-to-face assemblies and rotation of the work between town and country (a reminiscence of Fourier's idea). Moreover, in a globalised world, based on the concept that "everything is up for grabs, the entire world is one monster 24/7 market" (Hern 2010: 169), where the economic crisis is increasing inequalities and poverty, where government are supporting capitals and banks rather than people, citizens have to find alternatives. Hern (2010) suggests lots of them: the possibility of growing our food by ourselves or buying from the local farmers rather than in fast-food chains; "recovering factories, building workers' coops, planting gardens, occupy business, and remaking the economy" (Hern 2010: 211) as happened in Argentina; substituting cars with bikes. In a coming capital crisis Hern states that we have to give different value to goods, and, above all, to our knowledge, culture and lives, using "horizontality, collective action, shared work, responsibility, and vision" (Hern 2010: 211) as powerful tools for reinventing our cities. Is this all feasible? My research will help to answer this question.

The Grassroots Urban Initiatives underline Social Ecology's features such as: central role of the city, direct action, regular meetings, environmental improvement, urban agriculture, conflictual relation with the state, etc. The legal system is used when necessary, and discounted or opposed at other times (Souza 2006). Furthermore, these experiences are important because they took place in an urban context: they offer a solution to the dichotomy nature/city.

To conclude this section, I would to engage with the concept of right to the city, firstly introduced by Lefebvre (1999) in 1968, that has now developed and spread all over the world, becoming a power-

ful slogan for academics and urban movement in Western and non-Western countries; recently it has been also introduced in the international bodies' agenda (United Nations Human Settlements Programme 2010). The political philosophy of the right to the city shares many common traits with Social Ecology, first of all the centrality of the city in the discussion.

However, the libertarian or anarchist tradition seems to remain impermeable or suspicious about the idea of rights (Turner and Miller 2005): finding radical thinkers using this term is quite uncommon. An interesting exception is the work of Kropotkin where he speaks extensively about the right to live, to have food and to resist; emblematic is his slogan "What we proclaim is The Right to Well-Being: Well-Being for All!" (Kropotkin 1924:11). However, this seems to be an isolate case, determined by a context where the primary access to food and shelter was still very difficult. The debate around rights gained extreme relevance after the WWII when The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Now rights are guaranteed and determined by States and international bodies, and, despite many significant improvements, this result definitely insufficient for a radical change; NGOs that are usually seen as fundamental for improving international institutions for human rights protection seem to be more advocates of the status quo, incapable of a radical critique (Turner and Miller 2005). In my opinion, speaking about right is a dangerous step that can lead a dilution of radical demands or to form of co-optation, in a practice of de-construction by the system to the movement (Souza 2012c).

Attoh (2011) explores the broadness and difficulty to define the right to the city: this concept is still "vague and radically open" (670) and different scholars have used it in different ways.

Lefebvre defines the right to the city as "a transformed and renewed right to urban life" (Lefebvre 1996: 158): thus the possibility for people to shape their own city, where the concept of 'autogestione' is crucial. This last concept, so close to anarchist idea, lacks, in fact, of a full definition in Lefebvre (Souza 2010; Attoh 2011).

However, in his work there is a clear reference to a certain strong contrast with the State that reminds the anarchist approach: for him, the nowadays State policies are blocking the building of a city shaped on citizenship: "the incompatibility between the state and the urban is radical in nature. The state can only prevent the urban from taking shape". This behaviour is rooted in the nature of the state, that "has to control the urban phenomenon, [...] to retard its development, to push it in the direction of institutions that extend to society as a whole, through exchange and the market." (Lefebvre 2003: 180).

Another key author working with the right to the city is Harvey, who also defines the right to the city as "the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves" (2008: 23), putting the emphasis on the collective aspect of this right. Moreover, he emphasizes how, from a Marxist perspective, the right to the city helps to understand "who commands the necessary connection between urbanization and surplus production and use" (2008: 40).

Souza (2010 and 2012a) has tried to build a bridge between Bookchin and the right to the city, outlining many different common traits and stress the aim of a radical change in Lefebvre (Souza 2010).

4.c. Relations with power and institutions

This section is organized around two main concepts: the idea of 'Libertarian Municipalism'. and the role of Grassroots Urban Initiatives. My starting point is the recognition of the importance of self-management as a key concept in the libertarian tradition (Marshall 2008); at this stage of my research, however, I do not go into the depths of the classic anarchist literature regarding this idea. Instead I focus on the relevance of the interpretation of Bookchin.

In the late '80s Bookchin proposed a coherent project for a new political system based on the concept of Libertarian Municipalism that was later developed in Bookchin 1995; Biehl 1997b; Eiglad 2002, 2005, 2011. Bookchin (1993) suggests municipalities that are self-governed in a confederation, similar to 'Commune of communes'. He introduces this new system to allow people to return to the heart of political debate, suggesting an organization which should encourage public participation and consensus decision making. In developing this, Bookchin refers to Proudhon and Kropotkin's idea of 'communes', led by principles of self-management, complementarity, mutual aid and he defines 'decentralization', 'statelessness', 'collective management' and 'direct democracy' as the principal characteristics of Libertarian Municipalism (Bookchin 1986, 1995). I am presenting this political idea in detail in order to introduce the utopian project for the society to which in my opinion Grassroots Urban Initiatives should aim at.

The first objective of Libertarian Municipalism is to "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). In this way Libertarian Municipalism emerges as a 'new' form of grassroots organization posed against the nation-state. One of Bookchin's aims is to propose "a self-conscious practice in which confederal municipalists can engage in local electoral activity" (Bookchin 1995: 9). This new political form is a "fundamental *duality of power* in which increasingly independent and confederated municipalities emerge to the centralized nation-state" (Bookchin 1995: 10). Moreover, he argues that the power of confederated municipalities can only be acquired at the expense of the nation-state (Bookchin 1995). As Libertarian Municipalism is "a dual power that conteste[s] the legitimacy of the existing *state* power" (Bookchin 1995: 264) and "an effort to *transform* and *democratize* city governments" (Bookchin 1995: 268). From an economic point of view, this approach proposes a new form of economy that goes beyond nationalization or collectivisation (Bookchin 1995). Here all land and enterprise must be under the control of the extra-legal assemblies that challenge the current system at the city level, the Council. This approach

emphasises that face to face assembly is fundamental to the formation of community: it's seen as a tool to support the full development of individuals. Bookchin asserts further that it is important to organize at any time extra-legal assemblies to establish a normalized moral authority and the power of persuasion (Bookchin 1995). The assembly system is not only an expression of a vote but requires a deep personal commitment and involves many discussions and confrontations. The assembly is the arena of public life, the supreme political body where all citizens (in opposition to the statecraft) can participate in political action and where final decisions are made. Throughout history the Urban Revolution has called for the development of dual power and Libertarian Municipalism finally offers a way to "counterpose assembly and confederal forms to the centralized State" (Bookchin 1986: 179). Bookchin, breaking from the traditional anarchist framework, suggests that participation in elections at the civic level believing that it is possible to intervene at a civic level without being compromised by the central or local state, which is always to be opposed. This theory of Confederalism is thus always in tension with the State and suggests the movement has to avoid running candidates at the regional or national level; history has taught us that "state power is corruptive" (Bookchin 1995: 11) and for that reason regional or state elections have to be avoided. However, elections at the municipal level are seen differently: the municipality is the closest formal political arena to the people and it is more similar to the Greek polis. From an economic point of view and facing the community as a whole, Libertarian Municipalism envisions the "municipalization of the economy and its management by the community as part of a politics of public self-management" (Bookchin 1986: 181). Being aware that a community which is completely self-reliant is impossible to achieve, Bookchin proposes a confederation of communes, a so called 'Commune of communes.' He defines this as:

"a network of administrative councils whose members or delegates are elected from popular face-to-face democratic assemblies, in the various villages, towns, and even neighborhoods of large cities. The members of these confederal councils are strictly mandated, recallable, and responsible to the assemblies that choose them for the purpose of coordinating and administering the policies formulated by the assemblies themselves. Their function is thus a purely administrative and practical one, not a policy-making one" (Bookchin 1995: 253).

Decentralization is perceived as "a spiritual and cultural value that links the re-empowerment of the community with the re-empowerment of the individual" (Bookchin 1995: 203). Asking for a self-management, it challenges the core of the State's idea, becoming one of the most difficult challenge that the state has received (Bookchin 1995). The widely recognized idea that we need the state or a top-down structure due to the complexity of our reality is confuted by the internal contradictions of the actual economic system, that results in highly bureaucratic procedures, with huge expenditures for transporting materials and large amounts of waste and pollution.

Dismissing the state as an institution, the proposal is to decentralize social organizations to the level

of municipality, where "municipal freedom [...] is the basis for political freedom, and political freedom is the basis for individual freedom" (Bookchin 1995: 203). Such a grassroots political organization is possible thanks to new technologies that create the possibility of a post-scarcity system, based on self-sufficiency (Bookchin 1995, 2004).

However, while Bookchin recognizes the importance of decentralization, he acknowledges that trying to reach a complete autarchy is harmful: "interdependence among communities is not less important than interdependence among individuals" (Bookchin 1995: 237). Of course, singular decentralization, self-sufficiency, human scaled community and technology alone are not sufficient to create democratic social changes: only in combination with each other is there hope for a better future. There are no limits to what can be decentralized (Bookchin 1995): even the modern metropolis can be municipalized; the many examples from the past presented by Bookchin (Bookchin 1986, 1995) remind us not only that these histories of grassroots led changes are great inspirations but also that building a different world is possible. However, to cultivate such great aims we must keep in mind that "we [cannot] afford today the myth that barricades are more than a symbol" (Bookchin 1995: 244). Moreover, concerning the organization of the Commune, it is important to remember the difference between policymaking, which is a people's duty, and administration, which is more related to logistical problems and in which assemblies' participation is not entirely necessary. Thus the constitutions of administrative bodies of municipalities are considered possible. Another emerging characteristic of grassroots political movements is that they are becoming more and more 'transclass'. We see this especially in those that "concern environment, growth, transportation, cultural degradation, and the quality of urban life in general" (Bookchin 1995: 233). This reality of such contemporary political organizations supports Bookchin's position of opposing the idea of separated and static social classes. Libertarian Municipalism, therefore is not simply a strategy: it is a social project that refers to the ancient polis, to its face-to-face assemblies and ethics; it is "democratic to its core and nonhierarchical in its structure" (Bookchin 1995: 260). Personally, I am not interested in the electoral project of the LM: I find many of the critiques of it from the anarchist movement still pertinent (Biehl 2007). Since the end of the '80's there were different electoral attempts of LM, all finished without achieving much: for example, the Green Parties seemed to represent the requests of Social Ecology and Libertarian Municipalism (Tokar 1992; Roussopoulos 1993) but this hope was later vanished; other examples of Libertarian Municipalism experiences are Burlington, Vermont in the United States (Biehl 1997b), Montreal, Quebec in Canada (William 1994 and Roussopoulos's experience), and Norway (Demokratisk Alternativ 2007). The most interesting recent initiative recalling Libertarian Municipalism is happening in Kurdistan (Biehl 2011b, 2012; Eiglad 2012). This seems to me much different from previous experiences, putting together direct administration from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) of free territory and use of municipal elections. Furthermore, recognizing how Kurdistan is a

very plagued territory, maybe even small electoral achievement can be celebrated. Also the Zapatistas' experience in Mexico seems to be very similar to the theorization of Libertarian Municipalism, although there are no consistent references to it within the Social Ecology literature. The purpose of this research project is to examine the Grassroots Urban Initiatives as practical examples of 'dual power'. Until the '80's Bookchin favoured grassroots initiatives (Bookchin 1988 and 2004), defining them as "emerging "free space" for popular, often libertarian, civic entities, and the civic bases for a new body politic" (Bookchin 1988: 186). However, in his later work, he heavily criticized the effectiveness of grassroots initiatives for obtaining social change and concentrated his efforts in developing Libertarian Municipalism (Bookchin 1995). In particular he found fault in one of the common solutions posed to the capitalistic system, namely communitarian and social experiments such as cooperatives, social clubs and neighbourhood centres. His critique rested on the limitation of their success and the deterioration of their social dimensions caused by "the pressure of competition or simply greed, [which turns these initiatives] into corporations in their own right" (Bookchin 1995: 2). He observed that every business seems to necessitate moulding itself to the imperative, 'grow or die' if it wants to survive in the current system. Bookchin understood the future of these experiments is to disappear or to be incorporated into the capitalistic system. Another signal of his opposition to these solutions can be found in Bookchin (1995b), where he discusses so-called 'lifestyle anarchism' which had spread especially in the U.S. in the '90s, as in contrast with real 'social anarchist'. Lifestyle anarchists, he argued are those who dress in an anarchistic style or live in certain ways but do not align their activities with the development of a revolutionary project. Additionally, he makes a connection between lifestyle and individualism: "individualist anarchism remained largely a bohemian lifestyle, most conspicuous in its demands for sexual freedom ("free love") and enamored of innovations in art, behaviour, and clothing" (Bookchin 1995: 8). He opposes also primitivist and post-modern forms of anarchism, especially these notions posed by anarchist philosophers, John Zerzan and Hakim Bey. Instead Bookchin proposes a return to an anarchism with a strong 'social framework'. Despite these general good points, such as the critique on the emphasis on 'lifestyle' present in the anarchism movement, this work is generally decomposed and faulty (Price 2012a).

In this part of my work I want to recover the importance for 'first' Bookchin of Grassroots Urban Initiatives by applying the 'bridge' created by Clark (2006). Many anarchist thinkers try to articulate the tension between personal autonomy and social freedom: these two aspects cannot be separated and have to be interconnected. Replying directly to Bookchin, Clark (2006) states that "the bridge [between Social Anarchism and Lifestyle Anarchism] is crossed many times each day by those who practice the anarchist ideal of communal individuality in their everyday lives" (no page). I find myself leaning toward the 'communitarian social ecologists' approach (Wimberley 2009), which

is grounded in the idea that 'community' is the key area to radical change. While the dominant capitalistic perspective permeates all aspects of our lives and has divided people in anonymous individuality, an organic approach for community development must be created, where "true community development ...must be a holistic process which integrates all facets of a community's life. Social, political, economic, artistic, ethical, and spiritual dimensions must all be seen as part of a whole" (Chodorkoff 1990: 71). Similar to Chodorkoff's arguments (1980, 1990), my privileged actor for an urban social change are the Grassroots Urban Initiative, that have expressed throughout all the history an inspiration for a social transformation (Castells 1985). To underline the deep connection between movements and Grassroots Urban Initiatives, Chodorkoff (2012) attempts to outline strategies for the Occupy movement to assist them in moving from the stagnant moments after their 2011 square occupations to the construction of "permanent autonomous zones" (no page) or to 'solidify' the Occupy movement (Imboden 2012). The occupation of public squares represents an important example of direct democracy; however, we have to consider that "directly democratic processes in a movement context, do not constitute direct democracy, [they] constitute movement democracy" (Chodorkoff 2012: no page). In other words, what was reached is not a 'real' direct democracy, but rather an inspiring example, which instilled understanding and practice of deeper democracy into participants and witnesses. The development of this practice and understanding within public life creates a kind of proof that direct democracy is possible, at least within movement contexts; now it is the moment to expand and put in practice this in our everyday lives. If Bookchin's approach were to be applied, it would be that at this stage the movements' attention should now turn again to the community, to create new physical and mental spaces in order to put in practice on an on-going basis the principles of Libertarian Municipalism. Discussion about 'power' deserves a particular mention. Bookchin states very clearly that:

"power cannot be abolished – it is always a feature of social and political life. Power that is not in the hands of the masses must inevitably fall into the hands of their oppressors. There is no closet in which it can be tucked away, no bewitching ritual that can make it evaporate, no superhuman realm to which it can be dispatched" (Bookchin 2002: no page).

We can aspire to distribute power, to eliminate its abuse: this is the role of Libertarian Municipalism. However, this claim is disputed. For instance, Holloway (2005), coming from a non-orthodox Marxist point of view, noticed how, in the past, all the emancipatory examples to take power have failed. Also referring to the Zapatista experience, he hopes for a society built by people "who do not exploit and do not want to exploit, [...] *who do not have power and do not want to have power*" (205). Answering this, from a Libertarian Municipalism perspective, Legard (2010) argues that power has a neutral connotation and "power is always a mix in between "power-to" and "power-over" (70): as

stated in the Libertarian Municipalism project, the latter must be avoided while the former has to be distributed and made as accessible as possible.

Another key point in this debate is the decision making processes. In radical circles it is widely believed that 'consensus' is the preferable way to organize and take collective actions (Marshall 2008). However, Bookchin states that consensus is "suitable for small groups of people who know each other but [are] entirely impracticable for large assemblies of strangers" (Biehl 2007). From my personal experience, Grassroots Urban Initiatives are able to operate by applying processes to build internal consensus. The big question is whether the same approach is really replicable in big meetings and suitable for Libertarian Municipalism. Consensus can, indeed, easily be manipulative, authoritarian and be the stage for charismatic leadership, while it is strongly necessary to recover a democratic dimension (Bookchin 1994). I believe that a consensus decision-making process is always preferable and has to be seen as a 'desideratum', even recognizing the logistical and temporal problems arising from its application especially during desideratum periods of transition toward different societies. Nowadays, many different manuals on consensus are available (e.g. Seeds For Change, The Trapeze Collective, SmartMEME) that aim to provide information to assist practitioners in avoiding mistakes by introducing procedures for reaching effective consensus, even considering in some cases the need for recognition of a 'high majority' in order to reach decisions. In my opinion, these models offer seeds for progressing toward a new, more democratic and liberatory, societies.

4.d. Technics, resources and post-scarcity

The fact that technology represents another key point in theories of Social Ecology is well represented by the number of works that dedicate sections to it (for example: Bookchin 1965, 1986, 1988, 2004, 2005; Chodorkoff 1980, 1990). The first example could be found in the awareness of Bookchin that, far before the discussion around the Climate Change, considers how increases in pollution are directly connected with the scale of growth of modern cities and with industrial development based on fossil fuels (Bookchin 1965). In his early discussions he posits that fossil fuels promote "urban gigantism" (Bookchin 1965:186): modern metropolises are sons of technology based on coal and oil which not only provide an economic energy source, from power plants, but also for private transport. Bookchin 1965, as underlined by Biehl 2010, was able to recognize in a prophetic way the link between increases of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and weather modification, especially regarding the possibility of the polar ice caps melting. Moreover, he started to raise concern about the permanence of the effects of modern life style, prospecting that future generations will face environmental effects that will last for centuries.

However, this discussion is far from stating that technology is intrinsically 'bad' or 'good'. For Bookchin technology is indeed considered fundamental to reaching a positive and long-ranging solution to today's crises and to achieving a "balance between man and the natural world"

(Bookchin 1965: 188). Technologies ability to act as an aid is well summarized by Downton (2008): "technology = tool + use" (109): the key point is its use, not its substance. To help to understand this point of view as well as to deepen the discussion and overcome inconsistencies in Bookchin's work (Watson 1996), recovering the etymology 'techne' and the works of Mumford (1934) are useful to turn to. Here there is an interesting semantic comment about the fact that technology should be considered only a part of technics. For example, "mechanization and regimentation are not new phenomena in history: what is new is the fact that these functions have been projected and embodied in organized forms which dominate every aspect of our existence" (Mumford 1934: 4). During history, this phenomenon has led to the creation of the 'megamachine' (Mumford 1971), the organization of society along an authoritarian technics line. By this Mumford means the betrayal of the real scope of technics: the human advancement. It is important to stress that "technologies cannot be divided from the social relations in which they appear" (May 2000: 241).

Understanding of the importance of the use of technology leads to another key concept, 'post-scarcity'. The current economic capitalistic system (Swyngedouw 2004; Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw 2006) is progressively enhancing, both in so-called 'developing' and 'developed' countries, social unbalances and environmental problems, causing a deep scarcity of resources. However, Bookchin recognises how the concrete availability of resources and the incredible technics advancement -thus, the aforementioned use of technology- can contribute to building a different society, a post-scarcity society, where it is possible to imagine "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). Of course, Bookchin is not calling for a technocratic approach, but his awareness of the legacy of man's domination over nature and over humanity (Bookchin 2005) brings to his development of the notion that, in order to reduce scarcity, deep social changes are required, rooted in a new relationship with nature that is alert to how resources are affected by rates of human consumption (Bookchin 1988; Hopkins 2008; Hern 2010). In this context, post-scarcity is not understood as merely a material status: 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: xvi). This new future is made possible by new energy sources thanks to the feasibility of exploiting natural resources such as wind, sun and sea currents. Bookchin recognises how the technological development of these resources is fundamental to human survival, as the current dirty and exploitative development of sources of energy contribute to pollution, create health problems and destabilize the planet's climate.

Bookchin, using practical examples and referencing many scientific studies, analyses different sources of renewable energy, such as solar devices (usable even for metallurgical industries), wind turbines and dams. However, he underlines that developing their potential individually cannot be the

solution. He argues that reliance only on one source of energy, causes instability in our society. Every region has its particular environment which determines both possibilities and limitations for the connection between humanity and nature: there is a strong link between energy production and a community's geographic location. For this reason, we have to create "an energy pattern" (Bookchin 1965: 193) where both the load and the energy sources are distributed throughout territories. For example, communities nearest to the equator would rely more on the sun, while coastal cities would rely on the production of energy from the sea. Using the slogan from Shumaker (2010) Bookchin notes that, "small is not necessary beautiful" (Bookchin 1995: 237): a human scales need to be applied. Moreover, "it is not very difficult to show... how the international division of labour can be greatly attenuated by using local and regional resources, implementing ecotechnologies, rescaling human consumption along rational.. lines, and emphasizing quality production that provides lasting... means of life" (Bookchin 1995: 250).

In the '70's a new movement was born from a counterculture: the Alternative Technologies movement (Smith 2005; Wilson 2008) (this movement is nearby and convergent with the aims of the Appropriate Technology movement). With its stated aim of "offer[ing] alternatives, in terms of both product and lifestyle, as well as critique" (Wilson 2008: 12) it challenged capitalism, as well analysed in Chodorkoff (1980) where the author offers a vivid description of the potentiality of this movement. However, since the '90's, the Alternative Technology movement was co-opted by the capitalistic system. Only now we are seeing a revival of this movement by new groups such as, Practical Action, Alternative Technology Centre, Centre for Alternative Technology, Open Source Ecology.

My research explores the complexity of these frameworks by analysing the possibility for Grassroots Urban Initiatives to put technological development into practice. I am interested in the skills they have developed, in the tools they utilize to make spaces and in recovering the human dimension of 'techne', as suggested by Mumford and developed with the 'Do it yourself' (DIY) dimension in similar initiatives (Trapese Collective 2007).

4.e. Governance and urban planning

Starting from the widely held assumption that cities have problems which need to be solved, since the beginning of the nineteenth century the role of urban planners has increased steadily. Their role is directly connected with the assumption that people do not care enough about their cities, and thus there is a need for someone else who can and who has the knowledge to do that. However, it can be proven how spatial criteria are not sufficient to realize universal utility of and rational cities (Bookchin 1986). Relevant evidence of this are also found in the past, where, for example, Athens along with most medieval cities were not 'well' planned, but had vigorous social lives, within a recognizable urban human scale.

Furthermore, contemporary calls for better city planning acknowledging capitalistic society cannot express a city planning that transcends the reasons for modern crises, because it such planning uses parameters established by this destructive social system itself.

"Until city planning addresses itself to the need for a radical critique of the prevailing society and draws its design elements from a revolutionary transformation of existing social relations, it will remain mere ideology -the servant of the very society that is producing the urban crisis of our time" (Bookchin 1986: 148).

In the ancient past 'planners' of cities were priests and warriors and designed urban space in relation to the aim of the city which often included space for food cultivation (Bookchin 1986). Since the Renaissance, which marked a shift toward a bourgeois society, city planning had gradually lost its human spontaneous features until recently, when the key words are presumed as 'efficiency' and 'function'. Until the late nineteenth century city planning did not have a big impact, except in a few cases (e.g. L'Enfant's plan for Washington and Haussmann's remodelling of Paris). While it is impossible to negate the positive role of planning over the centuries in improving living and working conditions, it is important to recognize how these improvements occurred at the expense of many struggles, especially causing hardships for poor people and the loss of connection between humans and nature.

In the past, many utopian city planners (such as Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, William Morris, Peter Kropotkin, Patrick Geddes, and Ebenezer Howard) had believed in "decentralized, balanced communities, built on a human scale, which would combine the cultural advantages of the city with rural qualities of the village" (Bookchin 1965: 188). The actuality of their visions is nested in the fact that, while in the past their proposals had various problems in being realistically practicable, nowadays new technologies permit these views to become an affordable reality.

Also Bookchin analyses critically the idea of city planning for three of them: the utopian socialists, Robert Owen and Charles Fourier, and Ebenezer Howard and founder of the garden city. They all proposed to construct new settlements for solving deep urban problems of the nineteenth century. Common features of these thinkers are a new relation with nature implemented through the introduction of many 'green' areas and human scale development to the city. However, while the first two planners have had a greater commitment to radical transformation, the last is less concerned with social change.

Modern city planning has completely lost human value and is conditioned by extra urban factors arising from market principles. Facing the city's problems, we need an urban change that can be possible only in a new social framework. This cannot be done by modern planning, which is "an expression of rational politics — the proposition that a democratic government can craft policy to meet broad goals serving the interests of citizens, and solve problems arising in its 'policy environment'" (Low and Gleeson 2006: 2).

I still find pertinent Wildavsky's (1973) critique about urban planning. Today we are facing the dominant rhetoric with the terms 'planning' and 'environment' (Low and Gleeson 2006) but this emphasis is not transmitted in good projects. For example:

"Reading Australia's contemporary metropolitan planning documents, ... one can only conclude that planning has lost touch with reality. There is no argument in them, only slogans. There is no evidence or underlying substance, only surface. There is no implementation strategy beyond exhortation. Over the last thirty years metropolitan planning documents have become thinner, glossier and more and more like developers' advertising brochures. There is nothing behind the documents but business-as-usual. This is not real planning but junk planning." (Low and Gleeson 2006: 6)

The vagueness of terms used by policy-makers is recognizable in another popular concept: 'resilience'. Even from a radical perspective (Castell 2000), a unique definition of this term is difficult. MacKinnon and Derickson (2012), presenting an overview of this issue, suggest that resilience "privileges the restoration of existing systemic relations rather than their transformation" (11), stressing how it is problematic for antagonist groups to use this term. They suggest to use, instead, the term resourcefulness that is able to stress the importance of resource redistribution and the necessity for the entire community to have access to means, as basic steps to be taken before thinking about the vague resilience. Moreover, the term resourcefulness permits the construction of a strong link with community dimensions and with the importance of direct democracy / horizontality. Four key areas establish a framework for a resourcefulness society, are highlighted: resources, skill sets and technical knowledge, indigenous and 'folk' knowledge, and recognition (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012). This new approach seems interesting and deserves more attention in the future of my research.

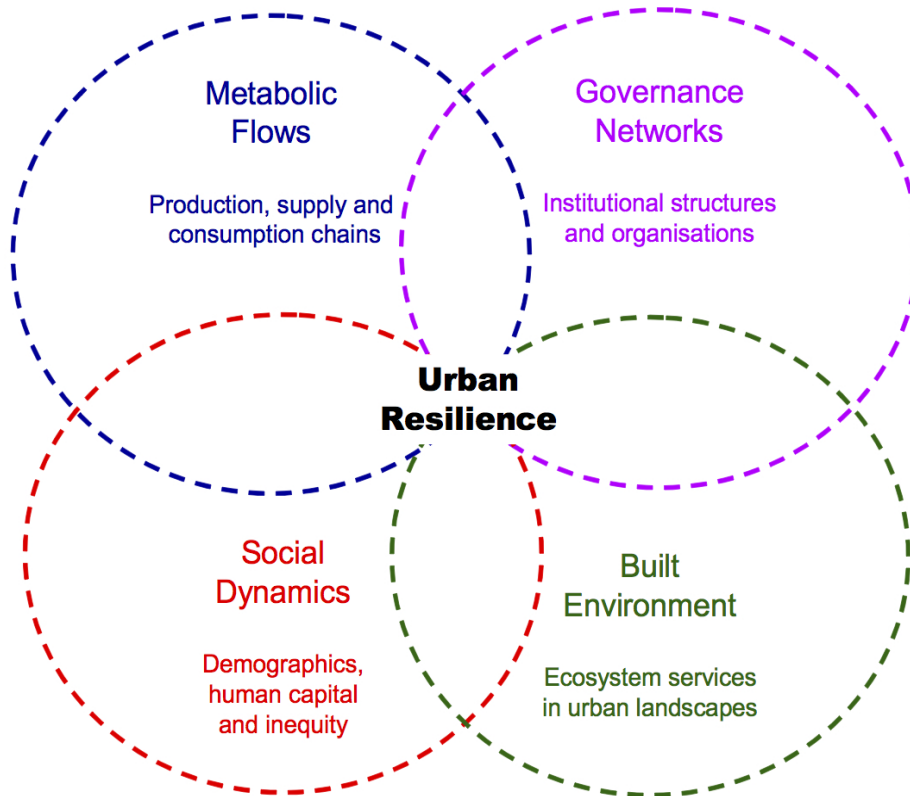


Figure 3, Urban Resilience (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Arizona State University and Stockholm University 2007: 10)

For example, the figure 3, based on a work of thinkers close to the Stockholm Resilience Centre, shows four interconnected research themes of urban resilience. Is it possible to change this approach to one based on resourcefulness? Shall this approach or the resulting outcomes of this research change?

Another recent term that has been re-used and emptied of radical meaning is 'creative city': as the urban authorities have conceived it, the adjective creative has lost the entire link with equal and localized human relationships and education (Chatterton 2000).

Coming back to the Social Ecology prospective, Bookchin points out that during the '60s there was a rupture, coinciding with the birth of the counterculture movement, when ideas of social change were put into practice in everyday life (Bookchin 1986). In that movement, a new generation of city planners tried to elaborate a new city design, based on principles of human rounded development, non-hierarchical, communistic and market independent. Bookchin emphasizes the city plan "Blueprint for a Communal Environment" elaborated by a group in Berkeley: it is presented as an example of this new tendency to deeply criticize the bourgeois city framework and propose a new city in a new society. This was a blueprint developed by a group of Berkeley students and residents who started to put in practice a different planning, planting flowers and trees on a vacant lot owned by

the University of California that became the famous 'Berkeley Park'; "the site quickly became a rallying place for people trying to imagine alternatives to traditional concepts of property ownership" (Rome 2003: 546). Unfortunately, for many reasons and not least police repression, this counterculture was not able to grow and to develop a strong force for social change. Similar to this approach is the work of Downton (2008), who, as an architect and inspired by Kropotkin and Bookchin, has tried to mix social aspects and nature in a planning vision.

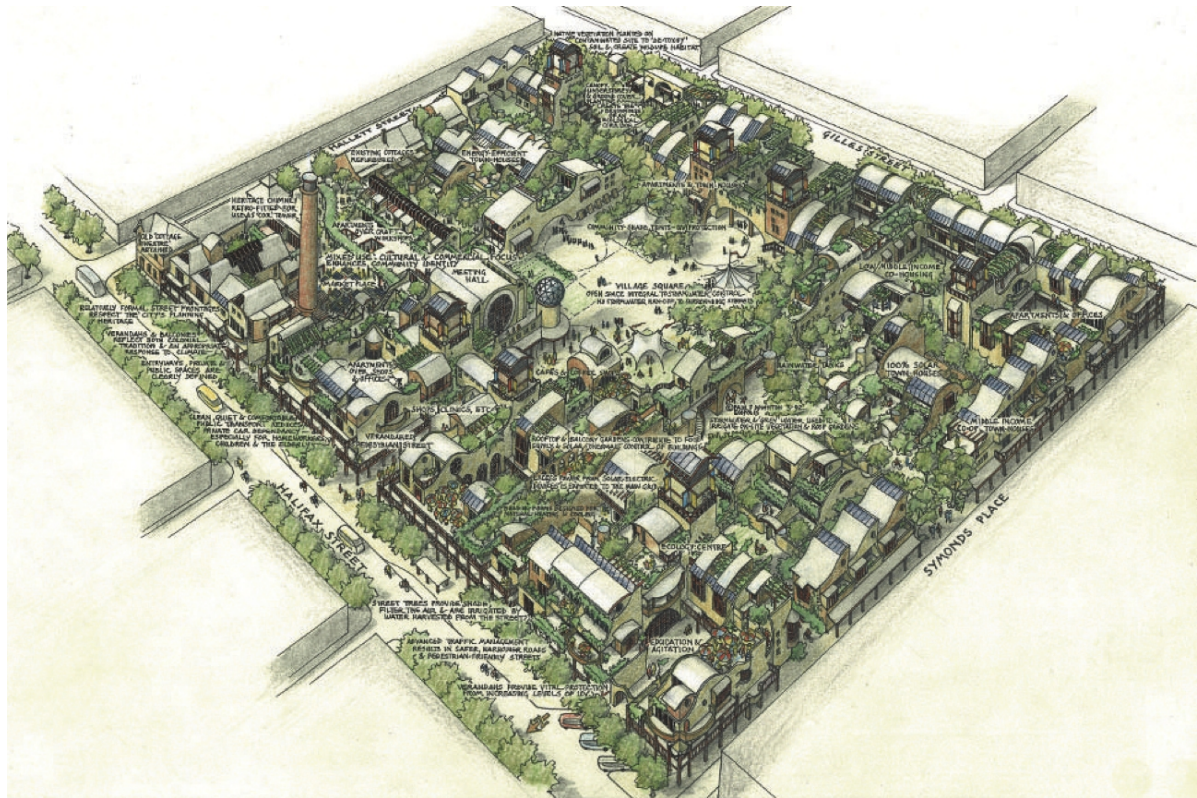


Figure 4, Halifax EcoCity Project (Downton 2009: 317)

From a practical point of view the project of Halifax EcoCity (Downton 2008) and the experience of Ecopolis Architects and Urban Ecology (architects group) have been remarkable. Figure 4 shows an example of eco-project: we can notice the presence of a lot of green/nature, areal passage, no roads for cars, large use of solar panel, community places and a square. History is full of utopian and realized examples of sustainable constructions / neighbourhoods that deserve mention, as happens, for example in the recent works of Pickerill (forthcoming) and Chatterton (forthcoming). However, considering that one of the key aspects of my research is radical social change, I believe that these approaches are only part of the solutions, offered in a small scale.

The challenge that we face today is to solve the dichotomies present in our society, like city and country, or individuality and community. Moreover, "megapolis must be ruthlessly dissolved and replaced by new decentralized ecocommunities, each carefully tailored to the natural ecosystem in which it is located" (Bookchin 1986: 161; similar concepts were expressed also in Bookchin 1965).

Finally, the technology, as explained in the previous part, has a fundamental role for reshaping the city. Bookchin is aware of the technological limitations of renewable energies. For example, the problems posed by transportation and challenges in providing energy to a high concentration of homes and factories. For socio-political reasons he is categorical in saying that we have to abandon modern urban gigantism: we have to think a new type of community, determined by the characteristics and resources of a region, recovering a past human scale. Suggesting decentralized communities, it involves an important subsequent problem: population density. Without putting any preconceived population limit, he states that the geography and resources of the community will determine the uppermost limit for population (Bookchin 1965).

A real city from Bookchin's point of view does not exist today; he calls for a move forward imagining new city forms for social justice (Chatterton 2010), creating new visions, debating with movements for alternatives and, maybe the most important thing, continuing this process because "cities are unfinished stories" (Chatterton 2010: 235). If we are invested in change, we cannot continue in the business-as-usual fashion, but instead need to recover a real, solid dimension of planning and environment. Hern (2010) emphasises several times in his work that what makes this 'solidity' is the community, the neighbourhood, the 'real' people that live in a city: "City-building leadership cannot fall to experts, bureaucrats or planners. People have to make cities by accretion: bit-by-bit, rejecting master plans, and letting the place unfold" (10).

My research aims to understand how Grassroots Urban Initiatives position themselves in community, how they imagine a new city and how they can be effective in putting to practice this new vision.

4.f. Other theoretical traditions

In the following sections I explore some other political traditions and thinkers that can help my research; these do not pretend to be exhaustive, but to constitute a starting point for further insights.

Anarchism

In this part I introduce some key aspects of anarchism and later I explore the thought of Lewis Mumford, Colin Ward and John Zerzan. All these three authors share a deep critique of the role of the State and a hope on a different society based on Anarchist principles. However, they also present peculiar and different characteristics.

Even though "anarchy is usually defined as a society without government" (Marshall 2005: 3), finding a specific a definition of anarchy and anarchism (its philosophical-political project) results much more difficult, being its internal definition non-dogmatic (Marshall 2005). Despite the fact that we can find trace of anarchism in many different thinkers through all the history, anarchism was born expli-

citly with William Godwin and developed substantially during the first International in the XIX century. A key standpoint in this political thought is the achievement of freedom and the critique of every form of oppression, among which, for example, the State is considered to be one of the principal manifestation. In anarchism are present many different tendencies that often enter in conflict between them. An example is constituted by the division between social and individualistic anarchist: the former focusses on the society, the latter on the individuals; they are in explicit tension regarding the way of integrating personal freedom and the existence of community. Moreover, among social anarchism we can find other subdivisions, like mutualistic, collectivism, syndicalist, according with different projects of social organization and preferred social actor. Some key topics in anarchism where it is also possible to find many differentiations are: spontaneity and structure, importance of nature, direct action, pacifism and use of violence, technology, utopianism, etc. However, these different tendencies "all flow in the broad river of anarchy towards the great sea of freedom." (Marshall 2008: 11). If the anarchism suffered a stop with the end of the civil war in 1939, it has seen a new revival within the New Left and the Counter Culture and still now is a prominent current in the Anti-globalization and Social Justice movements. Even the recent Occupy Movement, Arab Spring, Indignados, Student Movement developed all around the world are often libertarian in their organization and goals.

Lewis Mumford is an English thinker who deeply studied the development of the city through the history. He (1938) identified (influenced by Patrick Geddes) six stages of the city development: Eopolis, Polis, Metropolis, Megalopolis, Tyrannopolis, Nekropolis, dividing them by social organization and technology used. According with these definitions, we are now in the fourth phase, the Megalopolis: the city has started its decline because of the capitalistic system and the arising of an extreme individualism. The last two stages are considered to be hypothetic negative phases that we could face not changing our current trend of development; for Mumford there exists only a solution for avoiding them: the foundation of an eutopia (Mumford 1922) through which recovering the link with nature and transforming our society on different basis, where the science has to be at the service. A good example of city that follows to a certain attempt these principles could be found in the Medieval one, where there was a good balance between human intervention and nature and the settlements were almost auto sufficient, within an economy based on handcrafts.

Colin Ward is a contemporary English anarchist; he believes in the role of the working class and in the possibility of organizing a non-hierarchical federation based on self-management. Moreover, in his opinion, anarchism has not only a dimension of destruction and rebuilt a new society but it unveils the radical traits and desire for freedom always within the society (Ward 1996: 18). The Ward's (1996) analysis of the squatting movement as a way for solving the house problem in a non-revolutionary time could result particularly interesting in investigating the Sem-Teto experiences. Another interesting point is articulated in Ward (1978), where the author uses the point of view of the chil-

dren for analysing the city: the use of a different perspective for creating narratives different from the main one could be fascinating.

John Zerzan is a contemporary American anarchist that had vehement debates with Bookchin. Despite the strong similarity in their view on key topic like the importance of the environment, the two authors differ totally on the analysis of the role of technology. Zerzan starts from an anthropological position for criticizing the state and the hierarchy; he assumes that the only solution to today crisis is a "future primitive" (Zerzan 1994) where we abandon our level of production/consumption and we return to an archaic form of society. The agricultural revolution during Neolithic was the starting point of domination and the beginning of a process during which humanity has lost its ecological link with nature. Nowadays, in a society wherein this process of separation from nature has been totally completed, technology plays a predominant role as well as "the means and methods of social reproduction are necessarily in keeping with the stability of a social order" (Zerzan 1999: 204), perpetuating today oppression and reaching unprecedented level of nature consumption and devastation.

Non-orthodox Marxism

In this part I briefly explore the thoughts of Henri Lefebvre and Manuel Castell. I chose to define them as non-orthodox Marxist considering how they, acknowledging their Marxism as starting point, made substantial innovations, even departing from same kind of orthodox Marxist line.

Henri Lefebvre was a French sociologist and philosopher. Lefebvre (2002) underlines the importance of the role of each individual in understanding and changing everyday life for a real revolution. Furthermore, he gives major attention to the role of the space in this process of changing, recognising how: "new social relations demand a new space, and vice-versa." (Lefebvre 1991: 59). Following this positions, how to organize a future revolutionary space and society is still an open question that utopia tradition and the reconstructive moment try to address.

Manueal Castell is a Spanish sociologist: since the '70's he explored the role of grassroots movements for social change (Castell 1985); later he analysed the role of technology and the new media in shaping the society. In Castell 1985 and 2010 different social movements are analysed and it will be very important to me to explore carefully these works as example for my research (especially Castell 1985 is dedicated to grassroots movements in urban environment). He believes in the importance of the environmental movement and he stress that "environmentalism is a science-based movement"(Castell 2010: 181). Moreover, "grass-roots democracy is the political model implicit in most ecological movements" (Castell 2010: 182).

Eco-Marxism

In this part I briefly analyse the thought of Joel Kovel and Erik Swyngedouw; the latter is considered to be a key author in urban political ecology that has a deep influence in urban studies. I decide to

use the label “eco-marxist” because, despite differences in thoughts and influences, the core of this authors is correlated to a strong Marxist inspirations and a renewed importance of nature.

Joel Kovel is an American Marxist who collaborated for many years with Bookchin breaking with him only at a later stage and participate in Light (1998). Kovel (2007) is a key work for an introduction to his work, especially because the fact that it states clearly the differences between him and Social Ecology. He recognises how we are facing an incredible ecological and social crisis: “capitalism is the uncontrollable force driving our ecological crisis” (Kovel 2007: xi). He believes that Marxism is still necessary, especially its labour and class analyses. Moreover, he does not accept the Bookchin’s idea that hierarchy is the starting point of today crises, accepting that same sort of hierarchies should exist (like the family and teacher/student relations). He proposes a project after an ecosocialist revolution, that, underlining his Marxist approach, is based on a “free association of producers” (Kovel 2007).

Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw (2006) offers a clear explanation of urban political ecology, even compiling a manifesto. Urban political ecology is defined as a “theoretical platform for interrogating the complex, interrelated socio-ecological processes that occur within cities” (8). Furthermore, this approach “is an important step towards beginning to disentangle the interwoven knots of *social process*, *material metabolism*, and *spatial form* that go into the formation of contemporary urban socio-natural landscapes” (8). Urban political ecology is deeply influenced by the Chicago School and David Harvey among others. The starting point is the today importance of cities or, to put it better, mega cities, given their size. Acknowledging the significance of the debate around climate change, it is argued that usually this is developed on global scale, losing the urban scale. Moreover, we assist to a technical approach to today social and environmental crisis. For these reasons, an urban political ecology approach is necessary: an approach that focusses on the cities, that is political and that recognises the importance of nature. In today society elites are ruling over society, determining material conditions, widening the differences between rich and poor. There is a strict connection between nature and society, “environmental and social changes co-determine each other” (11). Remembering the Chicago school cities are not unnatural and their socio spatial dynamics act as metabolic relations. However, in describing nature, “in capitalist cities, “nature” takes primarily the social form of commodities” (5), losing its sustainability.

Any relation or changes is enacted (or blocked) by power and any process is never political or environmental neutral; social power relations are fundamental in shaping process

And Urban Social Ecology underlines the importance of class, gender, ethic or other minorities in power struggles.

Every change in our society produce effects and they have an impact: “processes of socio-environmental change are [...] never socially or ecologically neutral. This results in conditions under which

particular trajectories of socio-environmental change undermine the stability of some social groups or places, while the sustainability of social groups and places elsewhere might be enhanced” (10). To conclude, the main aim of urban political ecology is to reach a socio-ecological sustainability.

Ecofeminism

Feminism, like anarchism, is not a coherent philosophical movement but a set of different approaches that it is able to engage debate at academic level and constitutes a movement that aims to change the society (Gamble 2002). Given its heterogeneity, it is impossible to find a univocal definition. However, it is possible to say that feminism as a philosophy intends to change a society dominated by man in all of its aspects (Gamble 2002): feminism is a struggle against the man oppression. Feminism started to develop since the XVII century and have followed several historical periods developing different and particular characterization. Since the end of the '80's appeared clear a connection between feminist, the spirituality of Nature and ecology: the ecofeminism (Spret-nak 1990). This current has been criticized by Biehl (1999) that addresses it to be too much linked with spirituality and share too much traits with deep ecology. Vandana Shiva, as suggested by Sandilands (1999), is a key author that was able to link feminism, nature and colonialism: “all problems of oppression, including the physical destruction of the earth apparent in most development projects, could be traced to capitalist-embedded dualism; women, as the sustainers of life—most obviously in countries of the South—needed to be empowered in order to reassert the importance of the devalued feminine principle against the overvalued patriarchal logic of technological development and economic growth” (51). Today capitalistic system is unequivocally permeated with patriarchy and male domination and from here all the form of domination on nature and colonization (domination on the countries from the Global South) are developed (Shiva 1988).

Myrna Breitbart is a contemporary American anarchist who has written about participatory action research (Breitbart 2010) and used it in her works. Moreover, she has researched about urban planning and, putting in practice her principles, she works with a resident and community-based organisation of Holyoke (Cook and Norcup 2012).

5. Building a methodological approach

After carrying out an in-depth analysis of the existing literature on qualitative research, I have decided to adopt the approach of Participatory Action Research (PAR) (as defined by Chatterton, Fuller and Routledge 2007). Moreover, in this part I will discuss the seven principles towards a strategy for scholar activism outlined by The Autonomous Geographies Collective (2010) and one of my goals is to pursue a more strategic approach to scholar activism.

Participatory Action Research is the more suitable method for me, not only due the fact that “*the data [I] require[d] [is] not available in other forms*” (Manson, 2005: 86) but also due to my own deep

academic and personal reasons stated in the following paragraph (5.1). First and foremost, the values implicitly behind the Participatory Action Research approach coincide with the one stated in Social Ecology. In the following sections I plan my methodological approach, taking in to account the current debate about activism in the geography field in academia. Subsequently, I outline the methods that I want to implement in my research and I describe the idea and the use of an 'analysis framework'.

5.a. Activism, Academia and Geography

I believe in the importance of clearly presenting the personal experiences of a researcher, especially in the case when they are relevant for their research, as in my situation. For this reason in this section I will briefly introduce my biography especially regarding my political commitment.

Since I was a teenager I was involved in political activism and this had a significant impact on my personal development and life choices. I was involved in the student movement since 2000 and in the summer of 2001 I was shocked by two events that shaped my political understanding: the Geneva G8 and of the attacks in US on the 9/11. The bloody days of Genoa, indeed, taught me the impenetrability of governments in hearing population requests and the brutality of the police. On the other hand, we all know what happened the following September: the tragic terrorist attack in US, the subsequent American lies for a casus belli and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since then, I started to radicalise my views, especially regarding the concept of direct action and self-management (despite the fact that I will use this term quite often, I keep feeling it quite uncomfortable, strongly preferring the Italian translation, 'autogestione', that brings within it a deeper political 'flavour' and connotations). In the spring 2002 I started to participate in the initiative of the anarchist Centro Sociale Autogestito via Volturno (Social Centre of street "Volturno") in Udine, my hometown. This space was run by a collective born during the '80's and dedicated to the Social-Ecology: this is where I was introduced to Social Ecology and Bookchin. My first approach with this world was shocking for me: the horizontality, the assemblies, the consensus process, etc. were completely new to me and of big impact on my personal beliefs and behaviours. With the passing of the time my consciousness grew: if at the beginning I was driven by a natural predisposition towards injustice (Kropotkin 1972), by time, practicing and exploring different publications, I developed a more articulated critique. In the same way I moved away from Marxist groups shocked by their authoritarianism, violence toward comrades and bad politicking (Il Lato Cattivo 2010) and I developed a more philosophical critique also thanks to my studies: between 2002 and 2008 I attended the University of Trieste, obtaining a Bachelor degree and after a Master degree in Philosophy.

Moreover, I was always more heavily involved in the management of the social centre in Udine and my participation continued with a new occupation in the summer 2006 (and the consequent trial and

discharge for me and other 35 comrades with the accusation of 'invasion of private building'), the Centro Sociale Autogestito via Scalo Nuovo (street Scalo Nuovo Social Centre) (in Udine), until the police eviction occurred in winter 2011. Nowadays the collective who ran the space is still alive and it maintains its Social Ecology approach while also trying to find a new space.

Between 2008 and 2011, following my hope to become a teacher and because of the lack of positions and national competitions at that moment, I obtained a Master degree in European History and Civilization at the University of Udine.

While I was in Leeds for my Erasmus scheme (UK) (September 2010-June 2011) I was also involved with the group called Really Open University and I participated in British student protests against the rise of the tuition fees. Moreover, I discovered Geography and its multidisciplinary approach: after my studies in Trieste I started finding academic philosophy too narrowed in small-circle discussion and impact less on the everyday life while the geography seemed to be a good balance between politics/philosophy/'real world'. For these reasons my final thesis was a dissertation in the Geography field, comparing different approaches of urban development in contemporary Leeds, with particular regard to the differences between institutional projects and grassroots groups.

What emerges from this information is both my political involvement and my academic pattern have played a key role in my life during the last 11 years. However, only at the current time I have found the opportunity for them to become intrinsically connected into a full-time engagement: I am thus doing my research taking the advantage of a political framework that I have previously been constantly used for 'doing things'. I am aware that this fact represents, in my life, a crucial switching point: from activism to researching activism whilst doing activism. Reversing the statement of Chatterton, Fuller, and Routledge (2007), in my experience I have a lot of A (of action) but I lack of the R (of research). This change poses to me various challenges; nevertheless, I want to keep feeling connected with my past experience posing as one of my purposes the one of creating, through my work, a piece of knowledge that could be useful for the Movement, being aware that I am a partisan researcher.

This is being done within the consciousness of what is stated in the Strategic plan 2009 of the University of Leeds (2009): with this research and starting from my personal passions, I have the possibility to *develop* my knowledge, giving the chance to *make an impact* and to *create* knowledge. However, can I decline the values of the University (University of Leeds 2009) and my research for a social change? For answering to this question, I would like to first explore the term 'geography' which represents a new field in my academic culture. The key point is that

"the templates of the physical and natural sciences shaped the human sciences as a whole, but geography's concern with the relations between people and their physical environments ensured that they marked human geography more than most. Those

formations were not pure 'scientific': they were also philosophical, theological and irredeemably political and social." (Gregory et al 2009: 350)

However, as underlined clearly by Harvey (1984), geography and power have had always strong connections: "geographical thought in the bourgeois era has always preserved a strong ideological content. As science, it treats natural and social phenomena as things, subject to manipulation, management, and exploitation" (Harvey 1984: 3). Moreover, for building a new society, "geographers cannot remain neutral" (Harvey 1984: 8). In this context, the anarchists milieu has a long and strong tradition of geographers, like Peter Kropotkin, Élisée Reclus and Colin Ward.

Since I started this research, I found myself in a comfortable place: the geography field is indeed not only a framework for discussions on the so called 'boring and sterile debates', as sometimes happen in philosophy, but also a concrete, active and challenging multidisciplinary approach for understanding and shaping the world.

The relations between academia, research and activism are widely explored in the current geography debate and they raise significant problems: a starting point of my research has been the 'Autonomous Geographies' project (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006; Chatterton and Pickerill 2008; Chatterton 2008). The knowledge of this approach has made possible a link between my personal activism and research, showing that making an impact in a radical way is possible.

"The idea of autonomous geographies provides researchers, activists and the public with pieces of a toolkit for ongoing practical and theoretical engagements with building a more socially, environmentally and ethically just future. Moreover they provide hope that 'there are many alternatives'." (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006 : 743)

However, this approach is problematic, as recognized by The Autonomous Geographies Collective (2010). One of the big differences between me and the Autonomous Geographies Collective is the academic position: while they were, during their research, already fully established (even if at the beginning of a career) in the academia, I actually cover only a PhD position that obligates me to a changed approach, both solving and creating new problems. For example, I do not work in group and so I do not have any potential relational issues and I devote almost all of my time to the research.

Furthermore, I want to stress the fact that the approach of autonomous geographies constitutes an evolving process (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006); that is, from a didactic point of view, particularly evident in my case as I am a student (Bloom 1956): learning is a continuous circular process from the basic knowledge to the creation and evaluation of ideas.

The meaning of the adjective 'autonomous' is clear to me for background knowledge and philosophical reasons; I feel part of this project, despite the fact that I want to distance myself from some Italian experiences of the 'autonomia'.

5.b. Methods

Participatory Action Research usually involves four different stages that reiterate continuously, like a spiral: planning; action; observation; reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988). Now I am clearly in the planning phase and, during this first stage, I intend to outline my methodology and timescale. However, I am aware that most of the given prospective could change once put in practice within the forthcoming field work. Considering my timescale, I have identified different stages, allowing some overlap of different actions, depending on context, opportunities and possibilities. Time dedicated to a singular case study will depend on opportunity, availability of the Grassroots Urban Initiatives, funding and data collection. First of all, I will dedicate a part of my time to understanding the general context (linked with the Grassroots Urban Initiatives context of my framework) and to identifying the case study; subsequently I can concentrate on the specifics of the selected case. After analysing it for a while, I could identify and gain further information from other key actors not directly involved within the Grassroots Urban Initiatives, but either able to evaluate it or influenced or affected by their decisions (planners, politicians, neighbourhood people, etc.). Moreover, during my Participatory Action Research, I can propose particular themes of Social Ecology and explore with Grassroots Urban Initiatives' participants mutual differences and contacts. I can do that through: simple one to one discussion, discussing some key concept with front presentation or focus group work. I assume that proposing Social Ecology themes can be useful both for the Grassroots Urban Initiatives and for me: the Grassroots Urban Initiatives can indeed discover new concepts, perspectives or acquire more consciousness; on the other side I can acquire a better understanding of the case study, know new perspectives and have a genuine assessment of Social Ecology in the field. However, in order to avoid the risk of influencing the research, I will present Social Ecology concepts only in later stages of my Participatory Action Research. The selection of my dwelling will be fundamental: it should be enough close to my case study to make the access easy and not problematic. For this reason I am planning to rent accommodation to use as base camp / office, but I will try to spend as much time as possible at the location of the Grassroots Urban Initiatives. In the preliminary analyses of the case studies one section will be dedicated to outlining specific aspect of the methodology (time line, difficulties, my 'dwelling', language, specific ethical issues, etc.). As a researcher one of my aims is to not procure harm and not to put in danger the people I will involve. For this reason, the decision to maintain or not the anonymity of the people interviewed deserves an examination: McNiff (2002: 26) points out that, "action researchers are real people in real situations". As a first approach to the Grassroots Urban Initiatives, I will likely use a gatekeeper that can be a key Grassroots Urban Initiatives person (identified with an email or through acquaintance) or someone who I met in an initiative. I do not want to use any deception and I want to clarify my situation as a researcher from the beginning, particularly with the people more involved within the Grassroots Urban Initiatives. Moreover, being external to the given social context, I could, on one

hand, be accepted with some difficulties but, on the other hand, be identified easily as a researcher thanks to my role of 'stranger'. Moreover, once I have identified a gatekeeper or a way for starting a communication with people involved in the Grassroots Urban Initiatives, I will have to build a mutual trust in order to be accepted. Approaching my fieldwork, I am conscious that the Grassroots Urban Initiatives participant I will be in contact with could perceive me with some suspicion (Conti 2005; Hintz, Milan, 2010; The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010); it is indeed evident that my role will be influenced by the common belief that social scientists have produced knowledge only for the dominant system, objectively worsening, in some cases, their conditions; on the other hand, there will be the idea that most of the social research has been done entirely with a detached academic approach, completely distant from their needs. However, I want to make clear that my aim is to produce a piece of research that could contribute some tools for autonomous and radical governance. These considerations open an important question: how can I disseminate my work? Even if this point could appear premature at this stage, I want to stress how interesting I find the idea of pamphlets written from academic experiences for the movements, like the non-academic publications of the Building Bridges Collective and The Autonomous Geographies Collective. This should be done considering that, for me, "the goal of research is not the interpretation of world, but the organization of transformation" (Conti 2005: no page).

As part of the Participatory Action Research, I do not want to be seen as a researcher parachuted from another world but more as an activist from the Movement of Movements. As a researcher I am the 'weak' part of the 'trust pact': they do not know me or my research, at first I could not interest them. I want to be useful for the Grassroots Urban Initiatives, offering my 'hands' and my Social Ecology knowledge, trying to learn something interesting, theorising and giving my contribution to the Social Ecology and Participatory Action Research debate. For being accepted I know that my previous militant experience will help: I know the needs of a Grassroots Urban Initiatives and how to be helpful also through basic acts like helping to running a space. Furthermore, my presence as a researcher can help them in having access to documents, useful contacts in the academia and possibly visibility for their campaigns. I am aware that my help to the Grassroots Urban Initiatives is limited in resources and time and I should not create false expectation: I have to be very sincere from the beginning about what kind of help I can give.

My goal is to participate as much as possible in the activities of the Grassroots Urban Initiatives, to attend both public and private, daily initiatives (when I will be fully trusted).

It will be also important to write a daily field diary regularly with all the information gained during the day (this routine can be facilitated by the fact that I have been keeping a daily personal diary over three years); I can also use the time dedicated to writing as a moment of internal debriefing (Malcom 2003). Particular attention will be given to attending meetings (public or internal), but I will not record any of them for safety and ethical reasons. I will use structured interviews (for a maximum estimated

amount of twenty for each case study) in order to develop a general idea of the experiences of people involved in the case study and semi-structured interviews (for a maximum estimated amount of ten for each case study) in order to narrow the research focus and explore the core ideas of my research and of the Grassroots Urban Initiatives.

Furthermore, while conducting interviews around the topic of my research, I will always try to obtain participants' full and informed consent for audio recording; later the recordings will be transcribed and analysed, using a programs like NVivo.

Moreover, Grassroots Urban Initiatives usually produce written materials (paper or online) that I will collect to analyse using various discursive methods analysis; during my time in the field I will also gather further material of difficult access.

In evaluating the so collected material I know that the perception of the Grassroots Urban Initiatives could be different depending on the point of view: ideas of core activists or external actors, written material, or my observations could be different from each other; for this reason a triangulation of all the information is necessary.

I am not planning to do questionnaires as they are not fundamental for my research: I am not interested in generating quantitative data that, in my case, are not suitable even for a triangulation. I had only one previous experience regarding this approach (with the Friends of Leeds Kirkgate market campaign) that gave me the impression of being too time consuming; moreover, in the case I experienced, the actors presupposed a good knowledge of the context that I am not enough confident to build in my Participatory Action Research's time. Regarding the use of different media, I do not want to take videos: I do not have skills on video recording and it could be difficult to obscure the face of the people involved. However, I would like to use a digital camera (media that I use as amateur): I want to use to evocative power of photos for describing the context of the Grassroots Urban Initiatives and for exemplifying its initiatives. I am aware of the need of camouflaging all the faces; for this and other safety reasons I am not planning to take photos during demonstrations or actions.

To avoid lack of information caused by theft or police intervention, all the material gained during the research should be kept safe; special attention should be given to my field diary and interviews. The information on my computer will be kept safe using encryption software TrueCrypt and I will regularly send the data to my University account. I will try to use 'cloud computing' (using program like Desktop Anywhere) in order to not have all the information physically on my computer. For any issues related to networked and digital domains' privacy and safety I will follow the guidelines of Hyde et al. (2012).

As a researcher, I am aware of the ethical implications of my work: I adhere to the ESRC guidelines and the University of Leeds ethical research practice; moreover, I am applying for my ethics form.

In this section I explore my proposed way for addressing (5), about the assessment of the Grassroots Urban Initiatives; however, before doing that, another kind of evaluation is necessary: that of my research. Of course I have had a formal academic assessment of my work, through regular meetings with my supervisors, RSG, VIVA, etc.. However, looking at this experience as part of the Movement, I can also draw a common line with other groups that used self-internal evaluation, like the Mobilization for Global Justice (Conte 2003). They organized sessions of debriefing:

“After workshops they sometimes had informal evaluations

After the week was over working groups met individually and then collectively to evaluate their efforts

After the week was over individual activist-writers produced evaluations of the week

Much of the on-going research and writing by activists and activist groups might be considered a kind of evaluative policy analysis” (Conte 2003, no page)

In another example of internal assessment for the Climate Justice movement, Russell and Moore call for accountability where “individuals and groups are answerable to their decisions and actions. It also means that even as an individual, you are part of something larger than your own work” (2011: 31).

I thus believe in the necessity of doing a second accountability: the one from the movement. Dixon (2011) for his PhD research has developed a “second ‘committee’ made up of a small crew of activists who evaluated [his] work and, when necessary, raised concerns about what [he were] doing” (Dixon 2011: no page). This is a small but helpful action for building bridges between academia and activism. In my case, I have already done a public presentation of my preliminary work in our social space of Udine and I received stimulating feedbacks. Moreover, I want to take advantage of the vibrant and sympathetic environment of my cluster at the School of Geography sharing my aims and receiving interesting comments. One of the participants of this cluster, the PhD student Victoria Habermehl, will be also with me during my field work in Brazil. Stating the difficulties and the opportunities of field work abroad in a different social context (Shope 2006), I think that this could be a good opportunity for receiving fruitful comments, while maintaining my independence and personal commitment. Finally, the focus groups with the Grassroots Urban Initiatives can give me other critical assessments of my work from the Movement perspective.

To conclude this section: I am aware that the Participatory Action Research as method will involve many personal energies and emotions, being defined as “the most personal and emotionally intense among all choice of research strategy” (Gordon 2012: 92). This methodology creates many overlaps between the research, the personal life of the researcher and his/her feeling for the thing researched: defeats and perhaps victories, joys and difficult times, new encounters and farewells coexist together within it.

5.c. The analysis framework

An important part of my research is the construction of a framework for examining Grassroots Urban Initiatives according to my research questions. The aim of this framework is not to be a quantitative tool but an instrument that has to help and guide me in gaining all the information needed for answering to my research questions; it gives a structure to my field research and to my contents.

In the previous experience of my Master dissertation I used various parameters for analysing my case studies (general characteristics, objectives, resources and initiatives, decision-making process and structure, idea of a city and society).

Having subsequently looked at a variety of analyses (Bullards and Muller 2012; Chatterton, Gonzalez, Unsworth 2011; Moulaert, Swyngedouw, Martinelli, Gonzalez 2010; with a Social Ecology perspective: Chodorkoff 1980 and Tokar 1992), I started to develop my own framework that will guide the analysis of case studies in direct relation to the stated research questions.

I believe that I have to evaluate the city/area where a Grassroots Urban Initiatives is based and after the Grassroots Urban Initiatives itself, trying to understand its answers to the crisis in its territory. For example, the city/context will be analysed considering: the history, the economics, the social composition, the culture and the crisis. Furthermore, I have identified three topics ((3) sub questions) which are focus points in Social Ecology upon which I want to concentrate my Grassroots Urban Initiatives' research. First of all, every Grassroots Urban Initiatives will be analysed considering: general characteristics, history, economics, decision-making process and structure. Secondly, there I can analyse every Urban Grassroots Initiatives considering each topic of my research, taking into account: Objectives, resources and initiatives. Thirdly, I can do a more theoretical evaluation focussing on: theory and practice, influences, idea of a city and society / values and vision, similarity and differences with Social Ecology. Having a structure of that kind can help me to compare different case studies; moreover, the first part (the city/context) of the analysis is fundamental for giving the background of each case study. Using this framework, I hope to be able to express all the richness intrinsically expressed by a Grassroots Urban Initiatives, a definitely not monolithic or homogeneous entity (Gonzalez, Moulaert, Martinelli 2010). Especially in the part of my framework regarding the 'case study's' analysis I do not directly mention the 'time' dimension and I am thus worried to lose the constant changing nature of the Grassroots Urban Initiatives. For example, with time, different problems, approaches and events can deeply shape and modify the Grassroots Urban Initiatives; so I do not want to limit my research to a 'picture' in a specific time but also to outline the different evolution. In 2.1.2. I describe the history of the Grassroots Urban Initiatives; however, I want to take into account the transformations that occurred (or not) at the Grassroots Urban Initiatives in all the subsections of 2, being in that way able to describe the Grassroots Urban Initiatives as a 'working in progress'.

My proposed analysis framework is as follows:

1. The city / context
 - 1.1 History
 - 1.2 Economics
 - 1.3 Social composition
 - 1.4 Culture
 - 1.5 Crisis
2. Case study (GUI)
 - 2.1 General evaluation
 - 2.1.1. General characteristics
 - 2.1.2. History
 - 2.1.3. Economics
 - 2.1.4. Decision-making process
 - 2.1.5. Structure
 - 2.2 Research topics
 - 2.2.a. Relations with power and institutions
 - 2.2.a.1. Objectives
 - 2.2.a.2. Resources
 - 2.2.a.3. Initiatives
 - 2.2.b. Technics, resources and post-scarcity
 - 2.2.b.1. Objectives
 - 2.2.b.2. Resources
 - 2.2.b.3. Initiatives
 - 2.2.c. Governance and urban planning
 - 2.2.c.1. Objectives
 - 2.2.c.2. Resources
 - 2.2.c.3. Initiatives
 - 2.3 Theoretical evaluation
 - 2.3.1. Theory and practice
 - 2.3.2. Influences
 - 2.3.3. Idea of a city and society / values and vision
 - 2.3.4. Similarity and differences with Social Ecology

After I have analysed the case studies with my framework, especially in order to answer to (5) about the effectiveness of Grassroots Urban Initiatives, I can evaluate the Grassroots Urban Initiatives using the model/form elaborated by Hill (2005). Assessing grassroots groups is a difficult and controversial issues (Assessment for whom? Using which criteria? What does it mean to be a successful Grassroots Urban Initiative?) and, unfortunately, the structure of my research does not permit me a second access to the fieldwork years after my first arrival for a comparison of the effects. The answer to the question 'Why do we need a Grassroots Urban Initiatives assessment?' is that kind of evaluation that can help activist groups (Menconi 2003). Nowadays it is quite common to see feedback forms after public grassroots events: they want to know what it works and what not, the critical points and lessons to learn. This is especially true at this time when, for having access to public funding, it is necessary to write bodied documents attesting the goodness of the projects and their social consequences. However, any evaluation should be given in accordance with a philosophical framework (Vella, Berardinelli, Burrow 1998; Menconi 2003) as in my case an evaluation should start from the Social Ecology tradition.

Although his definition of Social Ecology is different from the one elaborated by Bookchin, Hill (2005) has created, in my opinion, an interesting evaluative framework for analysing all kinds of initiatives. I start from the position that this framework appears to be precise but not too narrowed and with many evaluation items. In order to understand the adherence to the values of Social Ecology, which is assumed as a desideratum model and Grassroots Urban Initiative's effectiveness, Hill built a framework composed of twelve questions, divided into four areas (Personal, Socio-political, Environmental, General).

The following is the complete framework:

"To what extent does any sustainability or social capital initiative (policies, programs, plans, regulations, decisions, actions, etc.) support or undermine each of the following qualities:

Personal Area

1. empowerment, awareness, creative visioning, values and worldview clarification, acquisition of essential literacies and competencies, responsibility, wellbeing and health maintenance practices, vitality and **spontaneity** (building and maintaining personal capital – personal sustainability)?
2. caring, loving, responsible, mutualistic, **negentropic relationships** with diverse others (valuing equity and social justice), other species, place and planet (home and ecosystem maintenance)?
3. positive total life-cycle **personal development** (lifelong learning) and 'progressive' change?

Socio-Political Area

4. trust, accessible, collaborative, responsible, creative, celebrational, **life-promoting community and political structures and processes** (building and maintaining social capital – cultural [including economic] sustainability)?
5. the valuing of 'functional' high **cultural diversity** and mutualistic relationships?
6. positive **cultural development** and coevolutionary change?

Environmental Area

7. effective **ecosystems functioning** (building and maintaining natural capital – ecological sustainability)?
8. 'functional' high **biodiversity**, and prioritised use and conservation of resources?
9. positive **ecosystem development** and coevolutionary change?

General Area

10. **proactive** (vs reactive), **design/redesign** (vs just efficiency and substitution) and **small meaningful collaborative and individual initiatives** that can be achieved (vs heroic, Olympic-scale, exclusive, high risk ones) and their **public celebration** at each stage – to enable the spread of concern for wellbeing and community and environmental responsibility?
11. focusing on key opportunities and **windows for change** (pre-existing and contextually unique change 'moments' and places)?
12. effective monitoring and evaluation of progress (broad, long-term, as well as specific and short-term) by identifying and using **integrator indicators** and **testing questions**, and by being attentive to all **feedback and outcomes** (and redesigning future actions and initiatives accordingly)?" (Hill 2005: 6)

For now I am taking Hill's methodological framework as an example and I will modify it developing my own model as it becomes applied. However, I am not considering this framework as a

quantitative method (I do not intend to give 'marks' to each question) having on the contrary the necessity of using this second framework as an outline for assessing the Grassroots Urban Initiatives. One of my next commitments is to work for addressing (5), exploring other ways and parameters beyond Social Ecology for assessing Grassroots Urban Initiatives.

6. The case studies

After my RSG 1 I focused on two case studies: the Sem-Teto (Homeless) movement and Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore (Board for the Rebirth of Pescomaggiore). I have chosen these two case studies because I feel they tie in well with my theorist approach and for logistical reasons. Regarding the first case, I will indeed take advantage of the Contested Cities project for analysing it from a close point of view; moreover, I will be helped by the future collaboration with Prof. Souza who has written extensively about urban movements and Bookchin. Regarding the second case, it will be logistically easier due the fact that it is set in Italy and that I already have personal connections with L'Aquila.

In this part of the document I explore briefly my proposed case studies: I introduce the context in which these Grassroots Urban Initiatives are operating. Afterwards I present an overview of the experience, with specific regard to (3). Finally I outline the specific methodology for each case study and some possible problems. Regarding the context, I want to stress that it is only at an early stage and I will dedicate part of my second year to fill this gap.

I want also to underline that, at this moment of my research, I am more concentrated on the first case study and that I know I can eventually modify the second one, having time for structuring my work and learning from the first experience on fieldwork.

6.1. The Sem-Teto movement

6.1.a. The city context

Brazil is part of the BRIC countries (together with Russia, India and China): it is experiencing an incredible economic growth, while it is, at the same time facing an incredible mission to protect its forest and biodiversity (Branford 2011). In 2010, approximately 11.4 million people in Brazil were living in squatter settlements such as slums, low income communities, invasions; this figure represents 6% of the entire population and 19% of the squatters are concentrated in Rio de Janeiro (Redação JCnet 2011).

Rio is a dynamic city famous both for its beaches, its Carnival, its new skyscrapers, but also for its deep social inequalities, the drug trafficking and the favelas. Rio and San Paulo are the biggest metropolis in Brazil, places where the urban crisis is more evident; to understand this fact, the work of Souza is very important, especially Souza (2001) (this work could result a bit outdated: I will research more updated work in the following months). The author states very clearly how in these

two metropolises there is a "*generalised deterioration in the quality of life*" (Souza 2001: 438). Moreover, a 'socio-political fragmentation of urban space', mainly caused by unemployment and drug traffics, is leading to increasing violence and rivalry between favelas which often end in armed confrontations. At the same time the economic elite make their efforts in looking for safe buildings, creating 'condominios exclusivos'. All these phenomena contribute to the creation of various enclaves (at different level segregated or self-segregated) in the cities and we can notice:

"1) an urban landscape increasingly characterised by poverty and informality; 2) deterioration of quality of life in traditional elite districts, by virtue of infra-structure saturation, too high building density and pollution; 3) the wish for a greater 'social exclusivity' on the part of the elites; 4) the desire to live in an environment with natural amenities clean beaches, lagoons, and the like) and non-polluted; 5) search for safety" (Souza 2001: 442).

Megacities, especially these two in Brazil, are so increasingly problematic and unsafe spaces and for this reason, with a movement also seen in other parts of the world, middle class people are migrating to near cities (Souza 2001). We can thus recognize how these megalopolis are going through a process of decentralization and of narrowing on the local scale; however this is clearly not the Bookchin's aimed direction: they are instead shaped by fear and economic inequalities. However, there is also a positive prospective: speaking explicitly about Rio and other megacities in the so called developing countries, Bookchin, even recognising his provenience from a Western country and his extraneousness to the non-Western culture (Biehl 1997), stresses that even cities with millions of people can become a libertarian community, especially thanks to the fact that "when many urban belts reach a large size, they begin to recreate themselves into small cities" (Biehl 1997: 151).

Apart from Souza, I am not aware of any other author from non-Western countries who is working with Social Ecology or researching in non-Western countries: maybe it is worth to research in this field.

6.1.b. The case study

In this part I introduce and define the Sem-Teto movement, exploring its relationships and connections with the Sem-Terra movement and the Occupy movement. Moreover, I describe some general features of this experience and underline which of them can be of more inspiration for my research.

The Sem-Teto movement can be considered as the urban counterpart of the more famous Brazilian Sem-Terra movement.

The occupation of agricultural land in Brazil has a significant tradition of countering with the presence of extensive estates and asking for a land reform (Hall 1989). The Brazilian constitution promulgated in 1988 gives indeed the possibility to occupy land, having stated that the "landed

property must fulfil a social function" (Alston et al. 1999: 57). The Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra (Landless Workers' Movement) (MST) is the biggest Brazilian social organization on this issue and "the most important political movement" (Antunes 2012: 265) of all the country. Its main aim is, since the 1984, to promote land occupations and demonstrations for the right to access the land. Carrying out protests that involve most of the common problem of farmers, the Sem-Terra has settled very strong roots in the countryside, asking for a land reform and a more easy access to the soil; its activities have been characterized not only by the aforementioned land occupations, but also by a wide range of protest actions, requests and dialogues with the government. The Sem-Teto movement, that similarly to the Sem-Terra has strong roots in the Brazilian history since the beginning of the XXth century (Souza 2012c), could be seen as the declination in the urban context of this experience. Strongly rooted in the urban fabrics of Brazilian cities, it utilizes the same strategies and actions of the Sem-Terra, converted in a more anthropic space. This connection between the two movement is not only given by similarity but by a direct bridge between them: for example, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto (Movement of Workers without Shelter) (MTST), one of the biggest Sem-Teto group, Marxist-inspired, has been developed directly as a urban branch of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, and only later has acquired more independence (Weinberg 2007; Souza 2006).

Facing huge problems of housing in Brazil and recognising how the housing market is developed responding to the capital demand, as of the best ways for absorbing surplus (Harvey 2008), the Sem-Teto movement has as a main objective to obtain an urban reform. As well as for the Sem-Terra a rural reform is a crucial request, the urban reform has been the main aim of social movements since the '60's and it has been obviously incorporated in the Sem-Teto. It constitutes, as stressed by Souza (2009b), "*the transformation of the institutions regulating the production of urban space to attain more social justice*" (25).

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Brazil has been hit, since the last century by a deep urban crisis; the Sem-Teto movement was born in this context mainly addressing the housing problem developed within this crisis: "o principal mote do movimento é, obviamente, a moradia" (Grandi 2010: 147). Despite the fact that the literal translation of the expression Sem-Teto is homeless, "the term is more specifically descriptive of those who have lost even their precarious living conditions in the shantytowns and tenements and are thus forced to live on the streets or squat abandoned buildings" (Melo 2010: 2). From this perspective the identity of the Sem-Teto is much more similar to one of squatters, especially considering how "the formation of squatter settlements is a popular response to rapid urbanization in countries that cannot or will not provide services for the increasing urban population" (Mangin 1967: 67). It is evident how the Brazilian situation perfectly mirrors this description. However, aim of the Sem-Teto is usually not only a simple research of shelters but also

the construction of a political project, in the same way as the squatter's movement is perceived in Europe (for a deep account of the term 'Sem-Teto' see Souza 2009b). It is also worth noticing that, even if the favelas are occupied space, people from the favelas and Sem-Teto can not be described as the same movement: they could be settled in different spaces/locations and Sem-Teto people are usually more politicized (Souza 2009b). The Sem-Teto initiatives can thus be seen as "a process of transforming individual and collective identities, of generating political awareness and as a way of producing a new sociability in a new city" (Belda et al. 2010: 15). From this perspective, I totally support the idea of the importance of these initiatives within a social point of view, even if their effectiveness could be questioned (De Souza 2001).

Despite the fact that there exist a long tradition of academic research on the squatting movement in Latin America (Mangin 1967; Castell 1985), finding material about the Sem-Teto movement is still difficult. As also underlined by prof. Marcelo Lopes de Souza in a personal e-mail to me, this fact could be considered as a consequence of the small number of authors researching on this issue: Souza himself is one of the few. For example, even the recent Webber and Carr (2012), a work dedicated to analyse contemporary key movements from the Left in Latin America, mentions only briefly the Sem-Teto experience without considering any particular experience. For this reason my research could be potentially important to expand the knowledge about this movement for the English speakers (and Italian) with a dissemination that could be both academic or not-academic. However, despite this lack of official information, this movement, with its vivacity and effectiveness, can be easily inscribed in the dynamic grassroots scene that are animating the Global South together with the piqueteros in Argentine, the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Abahlali Base Mjondolo in South Africa and the groups of the Arab Spring (de Souza and Lipietz 2011).

I want to stress that this is an incredibly heterogeneous movement that does not refer to a particular structured initiative but it is composed by groups with different political orientations and development. The Sem-Teto groups ranges from a typically local declination to groups rooted in different cities or even at the national level. In an attempt to coordinate themselves, they have also formed coalitions, like the national campaign 'Outra Campanha Para Outra Vida' (Frente Internacionalista dos Sem-Teto et al. 2012) and the network 'Frente de Luta por Moradia' in San Paulo (Aliano Bloch 2007). All these initiatives share the same kind of autonomous ideology (Souza 2009a) and a similar approach to the 'right to the city' (Velloso Buonfiglio L. 2007; Melo 2010; Belda et al. 2010). Furthermore, Souza (2010) argues that this movement "represent[s] a key to overcome these problems in a truly *new* and *liberatory* way - that is to say, a key to the *right to the city*, a key to a *just and free society*." (Souza 2010: 330). Thus the Sem-Teto should be understood not only looking at the concept of right to the city, but as a broader social plan.

As mentioned, at the core of the Sem-Teto is the occupation and the reuse of not utilized building: people without houses, with the help of more militant activist (a composition that may vary) occupy

empty buildings, allowing individuals to have a roof and a place where to live. Moreover, not limiting themselves at providing a mere individual relief, these occupations create common spaces usable by the movement for assemblies, artistic or public events and so on. This occupied space can be either in an abandoned building or on a piece of land occupied with the aim of building a new house (Souza 2012c).

Recently another movement has risen putting at the core of its agenda the strategy of occupation: the Occupy Movement, which saw its peak between the 2011 and 2012. It was born in US and it quickly widespread all around the globe, bringing thousands of people into the streets. Rio de Janeiro was also involved: it saw the occupation of the square in front of the city Council by 200 people (Ortiz 2011) in the winter 2011-2012. However, despite the fact that the critique of the current social system and the direct action of occupation are at the key point of both the Sem-Teto movement and the Occupy Movement, there are deep differences among the two groups. While, on one hand, the occupation of the Sem-Teto comes from a compelling and vital need of a space, on the other hand the persistent presence in the square doesn't respond to a strict necessity but is only a symbol of the re-appropriation of the political sphere (content that is also performed by the Sem-Teto). Moreover, main difference is constituted by the fact that the former movement can be associated with the idea of Permanent Autonomous Zone (PAZ) (Bey 1993) while the latter with the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) (Bey 1991). These two key words, with the term 'Zone', refer to a spatial concept of a square, of a building, of a street and so on; with the term 'autonomous' they recall the idea of autonomy that has been used also in politics and geography, as we will see later; the dimension of time is characterized by the two different adjectives, 'permanent' and 'temporary': while the first refers to experiences that last during the time (like social spaces, cooperatives, art galleries, etc.), the second recalls initiatives limited to a specific moment (like street parades, demonstrations, raves, direct actions, etc.).

Similarly to the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra (Vergara-Camus 2012), another key features of the Sem-Teto movement is its dislike of parties (Weinberg 2007), global strategy adopted even if they initially were partially looking favourably to Lula and its Workers' Party (PT – Partido dos Trabalhadores).

Self-management, key word in the anarchist tradition (Marshall 2008) and also in Lefebvre, with the term 'autogestion' (Lefebvre 2009) is still another important feature of it (Souza 2009a). Self-management is also a fundamental part for the autonomous geographies (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006), along with "rejection of hierarchy, [...] decentralized and voluntary organization, direct action and radical change" (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006: 734). Despite the fact that this is still an open discussion, all these characteristics seem to be embodied by the Sem-Teto movement; for this reason I believe that it is potentially an autonomous movement that can be linked with the project of autonomous geographies. Moreover, it has showed a liveliness hardly comparable with other similar

movement in the contemporary Europe (Souza 2009b).



Figure 5, Sem-Teto occupation (Boem 2009: no page)

Some Sem-Teto initiatives are experiencing urban gardens, even referencing explicitly to Bookchin and to the necessity of new relationships with the nature (Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro 2007). At the same time, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto (Movement of Homeless Workers), the strongest among the Sem-Teto groups, has proposed 'assentamentos rururbanos' ('rurban settlements'). The core of this strategy lies in "an attempt to build settlements for urban workers at the periphery of cities, in which people could cultivate vegetables and breed small animals, thus becoming less dependent on the market to satisfy their alimentary basic needs." (Souza, 2003: 332). Despite the fact that these experiences did not develop positively and were later mostly abandoned (Souza 2009b), their proposals and actions seem to be very close to the idea of Bookchin's eco-communities.

While in certain context the Sem-Teto movement tries to built a dialogue with the local authorities, depending on the context and on the situation, it is also playing the card of illegal occupations or the

possibilities offered by the existing legal framework to obtain a building (Souza 2009a; Souza 2009b). This could be assimilated to the situation of occupied spaces in England until the recent anti-squatting legislation (Section 144 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012).

Recalling a theoretical framework where Souza (2006) defines, with a slogan reminiscent of John Holloway, the effort for changing the society as "*Together with the state, despite the state, against the state*" (327), it seems clear how the social actors in Brazil are following this path. The Sem-Teto movement is able to mix occupations and confrontations with the police, use of the law, demonstrations, petitions and appeals. An interesting example is the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto's "ordinary praxis [that] shows an increasing ability to combine different approaches and methods" (Souza 2006: 333).

In recent years, Rio de Janeiro has been chosen to host the 2014 FIFA World Cup final and the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. Sem-Teto experiences and favelas in Rio de Janeiro are threatened by these mega sports events: if at a first glance they could be seen as a great chance for improving the condition of the citizen, we are already facing evictions, police brutality and gentrification phenomena (Williamson 2010; Phillips 2011; Zibechi 2011; Souza 2012c; Gibbons 2012). The poem Good Bye by Roberta Maria da Conceição at the inception of my work is written in memory of Prestes Maia, a large occupation in San Paul evicted in 2007, and it shows very clearly the feelings of the people involved in these initiatives.



In the same way the murals in figure 6 explains very well the feelings towards the 2014 FIFA World

Cup in a favela facing eviction: a child with the Brazilian soccer t-shirt is crying while the slogan says 'Destruction of my Community because of the Cup'. Furthermore, these events are not only leading to evictions but also they are creating much more deep problems, like corruption and suspension of laws and rights (Zibechi 2011). The critique of these mega sport event and the defence of occupations and favelas have been also in the agenda of the Occupy experience above mentioned (Ortiz 2011).

Weinberg (2007) represents so far the clearest description of occupation in Rio that I found: it considers briefly five different occupations, stressing that the first reason for an occupation is the necessity of a shelter. An example of them could be found in figure 5 that clearly shows a Sem-Teto occupation. Considering them, Weinberg (2007) underlines the importance of the assembly, the heterogeneity and liveliness of the movement, always threatened by possible evictions.

Related to my research, Brazil is experiencing 'new master plans' and 'participatory budgeting' which, with mixed results, can help a bottom-up approach to governance and urban planning (Souza 2000, 2001). The tactic of collaborating and searching the state as a counterpart, especially in the research for an urban reform, is to inscribe particularly in the slogan of the right to the city, that deep permeates the movement (see 4.b. for a critique of the right to the city).

Moreover, this approach could be compared with the idea of Libertarian Municipalism, even if it alone does not have the power for promoting a real social change (Souza 2012). "The ability to control a neighbourhood and establish form of self-governement" (Vergara-Camus 2012: 102) are defined as the most important characteristic of the Sem-Teto movement for potentially deep influence the society.

In the literature I analysed there is no mentioned to the use or not of alternative technologies or other particular technics by the Sem-Teto movement.

The Sem-Teto movement contains at the same time features of protest and social critique: most of all it puts in practice ideas of reconstruction that strongly recalls the building in progress of an utopia.

It will be interesting to have a look, in the field, at the strengths and weaknesses of these methods and explore the reaction of the social actors involved. Furthermore, my project can be help by the general disposition of the Sem-Teto movement to a "transnational activism" (Souza 2010: 323).

Until now I always referred to the Sem-Teto as a movement; however, aim of my research is to select and take into account of a specific occupation within that broad movement that could be associated with the concept of Grassroots Urban Initiatives.

6.1.c. Methodology and problems

Even if until now I have spoken about a 'movement', I want to point out that, after a general overview, my aim is to analyse only a specific Sem-Teto experience. The ideal plan is to have the

chance to work within an occupation of the Sem-Teto in the bay area of Rio: in that area the more radical and politicized occupations are located and that area will be a focus area for the regeneration for the Olympics game (Souza 2012c). However, up to this stage, I have not been able to find much information of a singular Sem-Teto experience: this could be due both to the non-availability of material translated from Portuguese and to the temporary nature of these experiences that are not able to produce a consistent set of information. An important part of my fieldwork is to identify a grassroots urban initiative of the Sem-Teto movement with which I can carry out my research. I am quite sure to find a valuable case study that can fit my research: Rio is a big city and where there are still many occupations present. In the worst case scenario of not finding a suitable case, I can work and collect data of past/evicted occupations and understand the changes that occurred in moving from a group organized around a physical space to a movement without this support.

I am aware that researching or activism in the favela can be difficult because of drug trafficking (Souza 2009b; Jovchelovitch 2012); for this reason the support given to me by the Contested Cities Project and by some selected local gatekeeper will be fundamental.

I am conscious of the language barriers that will probably be an obstacle to my work, however my mother tongue (Italian,) is neo-Latin and I have been studying Portuguese for one semester. Therefore, I feel comfortable to interaction with people on a daily basis in the field by myself. In the case of interviewing; however, I know that I will need a translator, being aware of the limitations and possibilities of this medium (Smith 1996).

Another issue is related to the accommodation: in the next months an important point will be the organization of my journey and residence in Rio. Moreover, I will select my specific case study only once being on the field.

All these issues will increase the need of time for developing my research; I preventive to spend for this case study 6 months. If everything goes as planned, I will be accompanied in the field by my colleague Victoria Habermehl; I hope that her presence could be a help for my work, being aware of relational and emotional issues that we could meet.

I planned my time in Rio with the Contested Cities project as followed:

- 1st month: settlement and knowledge of the city

- 2nd-3rd months: exploration of the Sem-Teto experiences

- 4th-5th-6th months: focus on a specific Sem-Teto experience

- 5th month: interviews with planners, politicians or other key figures influenced by the group chosen

- 6th months: focus groups with the specific Sem-Teto experience

6.2. Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore

6.2.a. The city context

At the 3.32 of the 6th of April an earthquake of magnitude 6.3 occurred at L'Aquila (a city in the centre of Italy, with roughly 73 000 citizens), after months of seismic swarm occurring there and in the neighbouring villages (310 014 citizens). In total, 67 500 people were left homeless, 308 people were killed and (ilCentro 2012) about 1500 were injured (Alexander 2010).

In the initial emergence, roughly a third of the homeless were temporarily rehoused in hotels on the coast of Abruzzo, a third were accommodated in 171 tent camps and the rest were able to find hospitality in other houses.



Figure 7, Palace of the prefect, Repubblica square, after the earthquake
(The Telegraph 2009, no page)

The post-earthquake management has been heavily criticized (especially by Comitati cittadini (grassroots groups) but also by private citizens) (Messina 2010; Puliafito 2010) as being monopolized by the Protezione Civile (Civil Protection Agency). The figure 7 is emblematic: it shows the ruins of the palace of the prefect, the local representative of government. It illustrates how the earthquake not only physically destroyed the city, but also the credibility of the government. Emblematic is the example of the Commissione Grandi Rischi, a committee of members of the Government and of the Protezione Civile and scientists: the day before the earthquake it issued a statement that instead of alerting the population in a evident risk situation, calmed it down (Alexander 2010) (this led to major polemics and to a recent criminal conviction of members of this

committee). One of the major issues in the emergency management has been the construction of new residential apartment blocks called C.A.S.E., acronym of Complessi Antisismici Sostenibili Ecocompatibili (Earthquake-proofed Sustainable Environmentally friendly Building) (note that in Italian "case" means "houses"). In a unusual attempt to skip the passage through temporary shelters the Government caused a further and permanent community fragmentation and displacement, reshaping all the territory in the city's neighbourhood (Ciccozzi 2009). Nowadays the city centres of L'Aquila and of numerous other neighbouring towns are still considered "red zones", guarded by the army, and the reconstruction has still not fully started.

The earthquake had a direct impact on medical situations: for example the birth rate has substantially decreased (D'Alfonso et al. 2012), while there has been an increase in suicidal intention (Stratta et al. 2011), high rates of post-traumatic spectrum symptoms in adolescents (Dell'Osso et al. 2011), an increase in substance abuse among young people (Pollice et al. 2011) and a disproportionate increase of involuntary treatment (Torsello 2012).

After more than 3 years the situation has still not improved, the reconstruction has not yet started, the red zones are still there, only 34 000 people have returned to their homes leading to the point that it seems that 'the time has stopped in L'Aquila' after the 6th of April 2009 (Di Nicola 2012).

We can point out that the Italian government's management of the post-disaster lack of shelters has created a permanent scarcity of housing as well as a progressive fragmentation of the local community, perfectly marrying the 'shock economy' principles (Klein 2007; Messina 2010; Puliafito 2010). The aforementioned 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 (Olshansky, Johnson and Topping 2010).

At the same time, many grassroots initiatives have been born around the damaged zones: the 'people of the wheelbarrows' (Farinosi and Treré 2011), two occupied social centres (3e32 and L'Asilo), an engineers' collective (Collettivo99) and so on. These experiences represent positive examples of the community's attempt to assert itself as the main actor of the reconstruction and underline the importance of the empowerment of the community and of its connection with its territory.

In more detail, my case study is located in Pescomaggiore, a fraction of Paganica, a municipality of approximately 5000 people, located 7 km from L'Aquila. Before the earthquake, 50 people use to live in Pescomaggiore and the population usually doubled during the summer for the return of migrants who fall for the holidays (Cure et al. 2012). Pescomaggiore was severely damaged by the

earthquake and most of the houses are still uninhabitable. Only 500 metres from the town there is an aggregate quarry that employs only one worker but produces significant quantities of dust, increasing air pollution and distorting the landscape (Cure et al. 2012).

6.2.b. The case study

For an introduction to this case study, the work of Cure et al. (2012) is important. The Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore was constituted before the earthquake in 2007 by residents, natives and property owners, with the aim to block the expansion of the quarry and to enhance the economic development of the village. One of the strongest points of this group was and is to defend the 'bene comune' (the commons) and its main goal is to reach the ALMA (Pescomaggiore 2012a), acronym for Abitare-Lavoro-Memoria-Ambiente (Living-Work-Memory-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.

After the earthquake, the existing social frame and network constituted within the Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore consented to re-contextualize its aims in the recovery process and to achieve numerous results: the effort of people involved in it allowed an entire eco-village to be built, made up of 5 buildings, to manage a permaculture allotment and to organize various events, including community meetings in order to rebuild the near historic village.

The eco-village is called EVA, acronym for Eco Villaggio Autocostruito (Selfmade Eco village) (bear in mind that Eva comes from Latin tradition and it means 'mother of the living'): it is built implementing Alternative Technologies solutions, like the use of straw for the walls, solar panels, phytopurification system, etc. (this part will be explored more in the details in the future).



Figure 8, EVA@Pescomaggiore (Robazza, Savini 2011, no page)

In figure 8 we can see on the bottom right the construction yard of the EVA (now it is completed and eight people are living there), in the centre Pescomaggiore and in the background the Abruzzo's mountains and other towns affected by the earthquake.

However, the commitment of the Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore is not only in EVA. It has organized many different public initiatives for the town, like the reconstruction of the communal oven of the town. Furthermore, Pescomaggiore has been chosen, among other 5 towns, for a project of participatory construction (Pescomaggiore 2011), which aims at stimulating citizen participation in reconstruction and encouraging the community to decide its own criteria for reconstruction. This process has involved interviews, focus groups, questionnaires and it has produced draft guidelines for the reconstruction of the town (Pescomaggiore 2012b). This document requires further analysis but I can already see attention being paid to the landscape and the nature, the importance of community to the reconstruction needs of common spaces for the community and the limitation of scratch building.

As we can see, this project presents several Social Ecology traits, having based its activities on the recognition of importance of environment, on a horizontal decision making process that remember the Libertarian Municipalism, on a strong relation with the community and on the use of alternative technologies.

6.2.c. Methodology and problems

My fieldwork in L'Aquila is made easier not only by my nationality and language, but also by the fact that I already know the territory where I have been occasionally living since 2002 for personal and working reasons; for these reason I preventive to spend for this case study 6 months.

Regarding the proposed case study, I had already participated in some initiatives organized by it; moreover, I personally know some of the people involved and I have already had an exchange of information in the field with them. In addition to that, I have the possibility of free accommodation whilst there.

All these opportunities allow me to reduce the time dedicated to this case, having the possibility to start working and collaborating by email before being physically in the field, trying to shape the Participatory Action Research in advance.

One of the problems that I could face is the change of scale between the Sem-Teto experience and this group: the latter will involve less people. Moreover, I do not yet understand how much this project is critical to the existing social system and if it only proposes a "green capitalism". If this is the case and I decide to substitute this case study, I have other options in the same region of other places where a strong grassroots scene has been growing following the earthquake, which involves two social centres, a citizen permanent assembly, several collectives of technicians and groups in defence of the territory. Here again my knowledge of the territory and people involved will be fundamental.

I planned my time in L'Aquila as followed:

- 1st month: settlement and deepening of my knowledge of the city

- 2nd-3rd-4th months: analysis of the Pescomaggiore experience (or other)

- 3th month: interviews with planners, politics or other key figures influenced by the group chosen

- 4th months: focus groups with the selected experience

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8. Research schedule

Research Plan February 2013 - February 2014

Date	Location	Activity
End of February 2013	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Finding an accommodation and knowledge of the University
March 2013	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Settlement and knowledge of the city
April 2013	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Start to make connections with the Sem-Teto experiences
May 2013	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Exploration of the Sem-Teto movements
June 2013	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Exploration of the Sem-Teto experiences
July 2013	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Focus on a specific Sem-Teto experience, start to make interviews
August 2013	Italy	Holiday
September 2013	Leeds, UK	Debriefing and RSG3
October 2013	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Continue the interviews, Social Ecology focus group
November 2013	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Interviews with planners, politicians or other key figures influenced by the specific Sem-Teto experience
December 2013	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Social Ecology focus group
January 2014	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Complete my data

3rd year	
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February 2014 – Leeds, UK	Start my third year PhD – RSG 4
March – February 2015	Organize the material, write the thesis
July 2014	RSG 5
February 2015	Submission of the thesis and VIVA

9. Draft thesis structure

- Abstract

1. Introduction

- a. Context
- b. Aims, objectives and research questions
- c. Overview of chapters and structure of the document
- d. Definitions

2. Literature context

- a. Social Ecology Approaches
- b. Anarchist Approaches
- c. Non-orthodox Marxist Approaches
- d. Eco-Marxist Approaches
- e. Eco-Feminist Approaches
- f. My Synthesis

3. Methodological approach

- a. Activism, Academia and Geography
- b. Choice of case studies
- c. Methods: Participatory Action Research
- d. The Framework
- e. Ethics review

4. Case Studies

- a. Sem-Teto experience
 1. The city context

2. The case study
3. Methodology and problems
- b. Comitato per la Rinascita di Pescomaggiore
 1. The city context
 2. The case study
 3. Methodology and problems

5. Conclusions

- a. A Grassroots Urban Initiatives Critical Assessment
- b. A Social Ecology Critical Assessment
- c. Towards a renewed Social Ecology
- d. Discussion on my research, recommendations and ideas for further

- Appendices

- References

11. School of Geography Personal Development Planning Form for postgraduate research students

Name of student:	Federico Venturini
Supervisors:	Paul Chatterton (main), Chiara Tornaghi, Sara Gonzalez (maternity leave)
Today's date:	13.12.2012

1 Seminars attended

Date	Speaker or seminar series	Title
6.09.2012	Ngugi wa Thiong'o, ASUK Conference 2012 (Leeds)	"Africa in the Language of Scholarship"
14.09.2012	Chiara Tornaghi et al. (Leeds)	"Urban food justice and Feed Leeds: a joint launch event"
11.10.2012	Leeds Plan C (Leeds)	"What future? And how will it work?"
18.10.2012	Tom Bliss, Gary Grant et al. (Leeds)	"TRUG Founding Seminar"
18.10.2012	Selma James (Leeds)	"Sex, Race and Class – What are the Terms of Unity?"
1.11.2012	Jonathan Porritt, Andy Gouldson, Andy Shepherd (Leeds)	"Repositioning the climate change debate"
8.11.2012	Chiara Tornaghi et al. (Leeds)	"Urban Food Justice workshop 2 - Land access"
16.11.2	Ed Soja, Andy Merrifield, Erik	"Whither Urban Studies?"

012	Swyngedouw " (Manchester)	
21.11.2012	Peter McGurn, John Worthington, Roy Donson, Josef Ransley (Leeds)	"What value do local people bring to placemaking?"

2 Courses attended

Date	Course title	Course provider (e.g. School, SDDU...)	Skills gained
12.10.2012	"Introduction to Learning and Teaching"	SDDU	How to teach to small group
31.10.2012	"Equality and Diversity training"	Faculty of Environment	

Any other information about training:

This semester I sit in the following course:
 SPPO1080 Portuguese Language for Beginners 1A
 GEOG 5120M: Qualitative Research Methods

3 Conferences/Presentations/Publications

I am presenting two papers in 2013:

Venturini, F., Nezihe, E. B. "[Hetero]-[U]-[Eco]topias (Social Ecology) and Urban Space". To be given at the AAG Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, California in April 2013.

Venturini, F., Verlinghieri, E. "Scarcity, Post-Scarcity and Local Community: L'Aquila as a Case Study". To be given to the SCIBE "Within the limits of scarcity: Rethinking Space, City and Practices" PhD Conference, 27 February – 1 March 2013, London

I attended and helped as IT Support the Vulnerable Workers, Forced Labour, Migration and Ethical Trading

A Conference at the University of Leeds, 14 December 2012, organised by Dr Stuart Hodgkinson, Dr Hannah Lewis, Dr Louise Waite, University of Leeds; Prof. Pete Dwyer, University of Salford, Prof. Gary Craig, Wilberforce Institute, Hull.

4 Additional commitments/responsibilities

This semester I demonstrated in the following modules:

GEOG1025 Leeds: From Local to Global & GEOG1035 Leeds: Local to Global
 GEOG 3920 Autonomous Geographies, Sustainable Futures

I help to setup and organize a public Capital reading group at the School of Geography.

I am part of the advisory council of new the organization "Transnational Institute of Social Ecology - TRISE" and I am invited to the 1st TRISE Gathering that will take place in Crete in March 22-24, 2013.

Federico Venturini 2012. Kirkgate Market – a student paradise. 9.10.2012, Friends of Leeds Kirkgate Market blog [online]. [Accessed: 10.12.2012]. Available from: <http://kirkgatemarket.wordpress.com/2012/10/19/kirkgate-market-a-student-paradise/>