The right to different realities in a touristified Florence: the urban struggles of *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson*

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore urban social struggles in Florence and their impact on the local community, specifically in the context of touristification. Drawing on David Harvey (2012) and John Holloway (2002, 2010), the thesis argues that urban struggles can produce alternative realities to the dominant capitalist system. Through a critical analysis of the municipal policies and private investments that have contributed to touristification, I illustrate how these have resulted in the exclusion of citizens from the political life of the city and their dissatisfaction with a city built for tourist amusement rather than citizens' necessities. This thesis analyses two urban struggles, specifically focussing on their claims, their relation with other urban actors, and the principles they enact throughout their daily activities. By examining these two social struggles and their capacity to reproduce alternative realities, I demonstrate how social movements can challenge the status quo and create meaningful change in the urban context. Overall, this thesis contributes to ongoing debates on urban planning and policy, highlighting the importance of serving the needs and interests of the local community rather than prioritizing tourism and private investment

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1. Introduction

As a hub of history, culture, and art, Florence is a city that has drawn in people from all over the world. Yet, despite its charm and beauty, the city is not immune to the challenges that face many urban areas today. This thesis explores how two social struggles within the city are working to create a liveable environment that meets the needs of its residents. Through exploring the ways in which the social and physical environments of the city are intertwined, this research aims to provide insights into how we can build more sustainable and equitable urban communities. More precisely, starting by investigating the touristic development of the city, what will be contemplated here is the possibility of such struggles to incarnate and reproduce urban alternative realities, designed to fulfil citizens' needs and desires, since the only urban reality produced now in the city is the one aiming at the amusement of tourists.

That said, this thesis looks at Florence from a non-conventional lens, replacing the popular view of the city as a mere tourist object with one focused on the residents' perspective. 'Non-conventional' because, usually, this city has always been conceived almost exclusively as the "Renaissance cradle", filled with history and culture that, literally exhaling from the many artworks spread all over the city, attract (and justify) the millions of worldwide tourists that flood the city every year. 'Non-conventional' also because visitors might think of the Florentine urban life as a wealthy and fun life – in line with the global perspective of 'living like a local' that affirms itself as the most fulfilling way of visiting places. Nevertheless, the urban life of common citizens in Florence might not be exactly as depicted by tour-operator websites. Mass tourism, led by huge investments in the commercial-touristic sector, relegated city residents to marginalised (physically and socially) spaces of the city. Florentines are concerned about 'losing' the city because of the strong touristic presence, blaming institutions and private investors to treat the urban space as a Disneyland for tourists – later explained and analysed, it is an urbanisation process that aims at transforming the city until it appears beautiful and without flaws, as a Disneyland amusement park. Deprived of their political agency of shaping the urban landscape according to their necessities, Florentine citizens endure urban conditions until they leave the city out of frustration, or are evicted by authorities. As a response to this and other urban issues, many social struggling movements start arising in the city to reverse or annihilate unwanted conditions. Being both legal (e.g. associations) and illegal (e.g., squats), urban struggles are entities that conduct social fights for different purposes – supporting the rights of specific citizen classes (immigrants, homeless, LGBT+, etc.), fighting for structural changes of the city or contrasting them – with a clear objective in mind: to render more pleasant the urban life for citizens. I have always been aware of the existence of anti-systemic entities in the city, and I frequented them mostly during my teenage years, for night parties or during school protests. I thought I already know the typology of the social environment I could meet and, unconsciously, I never really considered them as possible subjects for my thesis.

Throughout lectures at the *International Development Studies* master at Wageningen University, I start cultivating different kinds of interests, from more ideological to more specific subjects. I discovered a particular interest in social communities that arise 'from below', self-determine, and "make do" to overcome unfavourable life conditions – such as the struggling communities of Mapuche, Palestinian, Zapatistas, or Kurdish people. However, I always conceived these movements to be far away from my reality. Even though I knew about struggling entities in my city, I was not understanding their revindications, nor the correlated conditions from which they were born and, surely, I was doing little to get interested or involved – although, as later discovered, my political and moral ideals have always been similar to theirs. In short, I probably never considered them to be worthy of thorough attention. As a matter of fact, the very first idea for my thesis was to investigate rural struggling communities, maybe in South America – such as the Mapuche or the Quechua. Then, because of Covid-19, it was hard to plan something that involved moving too far or engaging closely with people. Moreover, through a friendly chitchat, I was enlightened about the possibility to do research in Florence (my hometown) from the perspective of urban social struggles. I was rightfully told that Florence is full of resistant social movements, especially interesting because of the conditions from which they arise.

The administrations of the city – meaning the municipal governments that have succeeded one another over the years – throughout the activation of specific policies (e.g., a sale catalogue of public and private properties)

and general ordinances (e.g., the large spreading of private concessions for bars and pubs), blatantly supported the rapid development of the tourist industry, disabling citizens' requests to develop alternative urban realities to the only one (commercialized) proposed to them. The more research I was conducting, the more I glimpse the hidden potential – intended as not publicly acknowledged – that struggling movements had in making social and urban changes, specifically with regards to hampering the process of touristification in the city. I discovered that my and the activists' ideals were more alike than I imagined, especially concerning critiques towards the urban and political management of the city.

The social struggles that I will analyse have their roots in the Italian extra-parliamentary movement of the 1970s, which saw the birth of various occupations (named 'social centres'), initiated by the student and labour movements of the time. From the need to create social spaces that break away from capitalist logic, social struggles constantly think about a society that breaks away from the individual consumerist culture that is gradually absorbing all spheres (social, political, cultural, and economic) of our lives. The analysis that follows will be exploring this view, focusing on the kind of relations that the two social struggles of *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* have with the city and its social actors. I will contemplate the possibilities for these to create communities that rely on the strength of their members and ideals, to then achieve desired urban changes. Moreover, it will be explored the socio-political role of such urban struggle, which move out of the framework of 'legality' in order to create realities that would not be realisable otherwise since, as we will see, what is normally conceived as 'illegality' provides opportunities that are not expressible in 'lawful' terms.

1.1 Research aim

The aim of this thesis, as stated in the main title, is to understand whether the urban struggles of *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* are capable of producing alternatives realities which can reestablish the population's right to shape the social and urban fabrics of Florence, while fierce processes of touristification hamper the citizens from being active actors in the political life of the city. This point will draw from the work of Holloway (2002), who brilliantly interpreted the separation between the design of a reality and its actualization as the main generator of frustration among humans – comparing this separation to Marxism, which sees the factory worker's frustration as a consequence of his exclusion from the product design, assumed by the capitalist. Consequently, Holloway argues that the action to negate a given – yet unwanted – reality is the principal motor for social change – to thus change that same given reality. The context of Florence fits perfectly within his theory, considering that the urban space of the city is under constant disputation by different economic actors, while citizens experience growing frustration caused by the institutional neglect of their needs and desires. In a nutshell, I will contemplate the possibilities of the observed struggles to reunite the designing – which implies people's active criticism – and the actualizing parts of citizens, in order for them to reintegrate the agency to implement urban changes. Concurrently, drawing from the book *Rebel Cities* (Harvey, 2012), I will explore the elements that such struggles consider essential for the restoration of the 'Right to the city' among the population. With regards to this, it is crucial to prove social centres' capacity to 'widen' the struggling class, switching the focus from the factory to the urban space, for a multiplicity of different social struggles – either emerging from the workplace or by the need to overtly reconquer the 'right to the city' – to unitedly fight for reconquering the shaping power over the city (Harvey, 2012).

With these as primary goals, the research will first focus on the importance of Florentine tourism and, more precisely, on its excessive development in the city, which is the cause of the loss of citizens' political agency. Then, I will analyse the relationship of the two centres with the neighbourhoods of belonging and with other social actors of Florence, such as the citizens non-related with the struggles, other civil society organizations, and the municipality. Moreover, I will investigate the different principles – behaviours and ideals that move the reasonings and actions of activists – that social centres put into practice daily. Lastly, the focus will be on combining the previous elements to interpret the potential 'catalyst' role that *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* could embody in producing alternative urban realities and in reformulating their conception of the right to the city.

This research aims to answer the following research question

How do the social struggles of Via del Leone and Next Emerson advance the 'Right to the city' in Florence (Italy)?

To reply to it, the next sub-questions have been formulated

- *What claims are made and what actions are pursued? And who are their targets?*
- *How and on the basis of which logics are centres interacting with other social actors? Which are the principles that social struggles want to enact while bonding (or fighting) with them?*
- *What alternative urban realities are created?*

1.2 Thesis Outline

The thesis chapters will be designed as follows.

The first chapter introduced the topic of my thesis and displayed the research aim and the related research questions, while briefly describing the investigation context. The second discusses the methodology used to answer the research questions, as well as provides observations on the limitations of the investigation. The third extensively analyses the literature regarding touristification, focussing on the scientific debate of the phenomenon and its urban consequences in general. It then narrows down the research on the case of Florence, analysing the development of the tourist industry in the city, the related effects on the local community, and the urban reactions to urbanisation processes, introducing the two study cases. The fourth chapter displays the theoretical framework used for the analysis of the social struggles, derived mainly from the works of Harvey (2012) and Holloway (2002; 2010), used to support the interpretation of the results obtained. The fifth chapter presents the results of the research. Starting from the analysis of claims advanced daily by the observed urban struggles, it then moves to relations among these and the surrounding social actors – the municipality, the neighbourhood, the population 'non-involved' with social struggles, and the other social struggles of the city – to conclude by analysing what I pinpointed as the main 4 principles that move the reasoning and actions of social struggles – Mutualism, Horizontality & Self-management, Inspiring mobilisation, and 'Shadow-ism'. The sixth and last chapter answers the research questions, discussing achievements and limitations of the social struggles and arguing on the possibility for these to reproduce urban social alternatives within the city.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design

The research design selected for this thesis is qualitative since it is thoroughly indagating on motivations, personal experiences, reflections, behaviours, and opinions of the subjects observed (activists). Such a methodology framework allowed me to connect on a deeper level with the militant environment of Florence. As a matter of fact, I participated in diverse social centres' activities, such as meetings – regular ones as well as intimate ones, where just 4 or 5 activists were present – large events – like public protests – or activities non-directly related to politics – ludic, sports, and cultural activities. Participant and non-participant observations here were extremely important to slowly bond with militants, and gradually reduce the virtual line that divides the activist from the social researcher in the field. In fact, these techniques, regardless of the initial embarrassment in introducing myself and explaining my research, helped me to nicely blend with the centres. To formulate the problem statement – touristification and consequent citizens' exclusion from the political decision on urban spaces – I conducted a thorough document review, dedicated to understanding the claims of Florentine social struggles, with a keen focus on social movements literature (e.g., blogs, fliers, audio-video material, social centres websites). After pinpointing the major urban problems according to struggles, I extensively analysed academic literature with the purpose of cross-checking academic and movement literature information and of investigating previous academic literature on Italian social centres. Lastly, I analysed local journalistic articles and official institutional documents (such as municipality ordinances and government decrees) to provide an overview of the Florentine context and the struggles residing there. While the found theoretical literature was both in Italian and English, data regarding institutional ordinances, newspapers, and movement literature were exclusively in Italian.

2.2 Data Collection

The research took place between June and September 2021 (4 months) in two social centres of Florence, *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson*, respectively located in the city centre, in the *San Frediano* neighbourhood (slightly South but close to the historical core of Florence), and the peripheral neighbourhood of *Castello* (North-West area), right next to the limit of the municipality (figure 1).

Figure 1. Social Centres location, personal elaboration. Image retrieved from https://www.google.com/maps/place/Firenze

After contacting a few social centres in the area (5 in total), selected after researching the activities pursued by each one of them, I got replies only from the two mentioned. The observation of two different occupations, in terms of locations (one in the central area of the city, the other in its outskirts) and characteristics (see section 3.5), gave me the possibility to analyse different ways of conducting activities and relating to the surrounding, according to the different needs of the belonging neighbourhoods. For the data collection, the methodology drew on qualitative methods, like the mentioned participant and non-participant observation. To exhaustively collect information, and to ensure a loyal representation of activists' ideas, I conducted semi-structured in-

depth interviews, both with social centres' militants and other actors. More specifically, I conducted 10 interviews: 3 militants of each social centre – 6 in total – 2 city councillors belonging to the opposition, and 2 externals, involved with social centre activities – 1 volunteer and 1 member of a local civil society organization. I chose these interviewees thoroughly. For what regards militants, I decided to interview the more present people and, among these, people that do not belong to the same 'area of interest' within the centres (e.g., one of the boxing courses, one of the hacking workshops, and one involved with the citizen helpdesk). In other words, I aimed at retrieving as many different perspectives as possible, in order to extensively cover all relevant information for analysis. According to ethnographic methods, I also conducted several informal conversations with other militants and participants. Usually, in the form of chitchats (sometimes short, sometimes long-winded), these provided me with good information regarding specific historical facts of centres, as well as deeper opinions of activists.

2.3 Data analysis

All interviews, newspaper articles, and movement literature were in Italian. All this material has been kept in the original language during the analysis, to then translate into English just the relevant material (newspaper pieces, fliers, etc.) in the form of quotations. The translation has been conducted taking care to accurately report the same concepts expressed in Italian, without modifying underlining ideas. Likewise, interviews have been analysed and coded in the original language, to then use translated quotes to refer to concepts expressed. To analyse retrieved information, both inductive and deductive reasoning has been applied, while still, the main discussions arise from data retrieved – as more usual in the inductive approach.

2.4 Reflexion and Limitations

Let me say that, as soon as I confronted myself with fieldwork research, expectations and reality clashed. I initially considered 'well mannerism' and positivity to be my best friends in achieving such a goal, allowing myself to slightly distort my own "persona". For instance, during the first meetings, I wanted to appear amiable and comprehending, pretending to understand every debated issue, even when I could not fully grasp each one of them – because of missing basic information (this 'cost' me more research later, and more detailed interviews). For the first weeks of my research, I unconsciously acted like a detached actor, not much because I wanted to not feel part of the context, but exactly the opposite. I wanted to feel 'included', even when my position could not immediately allow me to blend with the social context – both because I did not know people, nor their fights. Honestly, I think I 'slammed into a door'. I thought that just because of being a "researcher" (in many quotation marks) I could, more easily than others, be quickly accepted. Nevertheless, during the unfolding of the fieldwork, I discovered an initially invisible facet of the research, which helped me to 'unbuckle the bridles': the active participant. Through a growing involvement with activities of the centres, a real interest – that I would define more social or 'human' – grew next to the academic one, rendering the research easier to approach and understand. While emotions provided curiosity and sparked the most shameless questions and arguments, direct involvement allowed me to get to be treated as one of the same participants or, at least, closer to militants than I could have ever imagined. Of course, some arguments were to be faced with caution. Sometimes I have been asked not to divulge particular details, nor to describe specific ways of organizing activities. In addition to this, being part of normal activities of the centres brings the possibility not to aseptically observe the development of the facts. Moreover, the fact of sharing similar political ideals – which personally got closer to their positionalities after the research – definitely helped in understanding struggles perspectives. All the activities were reported in the field diary, which helped me to better "zoom-out" every aspect of the research, and to wedge in the bigger framework of the Florentine context, allowing me to 'move in and out' from the 'activist status' to the researching one. To bring a suitable example, during the protest against the privatization of a Florentine square, I felt completely and directly involved in the cause while, later on, I was able to discern the different interests of the actors in the play – not by being politically neutral, but considering the different 'positions'. To get involved in struggles as much as possible, I was inspired by the concept of 'carnal sociology' formulated by Wacquant (2015), who defines it as a sociology that *eschews the spectatorial viewpoint and to grasp action-in-the-making, not action-already-accomplished* (Wacquant, 2015). The author, thus, pushes the researcher to get involved and take a clear position in the research, namely that of the observed subjects. I am convinced of the fact that a 'politicised' position in

research, as many authors affirm (Jackson, 2006; Harding, 2015), could reinforce rather than weaken results. While at the beginning of my research, I wanted to gather many different non-activists opinions – such as neighbourhood residents or municipality members – I later realised that, for the methodology selected and, most importantly, for the purpose of this research, I should have not included the most disparate opinions within the results of my thesis. For example, I could conduct interviews with two municipality representatives – whose opinions have been included, even if not extensively – 'close' to the political area of the activists, while I did not interview the political majority – I did not get replies from them, but I did not furtherly insist. On the one hand, I initially thought that a nuanced perspective of the municipality would have likely provided the research with more insights. On the other, as stated, the research aims, since the start, have always been that of focussing on the social struggles perspective. Indeed, the concept of 'carnal sociology' (Wacquant, 2015) expressed above, would suggest taking a clear stance while researching, in order to strengthen consequent arguments.

Nonetheless, I was not always capable to approach every moment of the research accordingly to these principles. Sometimes out of hesitation, I had to 'pause' myself, and self-question if what I was pursuing was in line with what I premised before starting the research. In any case, during the whole period of the research – either in the initial 'extra-positive' phase, when discovering the human interest for the cause, or while questioning myself – I never fully detached myself from the social interactions that I entangled with militants. Moreover, as discernible from the previous lines, I needed some time before getting 'closer' with activists, especially because in the first moments I might have been seen as a non-fitting element – as I also acted and felt detached. Eventually, constantly thinking of myself as not forced – by others as well as by myself – in agreeing with militants' ideas or actions, actually helped me to better understand and, paradoxically, to agree more on some political arguments.

The research might have encountered some limitations. Indeed, it is possible that the number of interviews could have not covered all relevant opinions. While in *Via del Leone* – with an assembly of a maximum of 15 persons – three interviews might be enough to understand the struggle positionality, it could not be the case for *Next Emerson* – which hosts, when most frequented, around 30 activists. Considering the kind of relations developed with interviewees – socially, the ones with whom I had closer relations – I consider the usual uncertainty of researchers towards the reliance on respondents' accuracy, reduced to the minimum. It happened though, even when I planned interviews with other activists, that some of them decided not to release interviews, quitting last minute.

Another limitation might be encountered in the limited external validity. Even if overtourism and touristification are diffused phenomena, the actions that social struggles enacted against these processes cannot be replicated in other urban contexts. However, the generalisation of the results has never been a purpose of the thesis, since the focus has always been that of providing a strongly contextualised depiction of the two study cases.

The last limitation that the research might have encountered concerns the issue of bias. The respondents could have been influenced by the external role that I represented – some admitted that, at the beginning of my research, believed I was a plain-clothes police officer, or that my thesis could provide relevant material to start inquiries on the struggles. In order to overcome this, I conducted interviews in an advanced phase of the research, when militants had already gotten used to my presence in every activity. Moreover, during interviews, the words of questions have been carefully chosen to not steer their answers.

3. Literature review

3.1 (Over)tourism in cities

As starting point, before diving into the specific context of Florence, it is crucial to understand the dynamics and contexts in which the phenomena of Centri Sociali were born and raised. Besides the specific history of these realities, to which I will dedicate a summary of their life development, I will focus on a particular perspective of their social environment, which is tourism and, specifically, on the negative impacts that it has on the local community. As we will see from the words of the interviewees, as well as most of the literature that is analysing the problem (Madanipour, 2004; Colomb & Novy, 2018), tourism is one of the fiercest opponents of urban social movements.

First, it is important to give an overview of the multiple facets of the ever-growing (and overgrowing) phenomena of global tourism. In 2019, the touristic sectors and related activities contributed to 10% of the global GDP (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022). Just in Europe, in 2018 'tourism and related' sector provided around 12 million jobs, covering 5% of the total European labour force (European Parliament, 2022)

Even though it seems almost worthless to say for its obviousness, the Covid-19 outbreak deeply affected international and national tourism while, at this moment, it is still keeping remnants in the social and economic sphere of everybody's life. Indeed, it would be superficial to just compare the numbers of tourists worldwide through the last years, even though it can give a raw idea of the intensity of the pandemic from an economic perspective. For instance, by looking economically wise at the number of worldwide tourists, which falls from 1.5 billion in 2019 to 415 million in 2020 (World Tourism Barometer, UNWTO, 2022), we easily imagine the large number of people (and enterprises) that had to deal with severe financial issues. Nevertheless, as some studies show (Varzaru et al, 2021; Benjamin et al., 2020), this situation is symptomatic of more systemic and problematic issues. Several authors (Deery et al., 2012; Mihalic, 2020; Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020) state the importance to shift towards a more sustainable and equal socio-economic system, especially by pointing out the problems that arise from the tourism industry. It is not some news – since broadcasting channels all over the world, as well as academic papers or informal bar's chitchats, keep on sharing preoccupations on the matter – that, as humans, we urge a shift in several spheres of our lives to avoid fatal repercussions. After all, 'We shouldn't go back to normal because normality was the problem' has been one of the most cited mottos during and after the pandemic (Benjamin et al., 2020).

Considering that the research for this thesis has been conducted during the summer of 2021, while the effects of the pandemic were still ongoing, this work cannot sufficiently cover activists' opinions on new measures taken by local and national administration, especially for those related to tourism activities post-pandemic. Anyway, it is cautiously possible to say these are yet to be put into practice or, more precisely, the effects are not visible yet.

Despite pandemic digressions, which I think should be under the lens of scholars, literature about overtourism has been developed for almost a decade now. Even though the concept of overtourism has been already mentioned in older literature, the intrinsic study of the phenomena appears to be more recent (Dodds & Butler, 2019). As a matter of fact, a whole new branch – fostered by urbanists architects, as well as sociologists and economists – has been created, and it keeps on nurturing both quantitative (Adie et al., 2019) and qualitative studies (Eckert et al., 2019).

Easily as its name, *Overtourism* is a concept which indicates the excessive number of tourists in cities, especially European ones, and the related negative consequences of uncontrolled growth of visitors' presence, in urban and non-urban areas (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Its most visible effects are the ones related to the crowdedness of the city spaces, be it museums, bars, restaurants, public squares, or traffic roads. Considering this first connotation, as Koens et al. (2018) cleverly point out, the terminology should be reconsidered, aiming at more precise concepts such as *visitor pressure* or *carrying capacity*. According to the European Parliament Committee on Transport and Tourism, or TRAN (2018), Overtourism happens in situations where the *"impact of tourism, at certain times and in certain locations, exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, and/or political capacity thresholds"* (TRAN, 2018). In short, we should talk of Overtourism

every time that a city, in terms of public and private services and facilities, exceeds the maximum limit by which these services cannot be guaranteed, neither to tourists nor local inhabitants. Moreover, overtourism leads to many more consequences which, in their turn, have been deeply discussed and studied (Seraphin et al., 2018; Deery et al., 2012; Adie et al., 2019). I will analyse the type of gentrification fostered by the excess presence of tourists, namely touristification, although the literature has already provided a large number of studies on different types of problematic urban changes (Terzano, 2014; Bourlessas et al., 2021). To be more consistent, it is easier to think of Overtourism and its outcomes in a visual way. For example, it is simpler to picture the overcrowded *Piazza San Marco* in Venice, as well as its busy docks in which every day around 60,000 visitors go ashore (Seraphin et al., 2018). Or even the busy *Fori Imperiali* in Rome, filled with tourist tours that patiently wait at the *Colosseum's* entrance, as well as the *Sagrada Familia* in Barcelona or *Plaza Mayor* in Madrid. Albeit the described scenarios might suggest some specific ideas on the consequences for the cities at issue, from 'simple' traffic congestion to a more problematic stall of public services, there is a streak of consequences that heavily influences locals' inhabitant life, socially, economically, and psychologically. Touristification, gentrification – as well as terms like Airbnbzation, foodification, and many more –, are the 'bread and butter' of urbanists and sociologists (Tarsi et al, 2020) and, in this thesis, they will be of major importance to explain and analyse the perspectives and actions of social struggles.

3.2 Touristification debate

It has to be specified that the kind of city I will talk about represents an urban context that can be observed elsewhere. I am going to talk about Florence, but the same issues are reproduced likewise in other cities: Berlin, Paris, Prague, Hong Kong, San Francisco, Valparaiso, and many more (Colomb & Novy, 2018). The lowest common denominator is always constituted by the same factors: a (relatively) big city, with a great attractiveness potential of different kinds. Be it historical, recreational, cultural or a mix of them, a city that can offer such type of attraction could walk the so-called path of touristification.

Before describing the context of Florence and the tourism it is housing, it is crucial to first get a general idea of what literature defines as touristification and its effect on the impacted social fabric of the cities. Effectively, how can touristification be described and, specifically, why is it representing a problem of such importance to explain local rebelliousness of different degrees? In short, what is touristification and through which processes is it triggered and constituted?

A fast glance at the historical overview regarding touristification shows that there is no agreement among scholars on a unique and final definition (Woo et al., 2021; Slater, 2011). Urbanists, geographers, historians and other scholars have defined it depending on the case and context analysed (Belhassen et al., 2014). Despite the tangible (and yet real) potential of its quick scaling up, such a process still does not benefit from meticulous, holistic, and extensive literature (Woo et al., 2021). Most importantly, literature seems to lack some kind of joint transversal study among the different academic disciplines, to better comprehend every one of its facets (Ojeda et al, 2020). Such effort could be useful in serving as a compass to foster further research. Despite that, touristification studies encompass a consistent literature of study cases.

While reviewing the concept, it comes straightforward that defining touristification results hard, and differences among the diverse definitions become nuanced, melting into a confused and unstructured definition. Indeed, each academic field is prone to use different concepts of the phenomena. While in geography, for instance, the term is padded with a lot of operative definitions that help to describe it in the most concrete possible way (Sanmartín, 2019), in social science and humanities the concept seems to be conceptualized by reflecting specific social group perspectives, such as that of residents (or, better, natives) communities – or that of tourists. Of course, this kind of difference is also given by the fact that, for example, anthropologic or sociological research is more likely to use qualitative methods, considering its willingness to interpret the complex ideas expressed by the observed subjects during interviews or field works (Martinez, M, 2015).

Ojeda et al (2020), for instance, attempt to balance a wide number of essays. The authors highlight the importance of a multidisciplinary approach with a specific lens on social problematics, in order for new research to focus on impacts on society (Ojeda et al, 2020). Moreover, they lift a critique on how some scholars failed to define touristification, resulting in an 'empty signifier' with "*words and ideas that have no clear empirical determination, are self-referential or fail to refer, polysemic terms whose meaning is ambiguous, subjective, open to too many different interpretations or definitions and finally fail to designate something that exists in the material or immaterial realm […] indicates a difficulty not only to name a phenomenon but also to conceive it"* (Ojeda et al, 2020). I find this assessment intriguing and challenging since, whilst geographers or urbanists should undoubtedly have to approach a concept with extreme concreteness, I consider that sociological research could 'loose' the rein of definitions, without drawing excessively marked lines to contain a concept, allowing the research itself to fill in the term. To better clarify my thought, I will borrow the same concept of the empty signifier, but the one provided by David Harvey in *Rebel Cities* (2012). The author states that the 'right to the city' concept is like an empty box, which will be filled by whoever is working on shaping and designing the city – the author is cautious about including every category, from the homeless to the financial broker. By design, he means to shape the city not only physically, but also socially, or culturally. Also, depending on who claims it, the term can have different meanings and, in its turn, different practical implications (Harvey, 2012). As said, both the homeless and the Wall Street broker can claim the right to the city, but it is a matter of who put more effort to impose its conception – which normally, as Marx puts it, 'between equal rights force decides'. '*The definition of the right is itself an object of struggle*' hence, it is an issue of power and perspective, since imposing the term a definition means to treat it in such a way (Harvey, 2012). Likewise, the term touristification can be used (and filled of content) differently, by different actors. For example, although this term has been coined by activists and scholars that have been arguing and fighting it, there have been some occasional attempts to positivize the concept among policymakers, politicians, and private sector stakeholders.

Indeed, debating about an interpretative concept such as 'the right to shape the city' is not equal to explaining a more measurable issue like, for example, 'traffic congestion due to overtourism' but, indeed, they could be treated likewise since, more often than not, they appear to be connected.

I think that leaving space for those who are actually coping with such situations, in order for them to describe and specifically define the reality they are daily struggling against, could be useful and regardful at the same time. As a matter of fact, the conclusions of Ojeda et al. essay (2020) clearly explain how touristification should not be described using misleading concepts – for instance referring to gentrification or a sense of "hatred towards the tourist" as synonyms – but with a guise of a theoretical framework and, above all, with a fine study of the local situation (Ojeda et al, 2020). This is of paramount importance, both for the researcher and the reader, for the latter to clearly understand the matter at stake and for the former to better frame and steer the research.

In relation to my thesis, as mentioned, I will gather general principles that literature provided on touristification while reviewing and complementing them with the concepts that activists elaborate on when they talk or are being questioned about touristification and, specifically, regarding mechanisms and consequences of tourism and related activities in Florence. Hence, I will avoid treating the term as a blueprint. The next paragraph will serve as clarification for the term that has been at stake in this section. By doing that, I will introduce terms that, grasped while reviewing the literature, I found to be important to give a clearer picture of the Florentine situation and to better define the urban fabric that surrounds the social struggles.

It is important to stress that I am conscious of the fact that, already by describing such concepts, this thesis can have an excessively structured framework. However, I consider these concepts as a 'guiding compass' that supported me in the preparatory phase of the research, while 'blending' with the urban struggle realities. As a matter of fact, getting on the field with already some ideas – not defined 'in stone', nor immutable – of the struggles the activists are dealing with every day, favoured me with good opportunities to not be seen as a complete stranger and, honestly, to start the fieldwork with the less amount of embarrassment and uneasiness.

3.2.1 Framing touristification

Despite the multiple and diverse definitions of touristification in literature, some common elements can be pinpointed as the basis for its understanding. Woo et al. (2021) explain the term as the combination of the words *Touristify* and *Gentrification*. The first is intended as the process that refers to the commodification of spaces and local culture, for the sake of tourism. A bright example is the ever-growing number of cafés, fashion shops and restaurants that arise alongside the main streets of 'tourist cities' (Colomb & Novy, 2018), at the cost of local dwellers' well-being. The large majority of traditional local commerce has been replaced by fast fashion and fast-food chains. Nowadays is easy to observe this process in European cities. Health facilities, public social spaces, and local economies are the first to be threatened by the tourist industry (Talanti, 2020).

The second term, gentrification, entails a more detailed explanation. Coined in 1964 by Ruth Glass, the term was used by the author to explain the urban mutation that she was observing in London, where "*one by one, many of the working class quarters have been invaded by the middle class […] once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed*" (Glass, 1964). The author is referring to the change in the residential landscape, in terms of the housing market and beautification of some areas in inner London of the early 60s. Indeed, the term has been developed over the years, adapting to new and diverse urban contexts. Smith and Williams (1986), even when the term was young enough to generate confusion, among several attempts of definitions (Slater, 2011), provided a clear and consistent description

> *it should be clear that we are concerned with a process much broader than merely residential rehabilitation* […] *it has become increasingly apparent that residential rehabilitation is only one facet* […] *of a more profound economic, social, and spatial restructuring. In reality, residential gentrification is integrally linked to the redevelopment of urban waterfronts for recreational and other functions, the decline of remaining inner city manufacturing facilities, the rise of hotel and convention complexes and central city office developments, as well as the emergence of modern "trendy" retail and restaurant districts* […] *Gentrification is a visible spatial component of this social transformation. A highly dynamic process, it is not amenable to overly restrictive definitions.* (Smith and Williams, 1986)

The importance of this definition lies in two statements: a wider range of effects – social, economic, and spatial – in addition to residential restructuration, is also considered a consequence of gentrification (Sassen, 1991); the rejection of a unique and strict definition, enabling the term to stretch itself, depending on specific contexts.

Some authors, throughout the years, attempted to explain gentrification by splitting the process down into several phases, providing a sort of blueprint. Hackworth and Smith break down gentrification into time waves, in an attempt to better explain its development (Semi, 2015).

I will refer to gentrification as that process of marketing design that, through the exercise of a multiplicity of forces (e.g., the increase of rent prices, the rehabilitation of specific urban areas, the loss of public spaces), causes the deterioration of social, economic, cultural, and psychological conditions for local inhabitants. Specifically, the lower-class population is the most severely affected. It is a fact that this portion of the population is the first to be expulsed from city centres and, forced to move to the outskirt of their towns, is deprived of the possibility to live the social, economic, and cultural life of the city. What is more, citizens in this condition are disabled of their potential to claim and shape the city to communal and personal needs.

It is important, as highlighted by some authors (Sequera and Nofre, 2018), to avoid confusion between the processes of touristification and gentrification. Despite some similarities and the fact that the latter could be considered a consequence of the former – or the former as the final stage of the latter –, in this thesis, they will be represented as two different urban processes.

On one hand, gentrification entails a change of the urban fabric, since the middle-upper classes replace the lower ones in centric neighbourhoods, through processes of 'urban revitalization' (Carmon, 1999). On the other hand, touristification is not necessarily related to an upscaling class change. As a matter of fact, global modern tourism embraces a wider 'class' of customers, giving the opportunity – thanks to low-cost travel and

short-term accommodations – to the majority of the middle class (or lower, depending on the country origins) to visit a lot of destinations with little economic effort. Hence, while gentrification results in higher-class residents, touristification leads to a 'cross-class displacement' (Sequera and Nofre, 2018). In short, while gentrification tends to expulse lower-class residents from the city, the effects of touristification seem to hit indiscriminately all socio-economic classes of inhabitants.

Another difference regards urban conflicts and the resulting change in ownership. Gentrification, due to its displacing mechanism among the inhabitants of the same city (or the same region), entails that the ownership is transferred to higher-class residents. This leads to class "war", in which lower-class members – overtly or not – manifest their discomfort against their expulsion. With touristification instead, the socioeconomic class of the new owner is not really relevant, since the residence is oftentimes destined to short accommodation estate agencies (e.g., Airbnb). This generates general discontent among the local community, indistinctively hitting across all the social classes of the city, affecting the general community's liveability. As noted by different authors (Sequera and Nofre, 2018; Richards, 2014), protests against tourism, differently from displacement by gentrification protests, involve also middle-class residents.

The last, and most important difference regards the underlying logic of the two phenomena. While gentrification is justified by processes of beautification and revaluation, to socially and physically upscale the value of a specific area, urban changes due to touristification – new fast foods, pubs, fast-fashion shops, and more – are led by the choice of the local administration and the private accommodation sector to enhance tourism capacity – in order to maximise its profit. As a result, all the processes of urban restructuring undertaken to shape the city cause the so-called 'Disneyfication' (Bryman, 1999). The city is transformed for the pleasure of the tourist, reproducing an environment that appears flawless and secure. The travelling experience has now put tourism at the centre of the stage, not the city nor its culture. The tourist is not always a discoverer of places and cultures – as a matter of fact, now more than ever he is distant from this conception. Now the "local experience" is what attracts the most. To live 'like a local' is the slogan of tourist attraction (Semi, 2015). While a traveller is prone to go on the field and seek 'adventures' and new things to discover, the tourist already knows every step of his trip: cultural places to visit, restaurants to eat, bars to drink, and accommodations to sleep in. This is all part of the process of Disneyfication.

In short, the process of touristification regards all those tourism-related activities and practices, pursued by different actors, which cause the elimination of traditional uses and local economic activities, through the expulsion of a large portion of natives. The expulsion is not confined to the working class or lower-class residents, but transversally to a wider portion of the population, including middle and (to a lesser extent) upper classes – in a way, we could say that touristification is equal. Certainly, the first ones to be excluded – and expulsed – from city life are still lower classes, since economic effects (e.g., an increase in rents and good prices) are the first hitting the population. Middle and higher classes, instead, mostly suffer from social and psychological consequences – such as the loss of public places for socialization, or the sense of uneasiness for not feeling part of a community.

Of course, without a clear definition of the phenomenon – and with the etymologist clutter perceived while reviewing literature – I consider it legitimate to have confusion in defining terminology. I treated Overtourism and touristification as separate concepts. Some authors use the two terms as synonyms, while I thought of overtourism as the main cause of touristification (and related consequences such as gentrification, Disneyfication, etc.). I did this just because marking a distinction between the two helped me with theorizing and understanding the concepts. Similarly, I separated the concept of touristification and gentrification to better explain the different causes and consequences on the local community – even if both are disruptive phenomena for the local community.

3.2.2 Consequences of touristification

Of course, touristification, like any other social distress, does not come without human costs. But, as Novy and Colomb cleverly point out "*Local residents, individuals and groups are not homogeneous 'communities' who react to the prevalence of urban tourism in the same way. The potential benefits of urban tourism (and its costs) are consequently also the object of struggles between people* (Colomb & Novy, 2018). This means that

social groups will most certainly defer in terms of reactions. It is hard and excessively verbose – and honestly, for a case study, slightly unnecessary – to make a list of all the possible consequences of touristification – even though Novy and Colomb (2018) provide a detailed one – some issues keep on replicating in most of the urban realities invaded by tourism.

Some issues have characteristics that transversally hit all society spheres (economic, physical, social, cultural, and physiological), recognized as 'primary' issues, since they will likely produce a waterfall effect, sparking additional and specific problematics in different spheres – or affecting one another. These are noticeable even just by visiting a city, such as the residential and commercial gentrification, the privatisation of public spaces and, of course, the overcrowding. Some others, more subtle, heavily impact urban residents' private life. For instance 'sameness', which is the feeling or need to match social and aesthetic standards, spreads at the cost of local communities heritage. This can cause a great loss of cultural diversity, or also induce sentiments of psychological or physical – in the case of urban restructuration – alienation in residents, which in turn will lose their sense of belonging to a specific community. Another one is the conflict over land use. While areas should be disputed between residents and all the opposing forces (municipality and private receptive sector), which induce and shape the city following touristic standards, actual clashes see the local population opposing tourists. As a matter of fact, it is usual to witness graffiti or behaviours hampering tourist experiences since the latter are the most visible (and reachable) targets. This short introduction is just to display how the local population might be influenced by touristification. While it is not important to make a list of all the possible impacts of overtourism on residents, it is crucial to properly understand the context observed.

3.3 Urban reactions

Impacts of touristification comprise events of different kinds. While tourist and high-profit sectors flourish unhampered in towns, public spaces of various natures (ludic, cultural, political) are constantly eroded by processes of marketing design. It is quite common to notice, both in academic literature (Madanipour, 2004) and by informal chitchat with any local – activists as well as the majority of the Florentine residents I had the possibility to talk to – that city centres have been 'cleansed' from local dwellers in the sake of tourism and Airbnb renting businesses, by now a common way of living the cities (Novy & Colomb, 2018). Historical centres are becoming more and more a magnet for investments and local cultural appropriation. Urban restructuring for the revaluation of "degraded" central areas seems to be the forefront element of all local administrations' economic plans. Visitors represent a social status for cities. To have a lot of touristic activities means a guarantee of continuous remuneration. Local administrations that experience such processes are gradually more attracted by tourism's economic benefits, neglecting public expenditures to improve local inhabitants' well-being resulting, ultimately, in an urban restructuration of the city. The milieu of the urban economic realities shifts their focus on tourism since it represents a nice and solid investment for their future. Despite academic warnings on the consequences that mass tourism will have on the same tourist industry future – avoiding limitations of tourist flows will eventually result in the loss of 'quality tourism' and, more in general, the loss of tourist attractiveness (Loda, 2012) – the patterns seem to remain the same. Not even the pandemic, which clearly displayed the economic risks that a city undertakes in relying only on the tourist sector, stopped this trend. As a matter of fact, the number of tourists, with a neat and obvious stop during 2020-21, has never been receding worldwide.

This dizzying whirlwind made of uncontrolled visitors incoming, massive investments from the private sector, consequent responses of municipalities administrations – which seem to blindly 'ride the wave' of this gigantic economic flow while neglecting consistent socio-economic issues of the resident population –, or the huge increase of standardised retailing shop to replace historical-traditional shops, indeed does not pass unnoticed. Despite the loss of cultural identity and all related impacts, not all the residents seem to accept leaving their homes to find new ones on the outskirt of the city. This paragraph will precisely focus on that part of the population that refuses to passively witness the overturn of their cities.

Upheavals, protests, and an increase of new social groups that manifest their dissent and congest urban scenarios are always more frequent in tourist cities.

> *The word 'Berlin', a crossed-out heart, a capital 'U', and an unmistakable message: when the 'Berlin does not love you' stickers first appeared on buildings. Graffiti with slogans like 'No more rolling suitcases' and 'Tourists f*** off' became an almost ubiquitous sight in Berlin's districts; fierce debates at community meetings about the conversion of residential apartments into holiday rentals became more frequent. Anonymous posters citing Hans Magnus Enzensberger's famous words – 'The tourist destroys what he seeks by finding it' – echoed a sentiment that a growing number of residents expressed quite openly: the city, they felt, was in danger of falling victim to its own success (...) quasi-daily demonstrations outside the District and City halls to demand that politicians implement tighter control and regulation of the city's tourism economy and, more broadly, to plead for a change in the city's urban development model under the motto 'Barcelona is not for sale'* (Novy & Colomb, 2018)

On the one hand, it is easily understandable why an angry resident is gunning for the tourist, the carnal embodiment of the resulting poor administration of local government which lacks attention towards its residents' needs. On the other hand, it is important to focus on solving problems at their roots. It has to be acknowledged that often tourists are just scapegoats. These sentiments, which in reality are heading towards a local administration model that jeopardizes local citizens' well-being, hardly reach the intended targets, since far more complex and articulated actions than anti-tourist stickers and urban mottos are needed. Essentially, and despite the evident disgust displayed in the above quotation, it would be erroneous to state that touristification is equal to 'hatred towards the tourists'.

3.3.1 Centri sociali as Reaction

As said, local inhabitants (re)act differently to touristification. Despite little public exposure on the tourist issue, which is normally focused on badly portraying resistance acts of residents (Talanti, 2020; Claire Haven-Tang, 2012) – like the decorum or the distress that abounds on newspapers' headlines – there are several parties – mainly urban movements and local associations – that focus on understanding and fighting the essence of the problem, and its systemic nature. It is obvious to say that all of them conceive touristification as extremely political.

Literature such as the one cited above (Madanipour, 2004; Talanti, 2020; Loda, 2012) analyses touristification through different lenses. Some focus on the outskirt of cities and their inhabitants (Madanipour, 2004); others on the historical centres and the loss of public services for locals (Talanti, 2020); some others instead display an overview of touristification providing a range of examples of several 'bottom-up' realities of different urban realities (Novy & Colomb, 2018). The latter category is what attracted me the most. I wanted to look for groups that address urban problems connected to issues such as touristification. Italy is filled with associative realities of different natures (squats, spontaneously formed urban groups, neighbourhood associations, etc.). What I focused on the most is the informal context in which certain realities and activities gain traction. As I will display in the research question section, my curiosity is facing the possibility of these realities to live and act and, particularly, how, and why they act (illegally).

3.3.2 Italian 'Centri sociali'

Before delving into the study cases, it is good to frame, or at least to summarily define, the concept of *Centro Sociale*. When I asked different activists of a social centre "what is a social centre?", I received different kinds of answers. Some of them said it is a way of organization, namely 'self-managemental' or horizontal. Somebody told me that social centres are forms of anti-capitalism. Some others refer to it simply as home, physically and emotionally. Despite the different replies, all of them compose the idea of a social centre within a common ideological matrix. The concept of *Centro Sociale* is formed, debated, and shaped among the same activists, within one same centre. This means that different social centres may have different organizational or social dynamics, as well as different purposes. Every frequenter is both producer and receiver of a collective

identity, constructed by continuous personal and group interactions, mainly sustained by the organization of activities. Of course, some things are non-negotiable: anti-sexism, anti-racism, and anti-fascism are baselines, carved either in wall graffiti inside squats or in activists' ways of socializing. Social relations, as a decision-making process, lie and rely on mutual respect, aiming at shaping the right motivations and tools to jointly fight a counterpart, which can be physical or conceptual. Indeed, the main 'enemy' is always embodied by capitalism and neo-liberal governments but, depending on the context, it can incarnate different entities, either public or private. Literature provides a great amount of information about the history, motives, and potentialities of social centres (Mudu, 2012; Gambardella, 2017; Membretti, 2007). The majority of them display different interpretations of similar traits. Some of these features though, need a deeper observation than others to be grasped. For instance, one is the fast mobilization that contradistinguishes their actions, in response to policies and market choices. Social centres are able to organize sudden, big events, in a short time, or even in an almost spontaneous way. Throughout history, they had a big impact on square protests, like the organization of street LGBT+ pride parades or strikes parades (Mudu, 2012). This attribute highlights the slowness in organizing events from institutionalized (or lawful) entities, which need weeks or more, to deal with bureaucracy, before being able to implement an event. Another characteristic, which enables responsiveness, is social networking. Being part of a large social network that has the same purposes, often guarantees the presence and commitment of a large number of participants. Thanks to the heterogeneity of urban struggles within one city – feminist groups, housing groups, arts groups, and so on – and a loyal sense of solidarity, they support one another activities, even when not related to their 'field' of action.

The cultural heritage of occupation and self-management started in the 70s – while punk culture in Italy was at its peak – and the more commonly associated label is 'Centri sociali occupati autogestiti' or CSOA (*occupied self-managed social centres*). The movement aims at creating spaces where principles of horizontality and new socialities (named *freed* socialities) can be experimented openly (Bey, 1993; Berzano & Gallini, 2000). Mudu (2012) pinpoints 4 main features of social centres. The first one is that the great majority of social centres are born from experiences of squatting or occupying a physical place – normally abandoned or vacant –to debate and produce social and political activities. The act of physically occupying a facility incarnates people's revindication of what they have been denied (Solaro 1992). Here, the social claim at stake is the necessity to socialize and compare one another ideas. The resulting outcomes are very diverse, from the 'simple' building workshop to the creation of new cultural forms, like the Theatre of the Oppressed (Tolomelli, 2012). Secondly, within the centres, all activities performed are the result of horizontal decisions, which are fulfilled through periodic weekly organizational meetings. These are open to everybody who wants to debate future political actions on the ground, organise events of every kind, or just enjoy sociality. This organizational model – which on a macro scale could resemble the one of deliberative or assembly democracy – is not easy to implement efficiently and, more evidently, it slows down the decision-making process. Yet, for the same reasons of respect and consensus, it is the only replicated way of conducting organizational and social life within centres. Thirdly, activists are volunteers, hence they do not perceive any wage, even if their work is reflecting an economic value. As a matter of fact, social centres produce value, through each one of their activity. For instance, workshops participations are normally allowed on free donation which, eventually, is not given to teachers, but to a centre's common fund that will fund the activities. Essentially, while producing value, the economic one is not the one that activists want to valorise. Indeed, to sustain activities, centres need money, and activists prefer to cede a part of the income they 'produce' for the centre, to generate more activities that will generate more sociality within the centre. It has to be said that, recently, some centres decided to provide wages (self-wages) to sustain activists. This raised disagreements and disappointments among a part of militants, arguing that such a measure goes against social centres' purposes. The result chapter will better analyse activists' opinions on this matter. The fourth and last is a visual one. A distinguishing symbol that social centres in the 80s adopted as a sign of recognition: a thunderbolt breaking a circle; the representation of breaking the 'closed spatial totality' (circle), depicting precise rationality and the absence of distinction, crossed by an 'explosive energy' (thunderbolt), fragmented and interruptive, imposing its refusal on a constrictive reality (Tiddi, 1997). It is important to mention the pliability of such traits. For instance, a lot of centres, at the date, do not use the acronym CSOA anymore. While substantially all of them were born through

illegal occupation, today some of them are lawful entities – another decision, as the self-waging, that historically raised not few polemics among centres.

The centres, which through the words of an interviewee *are nothing without the people that work on and for them*[1], constantly produce alternative ways of socialization. Social centres since squatting and occupation practices started have been great generators of counterculture art. Also, when the practice of occupying and squatting consolidated, in the mid-80s, social centres started to organize an ever-growing number of activities of different kinds – including ludic and sports activities, such as skateboarding and boxing, creative ones, like hack labs or reading clubs, and manual, such as construction workshops (Mudu, 2012).

3.3.3 Development and diffusion in Italy

While one can imagine, nurtured by newspaper articles and stereotyping ideas[2], that social centres are violent and troubling entities – a perception connected to the early activities of social centres – devoted to party drugs and physical resistance in protests, they represent something else. As mentioned, social centres start diffusing in the national territory in the 70s. In those years, the country was undergoing a fragile and particular moment of transition. On one hand, actions of repressions against the protest of 68 and the consequent nascent anti-systemic movement, together with the promulgation of new liberal reforms, were daily occurrences. On the other, the presence of the biggest Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano) in Europe, an important labour union tradition, and a general ferment within the newborn left parties were motives of hope among lower social classes (Mudu, 2012). Nevertheless, left parties and union trades failed the promises of creating new spaces suitable for sociality and political debate, while fragmented extra-parliamentary forces (the predecessors of social centres) were unable to organize and implement a joint action plan, resulting in a disillusioned reality for the 'collective cause' of the emerging activist groups (Melucci, 1996). In addition, a strong disruption was represented by neoliberalist government policies, that encouraged further fragmentation of interests and processes of commodification (Mudu, 2012). Essentially, those years were the cradle of the major changes that are happening today in our cities – privatization, commodification, gentrification, but also growing unemployment and precariat. To confront such a socio-economic panorama, activists started to squat and occupy, to attract attention and to finally be able to debate political ideas.

The quantity and completeness of essays regarding social centres in Italy increased a lot over time. Whilst the first studies, in twenty years time frame (1970-80), are limited, between the 90s and the first decade of 2000 they grew exponentially. As with any other socio-anthropologic study subject, research on social centres started to be more assorted (e.g., ethnography). While a lot of essays focus on the local scale, describing the activities of specific centres (Membretti, 2007; Piazza 2011), few provide overviews on a national level (Tiddi, 1997; Mudu 2004). Very interesting appear autobiographies or auto-research, directly conducted by the same activists of social centres, which display different perspectives on the '*movimento*' – generally, that is what it is called among activists. Mudu (2012), an enthusiastic observer of social centres in Italy, through meticulous research among literature and fieldwork, composes a clear and brief analysis of their development throughout the years. While describing 4 different generations of social centres, the author gives an overview of the time in history, the characteristics, and the kind of claims and revindications of the struggles in each wave. I will refer to the author's essay in order to briefly expose the history of social centres.

The activity of the first generation, determined between 1975 and 1985, focused on big cities, especially in Milan. During major changes in the political milieu of the country – for the first time there was the possibility for a left government to administrate – extra-parliamentary left forces were able to intertwine factories and schools' struggles through an active presence in the urban city ground. The Movement was normally organizing events spontaneously, and the formed groups were not avoiding radical and tough actions, like physical clashes or sabotage (Mudu, 2012). The fights were mainly related to socio-economic class conflicts,

[1] F., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[2] https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/dallaskatasuna-allofficina-99-palestre-chi-sfregia-paese.html

directly referring to anticapitalism and to the inequity of power relations in industrial jobs. The second generation (1980-90), after a neat decrease in activity and the disappearance of many centres (either evicted or abandoned), started focussing its efforts on anti-nuclear campaigns, nationally, and fighting heroin diffusion, locally. It is from this generation on that social centres started having the 'social' features, by which activists started understanding the necessity of creating inclusive spaces and diverse socialities. Hence, the structure of social centres starts shaping itself and, albeit not clearly explicit, a necessity to unite the struggles start wafting outside the same centres. During these years, punk and anarchist groups were very active. The third generation, comprising the whole decade of the 90s, is characterized by the emergence of many more occupations, due to a great university mobilization in 1990, in response to a series of educational reforms (Legrottaglie, 2019). Interests in international social causes started to target specific realities (e.g., Chiapas, Palestine), resulting in activities for their support, such as donations or informative events. What is more, this generation started communicating with national and local authorities, to negotiate for recognition and legalization. This, until today, is a subject of debate among different centres. The last generation pinpointed by Mudu (2012), started in 2000 and, virtually, goes on today. Here, the political and social fights are really diverse, depending on local needs. Centres from the south and centre of Italy are strongly committed to immigrants' rights and support, while centres in the north have more care in providing low-income citizens with affordable (normally squatted) residences or food securitization. On a national level, the fight against the privatization of common resources is at the forefront, whilst, on the international sphere, it seems that there is no centre that does not belong to the no-global movement. A little remark has to be made regarding 'social centres' emerging from the right political heritage. While these consider themselves 'social centres', they have completely different motives and purposes of sociality, which are far distant from the one examined here. Striving and aiming for peaceful coexistence has always been the main focus of every centre action. What is more, social centres want to create a new geography of politics within the country, stressing (and acting upon) the necessity for peripheric realities to be supported and to fight against their citizens' exclusion.

3.4 The Florentine's case

Wandering around my hometown, while moving from one social centre to the other, several times I seek to understand the feeling of being a first-time tourist in Florence. To be immersed and to witness one of the most renowned cities of Italy and the world, which it is considered the cradle of *Renaissance* – one of the most used hashtags on Instagram when coupled with Florence. Among the whole architectural beauty, impossible to ignore, I pinpointed some elements that made me think. The first one was, indeed, the crowdedness that, despite Covid-19 restrictions, literally clogs some areas (e.g., the area in front of the Duomo), making it impossible for a pedestrian to walk through squares or roads. Secondly, it struck me, during a 35 degrees July day, the difficulty in finding a place to sit that was not privately owned, and the impossibility to use public sites to rest (I was personally asked to stand up from a sidewalk by a police officer). I walked down the historical site (formally *District 1*) of Florence several times but, honestly, I cannot recall a moment – or maybe my mind just wisely decided not to – in which I walked in the city centre during the warmest days of the year looking for a cool place to rest without finding it. The third thing that impressed me was the shift, in the number of retail shops as well as in presence of tourists, from the core of district 1 (Piazza del Duomo) to its edges, where one of the squats I researched is located, *Via del Leone*. The closer I got to the squat, the less 'trendy' or 'chic' shops I noticed, replaced by local shops (e.g., the neighbourhood's butchery, little barber shops, etc.), which gave the area a more 'local' atmosphere. The same consideration can be made for benches, significantly more presents and, as said, tourists, substantially diminished. Here, in one of the squares, it is present a concrete sports pitch, next to a little playground. The city centre, filled with fashions shops, city tour vendors, and restaurant waiters to sell out the best traditional beefsteaks of the city, absorbs the visitors within its chaos, making them part of the freneticism that characterises the city. It does not let one think about what one is surrounded by, but just to 'live and act', creating this loop of culinary and art consumption that makes what some scholars define 'museum-city' or 'museification of the city' (Loda, 2012). Just after crossing the *Ponte Vecchio* (the old bridge), the ambience becomes calmer and more welcoming. The *Oltrarno* (literally *Over the*

Arno River), the area that hosts *Via del Leone* occupation, together with other activities and cultural associations created by and for residents, reveals itself as a genuine area of the city. Even the nightlife changes between the two areas. While in the city centre, until the Ponte Vecchio, night bars are more expensive, and host a more 'fancy' clientele – where tourists are the majority – the *Oltrarno* neighbourhood is less frequented by tourists and the nightlife is definitely more informal.

This little introduction will serve me to analyse different aspects of the Florentine urban framework, in order to display the 'setting' in which social centres are located.

3.4.1 Overtourism in Florence

Of course, the most visible aspect of this tale is the ubiquity of tourism. In Florence, it seems quite a paramount element of its urban panorama. Stendhal, a French writer with a keen passion for Italian cities – the syndrome of Stendhal was named after his psychiatric breakdown during his first visit to a Florentine church – already noticed in 1820 the massive presence of foreign visitors in the city (Innocenti et al, 2014). The central neighbourhood (district 1), apart from a few areas, seems permeated by tourism and, today, even less touristy areas like the *Oltrarno*, are receiving more visitors' attention. It is likely that tourists started to notice the more 'authentic' parts of the city. To give an idea of the tourist flow, in 2019 Florence was the fourth most visited Italian city after Rome, Venice, and Milan (ISTAT, 2019). According to the official municipality's data, the number of presences in 2018 exceeded 15 million (Table 1). This data, not without methodological doubts, is calculated by summing up the people that arrive in hotels and extra-hospitality accommodations within the metropolitan area of Florence (all the municipalities within the Florentine province). The resulting data grows constantly and, making an exception for the pandemic period, it does not seem to stop during the next years[3].

Year	Arrivals	Presences	% Variation Arrivals	% Variation Presences
2010	4.248.818	11.418.183	----	-----
2011	4.487.472	12.402.781	5,6%	8,6%
2012	4.489.764	12.201.728	0,1%	-1,6%
2013	4.654.791	12.565.605	3,7%	3,0%
2014	4.810.175	13.024.614	3,3%	3,7%
2015	4.944.939	13.703.971	2,8%	5,2%
2016	4.975.687	14.129.125	0,6%	3,1%
2017	5.270.527	14.936.605	5,9%	5,7%
2018	5.306.997	15.495.881	0,7%	3,7%
2019	5.372.412	15.840.756	1,2%	2,2%

Table 1Arrivals and presence in Florence (province). Source: https://www.regione.toscana.it/statistiche/banca-dati-turismo

Considering that the data includes arrivals (people who arrive and sojourn) and presences (number of nights spent in official accommodation of the arrived people) within the whole province of Florence, this information might not count the ones that are not sojourning in the province but, still, visit the city during daytime. Despite this interpretation – it can be considered methodologically rough and slightly arrogant to just suppose that every person that sleeps outside the city will visit it – the consideration I am about to make will not be affected by this estimation, being the number of visitors visibly high. Moreover, this amount is likely to be an underestimation. The authors of "*La Filosofia del Trolley*" (Galli & Lensi, 2019) – literally "The philosophy of the Trolley" – conducted a thorough analysis of overtourism numbers in Florence, caring to research the problems related to the extremization of touristic policies carried on by the municipality. They cleverly point out that, within calculations of the touristic flow, the municipality's data is not considering daily visitors who sojourn in other provinces or regions and come to visit Florence – by bus, train, cars, and so on. Otherwise, when some data was registered in the past, today it is not collected anymore. For example, according to a municipality report from December 2018, 43.169 tourist buses entered the city in 2015 (Comune di Firenze, 2019). The report states that in the same year, buses transported more than 2 million people, of which almost 70% of these are daily visitors, not included in the official data of the municipality. However, after 2018, the

[3] https://www.comune.fi.it/comunicati-stampa/turismo-227-milioni-di-presenze-tra-gennaio-e-maggio-2022-attesi-16-milioni-il

municipality stopped reporting data on incoming buses, making it impossible to retrieve data on the issue. Another report (Cesifin, 2016) estimates that city daily visitors are around 50% of official presence – which means that the presence in 2019 was more than 20 million, not 15. Within all this chaotic information, it is crucial to pinpoint how institutional data are always reporting fewer tourists since what is considered as 'touristic flow' is just the number of nights spent by the accommodation facilities registers. For instance, while institutional reports were registering slightly less than 10 million visitors in 2015, estimates hypothesized the double (Galli & Lensi, 2019). This last data is also confirmed by the Regional Institute for Economic Planning of Tuscany (IRPET) which reports that if the official touristic flow of visitors in Tuscany is 48 million, the real data is 96 million (IRPET, 2018). Florence in 2018 snapped up 28% of the whole regional touristic flow, hence 27 million tourists approximal, which amount to almost double the 15 million of institutional data. Another element is the density of tourists. District 1 (historical centre) is the densest area, extended by 11,4 km^2 of the city ground. Here is also located a UNESCO area of 5,5 km^2 which, as imaginable, registers the highest rate of tourists:residents of the district. While the ratio of tourists per resident is 3:1 for district 1 (Galli & Lensi, 2019), the ratio raises to 26:1 in the UNESCO area (CNR-IRISS, 2020). It is important to note the difficulty to retrieve data. As a matter of fact, the information provided by authorities – either national or local– seems not fully appropriate. Some of it is not coherent – such as the abrupt stop on buses entrance report – misleading or incomplete – some data is provided in the form of 'metadata' without a key line, rendering it slow and deceptive to retrieve the correct numbers. While I kept on questioning myself on the lack of data on touristic flows, I could only give two, opposite, answers. The first, more likely – but which would denote a certain degree of incompetence – is the difficulty, for statistic offices, to retrieve specific data on touristic incomes, since they consider 'tourists' only the ones who spent nights in Florence. Indeed, accesses to Florence are multiple – trains, cars, buses, and more – and might be hard to precisely collect. However, it is not understandable the lack of efforts (likely in terms of resources) to retrieve such data, as well as the lack of some esteem to cover such 'voids', or an explanation to clarify the difficulties in collecting them. The second one, more conspiring, sees the municipality data collection as a political move to conceal correct data, which could result in fewer citizen complaints.

Problem analysis arises spontaneously: it is in fact impossible, for a city of barely more than 360.000 people, to efficiently provide for a service demand of so many city users – being the real number closer to 15 million or 27. The most visible issue of the city regards its physical transformation. Overcrowding may lead to slow down the rhythm of the city for the locals. Deterioration, privatisation, and commodification of public spaces seem to be causes of big discontent among citizens.

3.4.2 The urban fabric

The historical centre of the city, 5,5 km^2 of the first district has been listed as World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982, supported by the International Council on Monument and Sites (ICOMOS) which described the area as a "*unique artistic realization, a chef-d'oeuvre* […] *the greatest concentration of universally renowned works of art in the world is found here*" (ICOMOS, 1982). Florence is often at the centre of debates about privatization, commodification, and in general, historical phases that attracted investments from all over the world (Ponzini, 2009; Gervasi, 2008; Jenkins, 2014). As a matter of fact, the city was named the "Disneyland of the Renaissance" around the years of the UNESCO nomination (Gherardi & Tondelli, 1987). The main reasons for investment attraction are tourist-related activities, and, among these, the real estate market is probably among the most disruptive for the community, since short-term rent facilities offered by sharing economy platforms have strongly imposed themselves in the accommodation market. The city centre of Florence is highly dense with accommodation facilities which, according to institutional data, are 16.9 per square kilometre[4].

[4] https://www.regione.toscana.it/statistiche/dati-statistici/turismo

In this matter, Airbnb was among the strongest elements that boosted such a process. It is visually impressive to look at the data on Florence provided by *InsideAirbnb*¸ a website that measures the presence and the impacts of short-term accommodations in cities around the world, retrieving data directly from the platform (Figure 2).

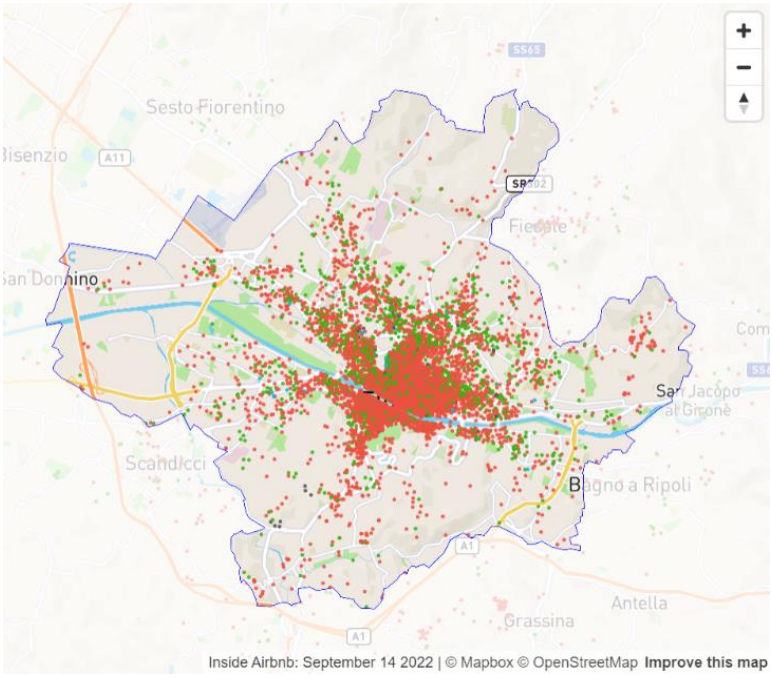

Figure 2 Short accommodations in Florence: entire apartments (red), single rooms (green), and hotel rooms (blue). Source: http://insideairbnb.com/florence/

Today the number of advertisements published is 10.727 of which just 1.5% are hotel rooms. The huge red 'stain' indicating the major density of accommodation, traces the boundaries of the historical core of the city centre (figure 3), especially the UNESCO area.

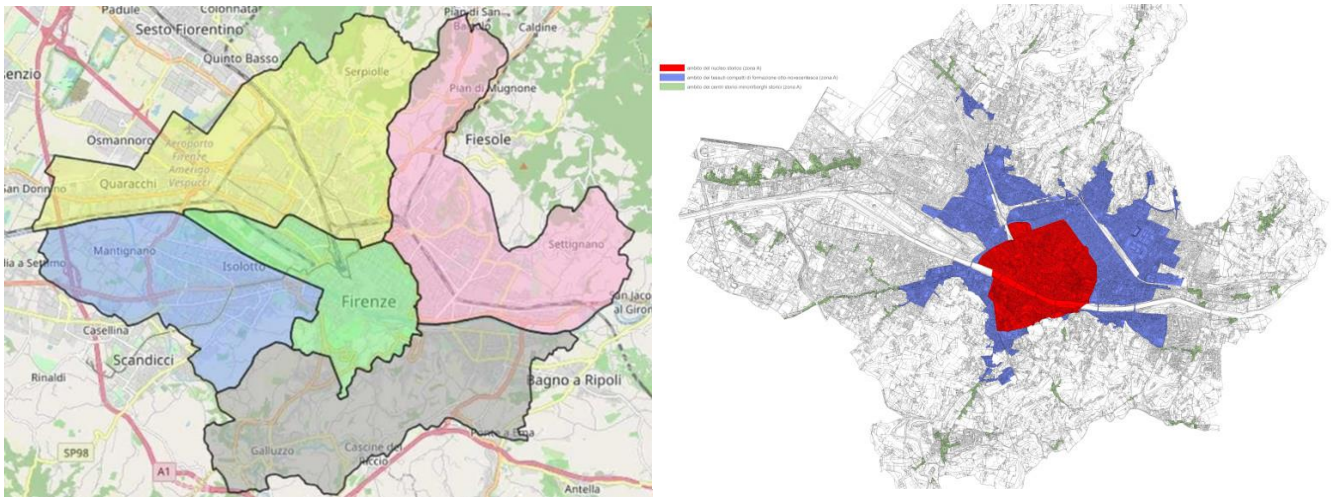

Figure 3: on the left, Districts subdivision: 1 (green), 2(red), 3(grey), 4(blue), 5(yellow); on the right, in red, the UNESCO area, part of the District 1 *Source:https://opendata.comune.fi.it/?q=metarepo/datasetinfo&id=5e08844a-c0d8-4d64-a3b2-d1ab58d9283f; https://www.comune.fi.it/dalle-redazioni/contributi-gli-esercenti-dei-centri-storici*

A lot of the advertisements are online all over the year, which indicates exclusive use for renting purposes. Yet, the most astonishing data is the 'top hosts' section. The top three hosts own 390 advertisements while the first 20 own 1121, which is 10% of the total advertised rent units[5]. The data suggests that this market is strongly led by owners of multiple properties. Among these, big real estate enterprises are involved, owning facilities in many touristic cities in Florence and, more generally, in the whole of Europe. What is more, this trend seems

[5] http://insideairbnb.com/florence

to be 'spilling-over' peripheric neighbourhoods (Galli & Lensi, 2019). All of this is heavily affecting the real estate market. The tourist rental market has been replacing the housing market, considering that 70% of available real estate in the rental market is destined for short-term accommodations[6]. What is more – and also predictable – the number of tourists and residents in the city have opposite trends, especially for those living in the UNESCO area. This area, in 1991, hosted 73.000, while in 2019 dropped to 39.500[7]. The real estate market is not the only problem in Florence, even though it is likely to be the main cause of the negative socio-economic repercussion on the residents. An issue that has been raising a lot of claims from the local and cultural associations is the loss of cultural identity. Through a set of new regulations, both local[8] and national (Decreto 114/1998), the local administration perpetrated real estate policies whose scope is to neglect the residents' requests for changes – undermining also their well-being. By boosting touristic-related activities, and not promoting any law for lower classes to retain in the city (such as social housing), the housing and renting prices keep on raising, forcing residents and local traditional shops to move or, in many cases, to forcibly stop the activity[9] - as a consequence of the many opening permits that the municipality issues to privates. This, as exposed below, spread a sentiment of discontent among the residents.

3.4.3 Local administration and residents' perception

Despite the condition of the housing market and the depopulation, local governments have been quite reticent in acting upon such problems. Actually, municipality administrations are one of the causes of this never happening. As mentioned, policies in favour of residents are yet to be done. Local associations and activist groups, periodically, recall the municipality about the poor management of public spaces. Claims of activists and residents regard a wide variety of local problems – housing emergency, economic exploitation of workers, speculation, and more. To mention a few, I will display problems more often debated in social centres assemblies. Just to be clear, these are not recognized as problems only by social centres, but by different parties – lawful associations, individuals, a few city councillors, and so on.

During my research, the "municipal structural plan" was a recurrent argument. This is a periodically revised document that includes modification to the urban landscape of the city – by restructuring, fixing roads and other urban issues. One of the most recent, in 2018, raised a lot of complaints because of the possibilities opened to privates on real estate speculation[10] which, in turn, might result in more native residents leaving the city centre, as well as further increasing the distance between residents' needs and the municipalities' actions. As an article from a local association states *foreign residents and city users that do not plan in residing in the city for a long time* […] *do not have the right to vote*[11]. Fewer native residents could mean an easier governable city, due to a lack of voters. This might be explained by the fact that a lot of 'lost' citizens – due to their forced expulsion from the city – are probably the ones that are more contrary to touristification. Since the expulsed represent a great number of the population, this might result in more opposed-to-touristification voters disappearing from the electorate. I am not arguing that the retained ones are in favour of overtourism or touristification – maybe some are, because of their commercial businesses – but, likely, these are not much concerned or annoyed, thus they are not willing to actively contrast or complain about it. Hence, the city is prone to private investments and residents' needs neglect. Through the implementation of many structural plans over the years, every kind of public service oriented to citizens – from more targeted ones, like universities and courthouses, to the more frequented ones, such as postal offices and health centres – has been decentralized (Talanti, 2020). A Florentine writer identified the expulsion of various University campuses outside the core city of Florence as a strategic move to depopulate the area from university students, to then prepare the ground for Airbnb rents and the 'museification' of the city (Santoni, 2016). Conversely, the

[6] https://www.sunia.it/notizie-dalle-regioni/toscana-emergenza-abitativa-cgil-e-sunia-piu-risorse-per-inquilini-in-difficolta-e-investimenti-in-edilizia-pubblica/
[7] https://opendata.comune.fi.it/?q=metarepo/datasetinfo&id=statistiche_demografiche
[8] https://accessoconcertificato.comune.fi.it/OdeProduzione/FIODEWeb2.nsf/AttiWEB/26B4BCDC1AD24D72C1257E43007AC761/$File/2015_C_00025.pdf
[9] https://corrierefiorentino.corriere.it/firenze/notizie/cronaca/21_agosto_17/qui-ero-l-ultimo-residenti-ora-che-sono-stato-sfrattato-ci-torno-ogni-giorno-4401602c-ff32-11eb-8784-c49b79e408aa.shtml
[10] https://www.perunaltracitta.org/2018/04/17/firenze-il-turismo-consuma-il-diritto-alla-casa/
[11] https://www.perunaltracitta.org/2018/04/17/firenze-il-turismo-consuma-il-diritto-alla-casa/#_ftn4

journalist highlights the importance of students' presence in order to stop the process of commodification of the city. "Where there is student life, the city breathes" he states (Santoni, 2016).

Another element harshly criticized by scholars (Tarsi et al., 2020), associations, and the same social centres, is the aura of real estate agents adopted by the administration. Particularly interesting has been the promotion of a document that arose shock and anger. In 2014, the municipality published *Invest in Florence*, a 'catalogue' of 59 on-sale buildings, 42 of which belong to other public institutions or private entities. Every building advertisement is provided with a thorough description of the place, the distance from the main attractions of the city and some pictures of the facility. It is a fact that the design and the description of the catalogue resemble a real estate agency promotional brochure, as pinpointed by activists. This, as well as the structural plan, has been widely debated in all the social platforms of the city, not only in social centres. Also, one of the occupied buildings I research (the one occupied by *Next Emerson*) is on this document and underwent two auctions in the last year.

To ensure the fact that this trend is not only recognized by 'active' entities on the ground, such as local associations, a study of 2020, according to surveys and arrivals in the city, showed the distresses perceived by residents due to tourism (Liberatore et al, 2020). The research displays residents' opinions on the impact of tourism on their life. Even if they recognize its economic contribution, the majority of them see tourism as the main cause of services and goods raising prices. Albeit its importance for the economy, tourism is not considered by residents as a factor to improve urbanistic planning. More importantly, there is a common feeling of alienation and detachment residents experience within their same neighbourhoods, as a result of the growing presence of foreigners (Liberatore et al, 2020). A little part of Florentines (17%) is happy about tourism growth and wishes for its continuation, while more than 40% is concerned about its development and wishes a more considered tourist planning. The authors recognize the huge number of touristic presences an element that put at risk the sense of belonging of the Florentine people. Acknowledged by this and other essays that display municipality deficiencies (Talanti, 2020; Jenkins, 2014; Loda, 2012; Galli & Lensi, 2019), it seems an urgent necessity that of shifting from touristic-centred to resident-centred politics, in order to promote participatory processes that could benefit the latter, without neglecting the (more contained) presence of the former.

The administration of Florence, in addition to what was just written above, has to carry the weight of past legacies, as any other city. And, as in any other city, it is a common opinion (and fact) that the population tends to criticize the administration. Furthermore, considering the Florentine population – by authors' descriptions, and personal opinion, Florentines are 'rough' and 'unrefined'; it is not news among Florentines to invent particular rude words to describe moods and behaviours – it is unlikely that positive feedback is commonly addressed towards its administration. Nevertheless, there is a common positive memory of one particular mandate. A positive and nostalgic memory, the one of Giorgio La Pira, the Florentine mayor in 1951-57 and 1961-65. La Pira, a university professor and keen antifascist, was a member of the Constituent Assembly after the fall of Mussolini's dictatorship. Admired by many of its colleagues (Amodeo, 1991), La Pira has been acknowledged as one of the most benevolent of all the mayors in the history of the city (Lugli, 1987). Through his extreme dedication to the poorest and most disadvantaged people of Florence, he achieved a positive popular reputation. Restructuring a part of the city centre, instituting basic education facilities and constructing a new residential area for the evicted, were just a few of the works he did for the population's welfare. During my research, I recognized the intentions of observed struggles as very similar to the ones of La Pira. What is a priority among urban social struggles is the care for the rejected (marginalised, poor, immigrants, precariats, etc.), to rehabilitate their concrete potential to shape their city – hence their future. A proactive role in urban life – to take concrete actions for the city to change – is, as we will see later, an essential trait of social struggles they want to transmit to people.

To summarise, the number of visitors to Florence, like any other city, is hard to assert precisely. Nevertheless, the presence of specific areas, like the city core, which interests around 11 km^2, is extremely crowded. This affects a lot of spheres of Florentines' daily life, from the difficulty to reach the city centre smoothly – Florence is a tiny city, and the mobility system is not efficient in terms of traffic fluidity – to the detachment that a community can feel from being immersed in a reality that does not represent and belong to its members. To

better manage the situation, more attention should be brought to the residents' necessities and desires. It seems necessary to mark lines and determine whether a citizen can decide upon certain matters and to what degree. Then, whatever is decided, might have to confront with population's replies.

3.5 Next Emerson and *Via del Leone*: introduction to study cases

In response to this complicated situation, all different kinds of realities led by citizens (or 'bottom-up') have arisen throughout the years in the city. All of them have different paths but are moved from similar scopes and aim in the same direction. Mainly, the idea is to stimulate the most inclusive ideas to meet the needs of the residents, especially the most excluded. For instance, a football club (*Lebowski* football club), on the outskirt of the city, is owned by its same fans, which are pursuing different ways to conduct a sports club – collective property, educational projects, anti-sexism, and more. Another one is the *Nidiaci*'s garden, a cultural association that aims at providing free ludic and artistic workshops to the youth of the neighbourhood. Others are spread within and outside the city borders: community radios, youth centres, artistic collectives, LGBT+ and feminist groups, workers collectives and many more. Despite their quantity, not all residents (or frequenters) of Florence are aware of their existence. As a matter of fact, as described by one interviewee, they are 'silent' to the rest of the population, until, substantially, some newspaper talks about them for some reason. And, oftentimes, these reasons are not to praise them. Especially with regards to social centres, media are harsh and sententious about actions they undertake within the city. The majority depicts social centres as degrading and violent, without mentioning the reasons for actions or the fundaments of their struggles[12]. Few others (usually independent press), normally connected to the same civil associations or directly to the centres, try to show the 'other side of the coin', in order to counterbalance the negative representation of mainstream news, by describing activities and potential positive impacts[13].

My research focussed on two social centres: *Next Emerson* and *Via del Leone*. This chapter will serve to further deeper the local surrounding of each one of the centres. Furthermore, I will display the difference in terms of internal organization and member composition, types of activities, and the kind of scopes

3.5.1 Via del Leone

The first one, named by its first squatters *Via del Leone* – named after the location's street – is situated in the beating heart of Florence, at the edges of district 1. The neighbourhood is called *San Frediano* (located in the already mentioned *Oltrarno*) and, among the whole city, it seems to be the last bulwark of residents' life in Florence. As explained in the description of my walk, the urban shape changes significantly while approaching this area. Streets are smaller (or, as an activist likes to say, 'human-sized') and visibly less crowded with fashion shops and tourists. The squares are 'alive', and the playground is probably the only one in the whole city centre. The area is, by far, the less gentrified and privatized of the whole city. Maybe it is just my imagination, but here random social interactions resemble a classic, friendly, neighbourhood life. I always have frequented the city centre of Florence, but before this time I never focussed on these differences in sociality between the two close areas.

After thorough research in the neighbourhood, activists occupied the vacant house in 2013. The occupation is divided into two spaces: the ground floor is used for common activities – a bar, a study room, a little library, a room for assemblies, and a small garden – while the other 2 floors are residential. Even though just a few activists sleep in the house, the assembly can reach up to 15 presences, or even more during the organization of particularly big events. Activists are very young, considering that the average age would be around 25/26 years old, with some peaks over 30. The building, in the past owned by the municipality, belongs to a public/private company that sells properties on behalf of contractors (in this case, the municipality).

The purposes are, since the beginning, clearly directed at neighbourhood care, in all of its facets. Militants stress the importance of keeping traditional shops and public spaces away from privatization or commodification. As a matter of fact, the neighbourhood identity seems of paramount importance to them.

[12] https://www.lanazione.it/firenze/cronaca/santo-spirito-cordone-1.6498909
[13] https://www.perunaltracitta.org/homepage/

The occupation claims the necessity to resist speculations and gentrification processes of the city and, most importantly, complaints about the absence of aggregative spaces for young people in the neighbourhood.

All the activities are connected to the political fight they are conducting on the ground. Oftentimes, activities related to the maintenance of the neighbourhood identity are supported (or promoted by) other social struggles. Throughout the years, these have been many and of different kinds: the assistance to tenants that are undergoing eviction procedures (with an assigned housing help desk); the support of local food necessities (as the food securitization help desk); the fight for the preservation of different type of spaces (e.g., a garden for children, a local health facility, a public square that was to become a parking lot); cultural activities (e.g., debates, movie clubs, recording studio).

Via del Leone is an occupation whose militants are quite unwilling to engage in any kind of relations with public institutions. Successful attempts of left city councillors in approaching the occupation have been few – not much in terms of deep collaboration, but rather on participating in the same activities, such as protests. This does not mean that militants do not confront municipalities (e.g., sit-ins, protests, etc.), but they avoid building a communicative channel with institutions. However, I will make this clearer in the result chapter.

3.5.2 CSA nEXt Emerson

Next Emerson is one of the older occupations in the city, counting more than 30 years of activity. The facilities occupied historically have been multiple. The social struggle – named originally *Ex-Emerson* – was born in 1989, the year of the occupation of an electronic company (*Emerson Electronics s.p.a.*) facility. Evicted in 1993, the group of militants occupied another facility, while maintaining the same name. After another eviction, in 2006, the struggle occupied the current facility – after temporarily squatting a building near the airport – and changed its name to *nEXt Emerson*.

This occupation, which is a social centre – we could facetiously say 'certified' by the acronym CSA – display very different features from the previous. Firstly, it is located in the neighbourhood of *Castello*, on the very edges of the entire municipality of Florence – on the road that literally separates Florence from the closest municipality – and the surrounding, definitely less crowded than *Via del Leone*, is not an object of fierce tourist contention like other spaces in the city centre. Despite this, being one of the biggest social centres in the city, and thanks to the activities conducted during its existence, the social centre gained a reputation far beyond city boundaries. The occupied area, a facility of a former factory, is composed of three big sheds, of which two are used by the activists. Owned by a building housing cooperative that underwent went broke some years ago, the facility has been put on sale for residential purposes. As a matter of fact, it is part of the buildings on sale in *Invest in Florence*. Within the last year (July 2021- August 2022) the place has undergone two auctions, both unattended.

The place is not residential, but the presences in the assembly are way larger than via del Leone, going from a minimum of 15/20 to 40, during special occasions. The composition is really diverse among the militants. While *Via del Leone* hosted mainly young people, *Next Emerson* activists' age range is very wide: from below 18 to above 60 years old. Despite this, the way of conducting the meetings does not differ albeit, as one can imagine, the dispersion of debates is more consistent and evident.

When looking into the scopes of the centre, they relate to the ones of via del Leone: the main is to hamper the process of city gentrification. More precisely, by talking with the activists and reading their blogs, the aim is to stop building speculations and to foster active citizenship among residents. Here as well is important to bond with the neighbourhood. Other social fights have been conducted throughout the years, depending on the circumstances (e.g., against the waste incinerator, or against the expansion of the local airport)

The activities of the centre are very diverse: a popular gym, skatepark, tango courses, a self-managed museum, and hacking workshops, are just a few of the many activities. Albeit resisting speculation and gentrification – by organizing protests and informative events – remains the main object of meeting debates, activists in this centre, through the conduction of ludic, sportive, and creative activities, seem to have a peculiar approach.

Actually, from an external eye, it seems that certain activities are not even linked to the political aim of this struggle. In reality, as an activist told me, even the organization of sports courses is entrenched with the political experience of the centre. As a matter of fact, this centre hosts a wide range which might not be recognised as political but, as I will display later on, have a deep correlation with the political and social aspects of the centre.

Differently from *Via del Leone*, the activists of *Next Emerson* are not reticent in engaging with (some parts of) the municipality, but 'do not even bend' to their will. As a matter of fact, they interact more or less regularly with some left councillors. However, they also maintain a certain distance from institutions, limiting communication when strictly necessary.

Shortly, these centres represent a fight for the resistance to unwanted changes in the city (speculations, privatization, commodification), and for sparking a conscious activity among the citizens. In each one of the activities unfolded, it is possible to witness the commitment each militant put in bonding with the local community. This is fundamental, not just to be accepted as an illegal resident, but to create a local network based on solidarity and mutual support. Also, theoretical concepts are, willingly or not, constantly debated within assemblies.

This chapter analysed some fundamental elements to lay the basis for deepening my research. The first part serves as a compass to understand, on a broad level, the problem of tourism and touristification, namely the excessive development of a city (social and urban) for the satisfaction of the tourist, rather than for the fulfilment of residents' needs. Later, I display a glimpse of the worldwide urban reactions to understand how residents' communities responded to problems that touristification generates. Consequently, a similar overview, narrowing the lens on the case of Florence, shows the reasons why Florence is considered a touristified city. This part, the largest, represents the problem statement of my research. Lastly, I give a little introduction to the centres, where I spent the majority of my time during the summer of 2021. The next chapter has the purpose of providing a relevant theoretical framework that will steer and support the analysis of my investigation, drawing mainly from the work of two authors, David Harvey and John Holloway.

4. Theoretical Framework

Let me, before digging up what I conceive to be core the experiences of the struggles like Via del Leone and Next Emerson, discuss some theoretical concepts. In order to try unfolding a clear and coherent theoretical framework, I will display the theory step by step. I will first consider the contextual precondition (briefly and generally) arguing that society, and the city specifically, is the cradle of capitalist evolution. As a matter of fact, through neoliberalist mechanisms (globalization, privatization, etc.) the city is constantly attracting new investments, in different contexts and for different (yet systemically, quite similar) reasons. The city is like a growing magnet, and is the main character – and the main dumping site – of capitalism. Wonderful and awful things arise from it, under essentially every aspect. For the analysis, I will use the concepts conceived by Harvey in his book *Rebel Cities* (2012), which provides an 'updated' version of the Right to the city displayed by Lefebvre in '*The right to the City'* (1968), especially his argumentations about the urbanization of the city as an administrators' tool to absorb economic surplus, and his conception of today urban struggles. Then, to give a more nuanced idea of the structure and aim that urban struggles should point at, I will make use of Holloway's concepts enounced in *Change the World without taking power* (2002) which, in my opinion, gives more suitable elements to refer to, when taking into consideration the potentialities and possibilities of anti-capitalist struggles. I will, occasionally, adjust the whole framework with theoretical concepts lent by different authors, to complement and render it more coherent.

4.1 Harvey's conception of the urban space: the city as a burden or blessing

One of the most striking elements of Harvey's book (2012), which I considered useful to introduce the problematic transformation of cities, lies in the title of this paragraph. As he states – or more precisely, as he cites urban sociologist Robert Park's words – the city is "*man's most consistent and on the whole, his most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart's desire. But, if is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself* (Harvey, 2012). I will try to unfold this argument gradually. As Harvey nicely puts it, if this is real, the vision of the city I want to live in should reflect the vision of what kind of person I want to be – even though being 'myself' is not a straightforward and free-from-influence enactment (*in making the city man has remade himself)*. If not the same, these ideas have to be strongly interconnected. Park, through his statement, suggests that the creator of the city is also its resident (*remake the world he lives in* […] *in which he is henceforth condemned to live*). Harvey also suggests that designing a city based on one's desires can be both beneficial and problematic – to become, for residents, either a burden or a blessing. On one hand, it may allow residents to create a city that suits their needs (blessing). On the other hand, there is a risk of making incorrect decisions that could result in an inhospitable living space for the city's inhabitants (burden). Therefore, residents need to be aware of their power to influence the appearance of their city and to make informed decisions that will create a livable and enjoyable urban environment for everyone. What is more, to create – or, better, to "shape" – the city, means to decide which kind of sociality will inhabit it which, consequently, should be recognized automatically as a collective act. In short, by being both residents and creators of their city, citizens are accountable for creating either their most wonderful spectacle or their worst nightmare (blessing or burden). Within this process of creation, residents have to be aware of which kind of sociality they want to live in – hence, as above, the kind of person I want to be. However, people are not the exact representation of themselves. Nobody transparently 'is', since 'being oneself' is not a pure act, but something influenced by the social, economic, cultural, and political spheres of society. All humans act under different conditions and different precepts. As it was for the Polis in ancient Greece, where citizens were constituted as part of the political life of the city (and the non-citizens as marginalised, and excluded from it), today people are constituted as consumers, and the non-consumers (e.g., poor, homeless) are excluded. This is to say that, the residents' will to change the city, might not – and surely is not – enough to implement a real change. A critical and ponderate approach to the issue is needed. However, I will come back to this point in the discussion chapter.

If residents of a city are effectively the ones who have the power to, urbanistically and socially, shape their neighbourhoods accordingly to their needs, there should be no issue at stake. But, as displayed in the previous chapter, a large number of cities are undergoing different kinds of urbanisation processes (gentrification, commodification, privatization, etc.) which are affecting the wellness of the residents. These mechanisms, besides physically transforming a city, generate and shape the role of the 'ideal' resident, namely that person – either a native resident or, as we saw, a temporary visitor – who perfectly bends to the will of 'city shapers', by now modellers of every aspect of the city – of what ought to be liked or hated. Consequently, plenty of urban movements have been raising from 'below', to fight problems that each one of them pinpoints in its context (Novy & Colomb, 2018). Anxieties and public discontent generated by the furious and insatiable transformation of the urban context are, according to Harvey, the *basis of urban life* (Harvey, 2012). Be it caused by excessive traffic congestion, the construction of new avant-gardist hotels, or rent increases, the dissatisfaction of local citizens is – and likely will be – always triggered by some form of urbanization. Harvey stresses the crucial role that urbanization plays in the development of a city. As a matter of fact, urbanization has always been conceived by administrators as the most efficient response to the excess value that the city is constantly producing. Indeed, '*the more the economic surplus, the more urbanization has to be perpetrated towards finding new profitable terrains'* (Harvey, 2012). In other words, the city needs urbanization to absorb the surplus that it creates – or, in even fewer words, capitalism accumulation in need of an outlet. History and Harvey, citing two specific cases – Paris 1853 and United States post-WWII restructuration, respectively led by Haussmann and Moses – remind us that urbanization brought financial benefits and – temporarily – saved local and national economies. Through structural renovations, urbanists allowed national economies to regrew, both thanks to new jobs and new waves of incoming investments that the 'renewed' cities attracted. Indeed, urbanization covered a role of paramount importance for the absorption of economic surpluses. What is more, where capital finds a way to 'breach' into a profitable terrain, it strives for maintaining such terrain profitable. When talking about urban spaces, an effective way to render them profitable is to upscale the relative class of residents. The richer are incomers, the larger will be the profit orbiting the city – through mercification, sparked by and through beautification processes, which lead to more investments, which lead to privatization, prices increase, and so on, in a never-ending loop. In its turn, urban masses that cannot afford the growing standards of the renovated city will be moved out, to its edges. Quite clearly, this can be recognized as a class phenomenon process. Harvey defines it as a 'constructive creation' mechanism. When implementing reconstruction of the city, which from a certain perspective might be a positive thing (structural and technological improvements), the disposal of the old and the institution of the – beautiful, efficient, avant-garde – new, is necessary. The old is comprised of buildings, roads, services, as well as former residents – involving a wide category that includes immigrants, precariats, homeless, and more – for which living in the city becomes impossible. It is straightforward that, this speculative process, despite being sparked and nurtured by mainly private investors – which represent capital – is necessarily endorsed and allowed by state organisms and entities.

All this mechanism, thoroughly explained by Harvey, implies that capital aims to hand its control over both state apparatus and the population as a whole. And having control over a population means controlling their "lifestyles as well as their labour power, their cultural and political values as well as their conceptions of the world" (Harvey, 2012). As a matter of fact, Harvey – and the later explained theory of Holloway – is concerned about the reconfiguration of the urban persona that comes with the physical reconstruction of the city. While landscapes in cities have been completely twisted, introducing a dense network of shopping agglomerations and sophisticated hotels, there is a clear focus to steer the needs and desires of people – the social, political, economic, and cultural influences of before. Every little thing has been mercified and, as Harvey states, there is a clear "building boom for the rich". Market niches have bloomed based upon the financial possibilities of the consumers, hinting that the same market is promoting freedom of choice – hence, liberating itself from whichever social or economic accountability. All of this whirlwind transformation lead people through constant and unperceived – but, indeed, powerful – processes of individualisation and consumerism. Harvey warns us on treating quality urban life as a commodity, since it may destroy the original social network of the city and create a new one, exclusively economically based, which will further exacerbate people's isolation and anxieties. I consider this as being one of the strongest leverages to maintain people 'under control'.

4.1.1 The right to the city

The most problematic issue of all, about the Florentine urban area, concerns the property of the right to decide upon the urban fabric of the city, namely who has the power to choose what has to be done in and with the urban space. Harvey, after providing a clear idea of how specific urban social classes have been excluded from such possibilities of changing urban space, asks himself whether such exclusion is honest and, most importantly, on the possibilities of reclaiming that right. Inspired by the book '*The right to the city'* (Lefebvre, 1968), as mentioned above, Harvey gives a revision of the conception of Lefebvre in more recent times, bringing attention to the characteristics that the right to shape the city has and should have. The author explains that the 'Right to the city' is an empty signifier. This means that everyone can claim and fill it with the meaning she wants. Belonging to whoever claims it, the issue then becomes a question of how to identify its legit holders; eventually, it comes to who can execute its substantive power. Since, as Harvey remembers Marx's words – *between equal rights force prevails* – it is imaginable that the right to the city does not belong to that portion of the population that actually shapes and mostly lives in the city: the lower class. As a matter of fact, investors, having more economic power than city workers and residents, are the ones reclaiming it. Nowadays it is easily visible how the right to the city is greedily held by the private or prone-to-private hands. Plenty of movements have arisen for the reconquest – even not directly affirmed – of 'The right to the city'. Moreover, being this an empty signifier, (whoever can claim and define it) *the definition of the right is itself an object of struggle, and that struggle has to proceed concomitantly with the struggle to materialize it* (Harvey, 2012). Harvey is aware of the cruciality of uniting the 'multitude of diverse urban (anti-capitalist) struggles', to point in a common and clear direction: to regain control over the uses of economic surplus.

Harvey stresses that "the right to the city" is not much related to individual access to city resources, but with the possibilities of citizens to collectively design a desired city – entailing undoubtfully collective rather than individual effort. Harvey's argumentation on the right to the city provides three theses he finds crucial for urban anti-capitalist struggles to succeed. Firstly, when flanked by the urban community, the work-based struggles gain a much greater chance of success, assuming that between the two realities lies a strong bond. And when this bond does not exist, because the urban setting is too diffused, a reconnection between the two realities must be implemented. Second, there is the necessity to shift the category of the struggle, normally assigned to the category of industrial workers, to a larger struggling class which comprehends all the workers occupied in the daily (re)production of the urban life – from the factory worker to the bricklayer, from the farmer to the food-deliverer, and so on. In short, to move the struggle from the factory to the urban space is a necessity to start regaining power over the city. As Harvey clearly poses it, the class struggle must not be recognized as exclusively 'proletarian' anymore, but it has to include the more modern 'precariat' class, as well as any other urban struggle (e.g., immigrants, LGBT+, homeless, etc.). Lastly, Harvey stresses that, while labour exploitation has to maintain its central role in anti-capitalist movements, all categories of struggle must have equal status. Both the workers' struggles – industrial or urban – and the struggles that actively attempt to recover control over the surplus value of the city (the right to the city), are equally important. The recognition of a multiplicity of struggles – a multitude, according to a lot of authors, especially Hardt and Negri – has to be an essential characteristic of every urban struggle in order to succeed.

4.2 Screaming against capital

Harvey's conception of recovering the right to shape the city by the urban masses is very compelling and well-organized. It provides a clear explanation of how the urban masses, having little economic power to invest in the city, are the first to be excluded from the possibilities to express their vision on how to design urban space. It also gives useful suggestions for the urban movements to regain that right. While reading it though, a question arose in my mind. How are these movements supposed to act? How can they, despite their will and awareness, act upon and against something that is much more powerful than them? Harvey would suggest creating different realities, through alternative day practices to everyday life. But what does it mean? In this section, I will try to answer that question, by providing the visceral and crude theorization which, through *Changing the world without taking power*, Holloway (2002) offers us.

4.2.1 The scream

Holloway starts its theory by making a neat and strong assumption – which I personally find to be true, but many would criticize. He states that generally speaking, each one of us (humans) suffers, from different causes. And what embodies this suffering is 'the scream'. He argues that this scream is the production of an unwanted reality, the frustration for all the things that humanity does not want to be, but are. By stating 'We scream', the author wants to include all social and personal sufferings that humankind has been receiving since the birth of the capitalistic society. In short, the scream is the negation of a reality that people do not want. Moreover, since we are all living the same reality, the scream is a collective scream, a shared struggle. Throughout the book, it is clear Holloway's will to shake the reader, to awaken her. He wants the reader to understand the problematic origins of the scream and, most importantly, its potential for changing things. The author recognizes two characteristics of the scream: one is the horror side – a scream that entails a messianic hope for things to change, the waiting for a 'miracle' – and the other is the hoping side – a proactive scream – which is not passively waiting for some good to happen, but it mobilizes itself. When these two characteristics are separated, the scream becomes a cry for help, a scream in despair with no action. Like a fly trapped in the spider web, humanity must act (rapidly) to make changes, and not just to (compliantly) scream in despair, waiting either to end in the spider's jaws or to be saved by a hero. Humanity should look for potential otherness, which are feasible alternatives applicable in everyday reality. After arguing, with extreme narrative power, the conceptualization of the scream, Holloway focuses on how to implement changes without the need to achieve a dominant position in society.

4.2.2 Beyond state and beyond power

To understand the potentialities of otherness, created by diverse community-based realities, it is important to first understand – and refute – the centrality of state power within the capitalistic system. Since the very birth of nation-states, power has always been conceived as a force held by the central governments. Consequently, everyone who strived for changing society aimed to conquest the state. But, as Holloway clearly argues, what leads our society are not states and the related head governments, but capital. Capital, contrarily to state jurisdiction, is extremely volatile and can move wherever it wants. This means that its connections – social relations of capital – reach farther places than the state ones. States, despite proclaiming and waiving their autonomy, are not able to fully enable a real autonomist jurisdiction. In other words, as Holloway affirms, the autonomy that states reclaim "just doesn't exist" since it is part of the whole capitalistic system. This leads the state to operate – like the rest of the world – under the conditions of capital. And that is why, throughout history, whoever tried to create a different world by the conquest of state power – either through the formation of a reformist party, or the constitution of a revolutionary military platoon – directly faced its failure. This is because '*Once the logic power is adopted, the struggle against power is already lost'* (Holloway, 2002). Being a strong believer in anarchism and, more in general, revolutionary (in its literal term of radically changing the society) ideology, Holloway argues not on replacing power with another form of power, but to dissolve the existent power relations. This is why the author considers anti-power entities to act beyond the state and beyond the preconstituted forms of power. The point of dissolving power relations has to be conceived next to the urgent necessity of reconstituting dignity for everybody that lives in society. This means that it is crucial to focus on the needs of the population, especially the poorer portion which is normally neglected by the pre-constituted power relations. As the author explains, there exist diverse ways to organize a society (whether big or small) that have no intention to gain power – such as non-governmental organizations, community creations, doctors or teacher protests, and more – and are still able to change society. The Zapatista community is the clearest example: to create a society that is not focused on creating dominating roles among the community, but on favouring inclusiveness processes, while being careful in accepting and including the claims of everybody, without people's wills to overcome one another.

In order for the reader to better conceive the possibility to regain a shaping power over society, Holloway argues the existence of two kinds of power: *power-to* and *power-over*. The first one is the core of the hopeful and proactive feature of the scream, and it is related to people's capacity of acting upon society. More precisely, it is linked to the capacity of acting as a collective force, what Holloway calls the *Flow of doing*. In order to enable this flow to function, it is crucial to start 'thinking and acting', simultaneously, towards alternative

realities (otherness). The idea is to start conceiving the world as a struggle and to avoid the complete life catastrophe by acting against the things that we do not like (to imagine what is "not-yet" and to refuse what "it-is"). In other words, the force of the power-to is the "capacity-to-do". It is always social, since our 'doing' is always connected to the 'done' of others, even when action seems to be isolated – such as reading a book is connected to the doing of the writer, of making findings in the academic fields is connected to the methodology conceived by previous scholars, and so on. This, as Holloway states, is the engine of society, what moves and enables everything that humans created (also capitalism). The second form of power, the *power-over*, while still being a force that makes changes in society, has a predominant and disruptive attribute. This power fractures the social flow of doing into channelled, individual doings. To make this concept clear, it is useful to use the concept of job division in industrialist times. While the artisan is accountable for the full process of product creation – from designing to material realization – the factory worker is conditioned to – and struggling against – the will of the industrialist (or capitalist). In other words, workers are limited to labour and deprived of any design of the product (fractured doing), while the capitalist is the conceiving 'head' of the product, without contributing to its physical realization. What is more, the capitalist is the only one taking credit for the whole creation, being the final good of his property. Here, it takes place a fragmentation of the flow of doing into three elements: the doer, the doing, and the done. With the *power-to*, these melt into a unique figure or, at least, into a unified action among different actors (e.g., activists). On the other hand, with the institution of *power-over*, the ruler (capitalist) separates the worker (doer) – now only accountable for manual work – from the product (done), and appropriates all advantages of the result, presenting himself as the individual doer. To Holloway, all the frustration and despair of humanity is linked to this separating mechanism, being it easily replicable in other spheres of social life. Power-over represents, in simpler words, the negation and disqualification of power-to.

4.2.3 A potential breakthrough

Considering the relation between power-to and power-over, there exists – according to Holloway, Harvey, and other scholars – a possibility to avoid the reproduction of the dominant mechanism of capitalism. As a matter of fact, rulers such as factory owners depend on doers (workers) – and this, thanks to Marx, is not news. Being this dependent relation true, it results alike also the one between *power-over* and *power-to*: the former is dependent on the latter. To display a clearer – yet taken to the extreme, and potentially causing a controversy – example, the relation between capitalists and workers can be seen as the internal organization of a mafia association, with the factory owner embodying the 'head' (boss), and workers as the 'arm' (henchman) of the job. And despite this might be among the most constrictive and frightening kinds of relations, the dependence of the head (*power-over*) on the arm (*power-to*) is the most powerful sign of hope for the latter to emancipate. As anticipated in the previous paragraph, for this process to be successfully implemented, is necessary to restore the lost dignity of people, especially the most disadvantaged ones. Dignity literally relates to concepts of respect and recognition. Following this logic, the ultimate step for dignity – hence of *power-to* – implementation is the recognition of the multitude of struggles that exist in the world. Recognizing and fighting for any additional struggle means giving hope and strength to the non-yet-recognized one. In other words, the crucial point is to create a community of struggles that relies on each other qualities that, eventually, will reconnect conceiving and doing phases into the restored *flow of doing*. To summarise, if capitalism is the movement of separating, the counterpart – which might be called Revolution, but which would likely lead to a misinterpretation of the concept – must represent the movement of the unification of struggles. Drawing from the Zapatista experience, Holloway stresses how such a movement must be anti-heroic. For the members to feel and act on an equal level, it is important not to initiate or foment the creation of outstanding figures, such as unequivocal leaders. This is because to create a 'conceiving-doing' community, means to create an aware community and, in its turn, an aware community is formed by conscious members, responsible for their actions. In addition, this movement should be 'anti-extraordinary'. What is common among 'revolutionary' movements, whether spontaneous or structured, is their focus on cathartic moments (i.e., protests, squats, revolts), without really mattering about the post-cathartic reality. It is important not to stop and feel content only with catharsis, but to strive and enact the wanted reality every day. As a matter of fact, 'revolution' can be enacted constantly with the reproduction of different and desired realities, and not only by the performance of cathartic moments – which are equally important (Holloway, 2002).

Crack Capitalism (Holloway, 2010) displays the possibility to develop a 'method' for alternative realities to grasp alternative realities and, most importantly, to stick to them. As pictured by Holloway, we can imagine the world as a room in which walls are shrinking, while the majority of us (the world population), especially the most advantaged, are sitting comfortably. Others instead are looking or creating 'cracks' into the walls, in order to avoid fatal consequences. These cracks – defined as 'fissures' by other scholars – can be represented by different entities. Social movements such as social centres, squats, and spontaneous protests are certainly cracks in the system. Within this category though, I would include – this is more a personal interpretation of authors' works – events such as economic or (nowadays more common) environmental crises, despite the brutal repercussion these have upon the world and its inhabitants. I would consider these as cracks for the visibility they arise on systemic problems, such as climate emergencies or big economic disparities.

To wrap up, for a movement to be effective, it has to understand the essence of what Holloway calls 'the flow of doing'. Being formed by all those activities that are not living outside capitalistic reality, but despite it, the *flow of doing* represents the real engine of capitalism – its 'living blood' as stated by the author. And, for the creative side (the conceiving phase) to be reconnected with the manual work (the doing phase), struggles of every kind should be directed to horizons 'beyond-catharsis'. As a matter of fact, these provide breaches (the cracks) for alternatives, but for them to be fully enabled, people should produce and reproduce everyday realities, since catharsis cannot provide itself for the survivance of alternative ways of living.

4.3 Framing struggles in the Florentine context

I think that the displayed theories perfectly trace the touristified Florentine contexts, as well as the social struggles that emerge from it. Florence is a city in which residents are losing – or maybe already lost – their *power-to*. The emptying of residents, the failure of several local artisans, the raise of tourism, and the poor management of public spaces are perfect proof of such development. Florence is a 'raffled city', referring to the fact that, consciously or not, its residents are contending for its use against several, way more powerful, actors – both private and public. I consider that the two displayed theories would support me in framing the actions of the two observed social centres, in order to properly answer the research question. The 'Right to the city' of Harvey sparks my curiosity to look at the kind of claims the struggles arise and the kind of actions pursued in order for these to concretise. In short, through Harvey's lens, I want to focalise on what kind of city the centres would like to create – also related to the idea that it can result in the most beautiful dream or in the worst nightmare. On the other side, Holloway's theories spur me to look at the city as a 'contested arena' between different actors (e.g., investors, municipality, citizens, struggles, etc.), and to try to understand what role each one of them as on this 'struggle for the city'. In addition, the author's theories steer my analysis towards the 'manners' of social centres, aiming at thinking critically about principles and actions concretised by the struggles. Lastly, Holloway gives me an additional lens to look beyond what the majority of people think of 'illegality': that it is the framework in which people act in order to avoid consequences, hence to enact 'bad behaviours' – both lawfully and morally unacceptable. This conception prevents illegality to be conceived as a 'field of action' to dissolve power relations, to 'play at another level' – beyond legality, not aprioristically contrary to it – where, actually, a large majority of social struggles act. The literature review chapter gave me a lot of insights on how specific actors – such as the municipality, private investments, and sharing-economy platforms such as Airbnb – actualise a separation of the Florentines residents' *flow of doing*, leading them to merely suffer the policies from 'above', without actually acting on changeable aspects of the city. I thus consider these theories suitable for my research question, actually giving me more analytical tools than I would have expected at the beginning of my analysis.

5. Results: Reclaiming the city through *Mutualism, Self-Management & Horizontality, Inspiring Mobilisation, and Shadow-ism*

In this chapter, I will focus on providing the raw results for the following sub-questions to be answered.

> *What claims are made and what actions are pursued? And who are their targets?*
>
> *How and on the basis of which logics are centres interacting with other social actors? Which are the principles that social struggles want to enact while bonding (or fighting) with them?*
>
> *What alternative urban realities are created?*

Specifically, I divided this chapter into three sections, that will directly address the first two sub-questions. The last, as I will explain at the end of this chapter, will be resumed in the next chapter, to display some arguments that I formulated in connection with the theoretical framework used. To start with, I will display claims and revindications that the two centres – and, more in general, the majority of the Florentine anti-systemic environment – have been pursued and developed during their presence on the ground, in response to the fast-changing urban environment. In short, this initial part will evaluate the 'why' of *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* existence. Substantially, it will analyse the weight that urban speculations – and all relative processes such as privatization, beautification, and commodification – have in shaping urban struggles claims, focussing specifically on the importance that protecting diverse kinds of sociality (meaning ways for people to aggregate with each other) and horizontal decision-making processes (politics) have for the centres. The sequent section analyses the targets of such revindications. This will display different kinds of targets approached, depending on the kind of relations these have with centres. More precisely, I define three of them: the municipality, which is the 'negative' target, being recognized as the major responsible for the gentrification of Florence; recipients, mainly residents of the neighbourhood in which centres are located, are 'positive' targets towards which is addressed the majority of struggle actions; 'non-involved', which, like the undecided before elections, are the ones that do not engage with social struggles or do not know about their fights, which social centres attempt to approach in order to join social fights. Here I will also dedicate a small paragraph to display the relations between the two centres and other Florentine social struggles. This second section represents the 'who', in terms of revindications objects. In the last section, I will explain 4 principles – mutualism, horizontality & self-management, inspiring mobilisation, and shadow-ism – that I pinpointed as the essence of social struggle actions, namely the values they put into practice every day and transversally in all their activities, both internally (among activists) and externally. This part, which represents the 'how' of social centres' actions, is probably the most important, from which I will draw the majority of arguments of the discussion chapter. Regarding the 'what', namely the activities that social centres are conducting, I will display them throughout the whole chapter, without a dedicated section. I did this for two reasons. Firstly, because I consider that listing a number of activities is less attractive in terms of reading; secondly, because I want to use activities as concrete illustrations to explain the other sections, avoiding their repetition throughout the text.

5.1 Revindications and claims

I want to start to unfold this analysis from the clearest element of my investigation or, at least, the element I consider not to require a specific or inventive interpretation, namely the socio-political revindications of *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson*. As imaginable, a considerable amount of material (e.g., online blogs, fliers, street newspapers, Telegram and WhatsApp groups, etc.) on social and political requests of these social struggles, is accessible to every citizen. After all, a wide reachability of their information is fundamental for their activities to gather as much popular participation as possible. Hence, political requests of social struggles appear to be relatively easy to retrieve, and straightforward to comprehend. Thanks to their clarity, further explanations are usually not necessary. Notwithstanding, to understand specific features of particular contexts, a direct connection with the ground and with struggles definitely helps.

5.1.1 A chain of claims

As imaginable from chapter 1, the main complaints of Florentine urban struggles revolve around gentrification and, more specifically, about gentrification led by investments in touristic-related activities, hence the so-called touristification. In many parts of my thesis, I refer to the municipality as the main responsible for touristification in Florence. This affirmation though, if not complemented by a further explanation, is not completely correct. Indeed, the city of Florence, every year, attracts privates – usually big companies – that invest huge quantities of capital in restructuring the city landscape – such as the Dutch company "The Student Hotel", now "The Social Hub". Of course, these are shaper actors of the urban fabric and, in a sense, they are the main reclaimer of 'the right to the city' of Florence. However, the social struggles consider the municipality as the main responsible for these constant waves of investment. As a matter of fact, the administrators of Florence, through economic manoeuvres – such as the *Invest in Florence* document – or the few limitations to the economic expansion of private investors, strongly promote touristic-related investments. As consequence, despite fiercely disregarding private touristic businesses and related events (such as Airbnb conventions or fashion runway shows in the city), the two social centres consider the municipality as the main accountable for the situation of the city, since while private investors – which, I repeat, they disgust – are 'playing by their rules', the municipality should be more concerned of citizens' needs. More specifically, the two centres – together with all the social Florentine movement – denounce the role of the municipality as a "real estate intermediary" for privates[14].

> *here in Florence, mass tourism makes it so as who lives in Florence is kind of a second problem. It became very pressing when there was the pandemic. There were no more tourists, so, the municipality had to take care of the city's problems. But the moment the tourists come back, that's it. Eventually, that's what moves the money. It is not that the municipality does nothing. But what it does do is continually pull the oars in the boat, even now. It still makes some kind of public-private contrivance, by which it contracts a place to someone capable of managing it who is, always, a private person that will have to pull money out for it. And that brings everything back into the of profit again.*[15]

During the lockdown, in the first part of 2020, Florence disclosed its true devotion to tourism. Tarsi et al. (2020), provide a striking depiction of a quasi-spectral Florence in Covid times, flanked by a pungent critique addressed to the administration for the inconsistent management of overtourism. These activist's words explain the moment in which the municipality, not having to deal with touristic activities, found itself to be overwhelmed by population necessities – like the impossibility to pay rent or buy food because all the tourist-related precarious workers that lost their little social guarantees jobs – without being able to fulfil them (*It became very pressing when there was the pandemic. There were no more tourists, so, the municipality had to take care of the city's problems*). Often, both centres, especially during the pandemic, complained that the inefficacy of a municipality in taking care of citizens' well-being, is the result of years of politics directed at meeting tourists, more than resident needs. Of course, it is understandable not to be ready, since likely there was no institution in the world able to face properly an outbreak such as the one of Covid-19. Nonetheless, the pandemic unveiled the problem of a unilateral dedication to tourism, which lead precarious workers of the whole region, specifically Florence, to great economic instability.

While it is not always about tourism, the majority of big urban restructuring in Florence, recently, has been related to the tertiary sector – five stars hotels and spas, luxury restaurants, and new tramways. Without repeating myself on the same issues, I here narrow the lens to identify focused claims that *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* express concerning the touristified Florentine landscape. In other words, I want to analyse which local issues are pinpointed by centres, and what claims emerge from them. Indeed, to 'fight gentrification' – or any related process – without a clear and structured action plan, would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. It has to be said that social centres and squats express claims in many different ways – through fliers, public manifestations, physical resistance actions, websites blogs, interviews, and events of different kinds. Thus, being their socio-political requests numerous and diverse, they might appear bewildering. If not properly

[14] Retrieved from https://www.perunaltracitta.org/2014/10/13/firenze-real-estate-le-nuove-frontiere-della-giunta-nardella/
[15] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview

displayed, they can generate more confusion than clarity. In attempting to avoid this from happening, I will try to organize claims next to complaints from which they arise. In other words, starting from a complaint against a particular urban undesired process (e.g., raise of rents), I will display the related claim that struggles formulate (e.g., revindication to issue lower rents to long-term tenants).

To start with, as mentioned, all complaints and claims seem to have, as their major basis, gentrification – here intended as the expulsion of residents – by touristification. As the first question related to touristification in Florence, I asked activists whether there is an issue that, more than others, concerns them.

> *Our work has always been against gentrification in Florence. Basically, since we were born. It has always been against gentrification in Florence and its various evolutions [...] at a specific level, all territorial speculations*[16]

Substantially, all activists recognized speculative practices as the biggest problem for the city. More precisely, militants pinpoint as very problematic the municipality's role within this framework. For each property sold by *Invest in Florence*, the mentioned catalogue dedicated to attracting new investments in the city, the municipality receives a percentage for the concession of the 'Adaptive reuse', a legal measure that allows the property to be used for other purposes than the one it was originally built for – for example, from residential to commercial, or from industrial to tourist-reception, and so on. This was the case, in 2015, of one pawnshop (Monte dei Pegni) in the city, by which change of use – from commercial to touristic-accommodating – the municipality received 900.000 euros. In the same year, the offices of the prosecution were sold to build an Apple Store, allowing the municipality to receive a similar amount.[17] *PerUnaltracittà* (literally *for another city*), a local collective of independent journalists of the city, attentively monitors real estate movements of the municipality, periodically reporting them in its magazine[18]. These excessive property speculations are what majorly lead to neighbourhood gentrification, both in the historical centre and in more peripheral areas. As consequence, the first claim of the centres regards the excessive amount of speculation and the need to stop it. In any case, this is a general revindication which, if not more accurately specified, might end in a sterile request.

Indeed, throughout their existence, struggles developed derived, more addressed, claims. For instance, concerning the huge amount of speculation for the implementation of touristic-related activities, social struggles claim to set limits to accommodation and commercial businesses.

> *They could say 'let's not allow multi-owner' agencies to run mountains of short-term rentals and make it so that there isn't even a single long-term rent downtown, because everyone rents on Airbnb. Or incentivize, with subsidized rents, downtown residency. Discourage moving to suburban neighbourhoods*[19]

> *Put bans on Airbnb, expropriate big Airbnb companies, put the houses back for the use of the people the citizens. Remodel the social houses that are in the neighbourhood. You know? This stuff right here. Put a threshold on restaurants. Prevent a person who already has 3 restaurants from opening another one*[20]

More specifically, activists complain about the excessive and unmonitored economic agency that big businesses, such as 'sharing economies' platforms (e.g., Airbnb), have on the ground, at the expense of residents' housing and already isolated local businesses. Social struggles also claim more care for non-restructured social houses, which un-inhabitability prevent new residents from moving in, and which lack of use tends to expose them furtherly to the risk of monetisation – through speculative sales. To fight speculative processes, urban struggles often organize meetings and debates focused on specific problems – such as the lack of social housing. This is the case of *Via del Leone* which, together with other local associations, in

[16] L., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[17] Retrieved from *https://corrierefiorentino.corriere.it/firenze/notizie/cronaca/15_settembre_05/via-palazzuolo-tesoretto-privati-72669386-53aa-11e5-bf8f-5c5424d4fa5c.shtml*
[18] Retrieved from https://www.perunaltracitta.org/homepage/archivio/
[19] F., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[20] L., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview

November 2019, organized two days of protests, in conjunction with an event organized in the city by Airbnb ('100ideasfor100houses'). The protests, ironically named '100houses100evictions', took place in Tasso square – next to *Via del Leone* occupation – and consisted of debates to raise awareness on the many cases of eviction in Florence, followed by a book presentation, and a march. Indeed, the huge increase in rents and prices forces residents either to move or, at a certain moment, to be forcibly moved. Another reaction to real estate speculation is the same practice of occupying. After all, as one activist put it, *squatting practices also serve to put, as far as they can, a stop to speculative mechanisms*.[21]

As mentioned, speculation can be interpreted under different lenses and, in order to deal with it, it is important to develop specific claims which are not only related to property or real estate transactions. Being the function of speculation that of squeezing out all possible remunerations from an activity – hence all the benefits – it is possible to say that processes such as commodification (the attribution of a monetary value to non-economic elements) privatization (selling public facilities to privates, or deregulating private sectors) and beautification (the focus on making the urban public landscape more attractive, rather than taking care of public needs) are all speculative practices. It is possible to say that, in the end, all these refer to touristification and, within it, to Disneyfication. Disneyfication is the very motor of touristification, resulting from all the mentioned processes. Tourists are the main enjoyers of the city, which is modelled – economically by investors, politically by the municipality – accordingly to their pleasure. They are both the objects and the subjects of the transformation of the city, being the ones that allow urban renovations – thanks to their expenses – and the main (and almost only) beneficiaries – of all the commercial services.

> *I am mainly referring to that* [commodification]. *San Frediano has started to become the coolest neighbourhood since we occupied. Until a decade ago the commercial and residential composition of the neighbourhood was different. In 2007 I was evicted from Santa Croce. I got evicted and then occupied a few years later. There are neighbourhoods where there is nothing left: from schools to health districts, to public personal services, they have already been gutted. From Piazza Duomo and Piazza della Repubblica, in the late 1800s the poor were expelled: with a view to making money through tourism. Then to follow, all other neighbourhoods.*[22]

It is important to remember that, as expressed in the first chapter, Disneyfication is part of the touristification process, since rendering the city more beautiful, secure, and filled with plenty of parcelled services (like bars, pubs, or tour guides), is all destined to improve the well-being of the tourist, at the expense of residents. In this case, the activist is referring to his personal eviction, and to the commodification of neighbourhoods in the city, which only attraction now is represented by the presence of many commercial retail shops (*There are neighbourhoods where there is nothing left: from schools to health districts, to public personal services).*

Despite the eviction of residents – to prepare the ground for commercial purposes – being one of the most dramatic actions of speculation, it is not the only one. For instance, Santo Spirito square, the focal point of young locals' sociality, has been undergoing a fierce process of commodification. Besides several problems, thoroughly explained in the principles section, the square is furnished with few public trash bins and only one public toilet (closing at midnight), for which is necessary to pay a fee. Other options are to use pubs toilets (and pubs trash bins) after purchasing or, which is commonly observable among the youth, to urinate in the street. Some residents, angry about the decay of the square, constantly identify social centres of the neighbourhood as the main ones responsible for spreading a degrading kind of sociality[23]. Nevertheless, social struggles, supported by a supportive (yet smaller) part of the residents, report being among the few that 'clean up their mess' and lament the lack of public free toilets in the square. Another example, similar, is given by the fact that the whole city centre disposes of only one public health care centre that, in 2016, the regional administration – the responsible institution – tried to sell to private investors for commercial purposes. The joint action of the neighbourhood committee, *Via del Leone*, and other local collectives, through continuous protests, prevented this from happening.

[21] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[22] F., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[23] Retrieved from *https://www.firenzetoday.it/politica/centri-sociali-santo-spirito-cordonatura.html*

This is an important thing, in the end we talk about essential things like good public and free water and free public bathrooms[24]

The Oltrarno would need spaces for youth, for information, spaces to go to for support. I went to Java to the psychologist myself, because I needed it. I think these spaces should be there in every neighbourhood and should be enhanced as services. Instead they are treated almost as a joke. It's hard to get in touch with them [...] it is necessary to provide educational services, health services. If you take away doctors, you also take away people. I believe that older people are not happy to leave the neighbourhoods where they were born, but they don't have the opportunity to live there anymore[25]

The emerging claim is related to the need of implementing free public infrastructures and services, particularly accessible for that part of the population that cannot afford subsistence costs. Indeed, in place of public toilets and drinking fountains, the city centre offers clean streets filled with plenty of bar tables and dehors; instead of free parks or health facilities, tour agencies and hotels sprout in every empty corner of the city.

Squares in Florence are increasingly empty. They are stretched out, flat, to show, more than the square itself, the artistic things around it. More and more built like a jewel; benches are built so that tramps don't sleep on them. There is all this going on here in the centre of Florence. Then slowly it widens[26]

the privatization of squares is the hottest topic lately, just look at what happened in Santo Spirito. The insulting, aberrant, nonsensical ordinance whereby you can't even sit or stand on the parvis, or on the steps […] all over Florence more and more of these terrifying little bar tables are springing up as the only answer for sociality[27]

All urban landscape reconfigurations, complemented with a set of *ad-hoc* regulations, progressively hamper the free circulation of people on public soil. These complaints, related to the three above-mentioned processes – privatization, beautification, and commodification – explain the centres' determination to stop Disneyfication processes in the city.

As a matter of fact, these lie at the base of what I pinpoint as the last claim.

I think it is very very important that a square remains a square. Squares, in the history of ever, were, are, and should be places for citizens to meet and socialize[28]

In my utopian world, in every neighbourhood of every city, there would be free spaces, legal, illegal or hybrid, where people try to carry on a somewhat different way of life[29]

Both activists here – and I honestly would add every other activist of Florence – express a request of paramount importance: the claim for the recognition and acceptance of different kinds of socialities. Indeed, Disneyfication – and, connectedly, all the touristification-related processes – makes one kind of sociality stand out over the others. As for the case of Florence, it is caused by political decisions which encourage frequenting private spaces (e.g., bars, pubs, nightclubs, etc.) as the only possible way to socialise, neglecting all others (e.g., squares, parks). For example, the impossibility to sit on staircases – as happened to me while resting under the sun in July – critically discourages the "let's meet in the square" kind of sociality, especially if streets and squares are devoid of benches, rubbish bins, and public toilets, and filled with dehors and bar tables. Moreover, this kind of policy might lead – as it does – part of the population to break regulations. As in the case of Santo Spirito, this could result in raising discontent among residents who, reasonably, channel their exasperation unilaterally against transgressors, ignoring the lack of public services as a responsible cause of their anger. Periodically, the municipality makes temporary ordinances – named 'anti-bivouac', 'anti-sandwich', 'anti-alcohol', and so on – to prohibit the seated (in some places even standing still) consumption of food and drinks on public soil[30]. In short, the only sociality allowed in Florence is the one imposed by

[24] M., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[25] F., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[26] L., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[27] M., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[28] M., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[29] F., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[30] Retrieved from *https://www.lanazione.it/firenze/cronaca/movida-bivacchi-1.7738720*

economic and political decisions, strongly steered by the municipality – which, in its turn, is manoeuvred by the massive investments that flood the city.

Contrarily, according to the two centres, there should be the possibility to express a sociality that fits everyone' social needs – inevitably different among them. Militants strive for a 'free sociality', as opposed to a 'mercified' one, which is strongly boosted by administrators. Free sociality means being able to express personal ways of socializing, without disrespecting residents and others' life. To have a free cine forum in a square (*Via del Leone*), or free boxing courses in a popular gym (*Next Emerson*), is to provide "social services" that normally are charged, hence to contribute to an alternative sociality, which is not normally enacted. What struggles express is that sociality – the possibility of individuals to gather and enjoy each other company – especially in what are everybody's places (public spaces such as squares, streets, or parks), should be encouraged and not dissuaded, by governments. Actually – and this is a personal interpretation – free socialities do not imply 'free of charge' services indistinctively for everyone – even though the majority of militants agree with this – but means the possibility to enact a different sociality from the one that is now the only (economically and politically) allowed, namely the 'mercified' one. As a matter of fact, urban struggles do not negate the existence of a 'fancy' sociality – expensive, trendy, or whatever other way it could be named – but refuse the monopoly of one sociality over the others. Essentially, what activists of *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* are trying to do is *create inclusive spaces, whereby even those who really have nothing can come and have everything, in the end* [31]. This does not mean that any other sociality should be banned, quite the opposite. In short, I consider this to be the most important claim, since fighting for a society that allows its citizens to live social interactions in the way they consider best for themselves, means striving for a world that recognizes one another necessities – or, as Holloway would state, to strive for the recognition of every struggle.

To summarise, what regards Florence's touristification – and what regards the specific focus of my research – claims of urban struggles are numerous and different, all emerging from specific complaints to particular urban problematics. Nevertheless, they affect one another and, more importantly, are all directed towards the municipality. Even if the primary cause of the urban restructuration may be identified in the huge wave of investments – hence all private investors – the centres recognize the administration of the city as the main responsible for touristification, being the one politically (and lawfully) allowing such situation – while doing nothing to prevent it.

These revindications unveil a major preoccupation of the centres.

> *Neighbourhood policies and these things here tend to be the tail-end [...] even though they make such a fuss for Florence being the 'New Renaissance,' in fact there is no future vision for the city, [...]they have to make a buck every time. And what does that mean? That on each area municipality deals with what for them is a credible interlocutor. Credible interlocutors are those who have the money to do something*[32]

A reiterated request, equally promptly denied by administrators, is the possibility for citizens to act upon the decisional mechanisms of the city. As stated here, the great fear of urban struggles seems to be the inability to envision a future for the city different from the one imagined by the municipality. In other words, to propose a different future would mean imagining – and enacting – a perspective diverging from the one that sees Florence as a mere, yet beautiful, container for tourists. In conclusion, what may be deduced from all these claims, is the will of social centres to create a city suitable for its citizens, with spaces and services that fulfil their necessities, not those of tourists nor, least of all, those of private investors.

I renamed this section 'chain' of claims since each one of them emerges from specific urban problems that are interweaved among them, and which hence produce interconnected claims. The failure or the success of one claim would automatically modify the status of all the others. To stop real estate speculations, for instance, would have a whole set of implications for other claims. To avoid overselling public and private spaces would reconfigure the urban scenario. Fewer property sales – either public or private – would mean, likely, fewer accommodations for the hospitality sector – since the majority of the restorations are, as we saw, in the tertiary sector – impacting positively on the retainment of residents within the city. Life around neighbourhoods would

[31] F., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[32] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview

flourish, and more locals could better pressure the municipality to furbish the city with more public services, and so on.

Despite this being an improbable – and maybe naïve – perspective of the city, it is important for urban struggles to foresee common goals, even if these seem disconnected among them. Indeed, to 'join forces' is crucial.

5.2 Relations

Having shown revindications, this section regards the specific targets towards which all these revendications directed – hence, the 'who'. All these categories can likely be deduced from the text, but I consider it important to provide a clear overview. I pinpointed three types of targets to which social struggles actions are directed. The most intuitive is the municipality. After all, all revindications displayed are directed at institutional bodies and, more precisely, at the local government of the city. The second target can be recognized as the main recipient of the centres' activities – residents, people in need, and participants in the activities. While the municipality is a 'negative' target, against which urban struggles are aiming all complaints for the development of the city, recipients are that element which activists want to help and inspire (hence 'positive' targets). There is a third category, which I called 'non-involved', and which can be either a 'positive' or a 'negative' target. I will properly later explain its composition and function.

5.2.1 Municipality

The first and main target of struggle revindications is the municipality and, by extension, state institution – or whichever public entity imposes a dominant relation on the population.

> *All these forms of power refer to a system that is wrong at its root. We tend to target a specific counterpart. Even in a capitalist system there are little things that a power may or may not put in place. We also try to identify tangible counterparts* [...] *in the case of Santo Spirito, the municipality. In the case of Santa Rosa, it is the region.*[33]

Of course, social struggles actions are not limited to the city boundaries – hence 'enemies' are not only identifiable in the municipality. To bring an example, during the pandemic, both centres harshly criticized the continuous downsizing of public healthcare, for years an ordinary manoeuvre of each government in office, which led to a critical health system collapse. Concerning the international context, since their very birth, social centres periodically make initiatives to support specific foreign causes (Kurdish, Palestinian, Sahrawian, Zapatista, etc.). In short, for each context, activists seek particular opponents (*We tend to be directed toward a specific counterpart*), as well as allies.

About local battles, centres' actions have the purpose to highlights flaws, mistakes, or negligence of government entities over the city and its residents.

> *In my opinion it is emblematic that in 2016 that the municipality of Florence with the 'active stability pact', that is the obligation to close the financial report of the year with a positive budget, closed with over 40 million, with a huge profit that was not invested. It could be invested in anything: citizen services, for example*[34]

The constant perception of being disregarded by the administration – and, more importantly, the constant neglection of population requests – led militants of *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* to have infrequent and tense communications with the municipality. When talking about the "municipality", social centres mostly refer to the municipality board – a close council composed of 10 assessors and the mayor – and, more generally, to the majority of councillors that legislate in favour of touristification processes. Nevertheless, even with 'closer' councillors – in terms of political ideals – militants hardly ever open communicative channels. In these

[33] L., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[34] F., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview

situations, the communication is brief and tends to be stiff, and 'closer' council members are approached only when strictly necessary (e.g., to ask for a garrison permit).

> *Since you are part of the institutions, you are seen as the one who wants to break the balls, there is a lot of distrust. A lot of glaring at me, and acceptance change. That to me is unfortunate. But I think though, as one was there before, one continues to be there now. If there is a need to ask permission for a social garrison, demonstrations, etc., we write it. There's not a neat separation, of course. But there is also no super trust from them.*[35]

This interviewed city councillor, once a keen frequenter of social centres, experienced how relations with militants evolved after getting into politics. She perceived detachment, despite still considering herself part of the 'struggling world'. Nevertheless, the same 'close' councillors recognize the difficulty of struggles to rely on institutions. Again, despite having a slightly more tolerant collaboration with 'closer' councillors (*If there is a need to ask permission for a social garrison, demonstrations, etc., we write it)*, activists maintain cold relations with substantially every member of the city council (*There's not a neat separation, of course. But there is also no super trust from them)*.

> *I no longer trust institutions. In the municipality, in the institutions, in the things they do. [...] you see a myriad of things, they sell off this way, they pull up horrible buildings, they do the tramway awfully. All things that make you lose trust at the local level.*[36]

The distrust towards the municipality – caused by reiterative neglect of struggles requests – is probably the major cause that explains the cold-heartedness communication of social centres. All other causes – the fact that the vast majority of militants do not believe in political institutions, or do not relate with the concept of 'legality' – emerge from it.

Apart from minorities – such as the interviewed councillor – the city council seems to be either indifferent or overtly opposed to social struggles presence. The same mayor, representative of the centre-left "*Partito Democratico*" (PD – Democratic Party), on several occasions, referred to social centres as *extreme, dangerous factions that have little to do with the democratic left*[37]. Moreover, despite the media regularly displays the problematic consequences of the touristic "Movida"[38] – and the related complaints of residents – the first citizen often blames *antagonists*' protests – on one occasion even stating that social struggles were *privatizing squares with banners and smoke bombs, preventing others to use a public space*[39] – ignoring the reason of protesting – the bars privatization of the square. In place of greeting (or listening) claims, the municipality often asks authorities for repressive measures – such as requesting more police patrols or the eviction of social centres. All this is to say that, social struggles, being quite aware of municipality strengths – both in terms of political power and public opinion influence – tend to avoid contact with the city council and its members, finding it useless or deceiving for their activity. This does not mean that struggles tend to avoid confrontation with the municipality, or with authorities. On the contrary, they overtly face institutions, especially to display their contradictions – such as when the mayor declared that the Florentine government has always been open to discussion to, just later, ask for protest suppression.

> *It's not a problem for us to have a relationship with the institution. So, it's not that we live completely out of the world, and we make it an "arm wrestling" issue, of this kind. We don't want to get into bureaucratic issues that then would eat us […] And so you live this kind of very strange stuff, of confrontation not confrontation with the institution that, at best, ignores you. Which is better than if it's on your back anyway, also because eventually they'll pimp you out.*[40]

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[35] A, city councillor, personal interview
[36] F., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[37] Retrieved from *https://www.ansa.it/toscana/notizie/2018/03/07/nardella-infiltrazioni-comunita-senegal_dc5c22aa-2e00-4f2c-8125-0ec51af0bff3.html*
[38] Retrieved from *https://www.lanazione.it/firenze/cronaca/degrado-firenze-1.7614880*
[39] Mayor interview, retrieved from *https://www.novaradio.info/2020/07/06/movisa-nardella-chiede-piu-forze-dellordine-e-da-la-colpa-ai-centri-sociali/*
[40] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview

What struggles want to prevent, is bureaucratic confrontation, not having – and not wanting – legal status for their fights. In any case, this confused and nervous relationship oddly contributes to maintaining stability in which social centres and squats can live while continuing their activities.

In short, social centres recognize the municipality as the main problematic actor for the socio-economic condition of city residents, as well as for touristification. Moreover, the neglection of their requests, and the indifference towards their presence, force centres in implementing actions that are not accepted by administrators – such as public protests to block the traffic – in a way for the latter to notice and respond to claims. Nevertheless, the municipality seems to barely reply to public revindications or, more importantly, to respond with intransigence. In other words, the relation between struggles and the municipality can be represented as a sort of vicious circle, in which the correlation request-indifference lead to the equation protest-repression. Also, considering the nature of the relationship between the two parties – chaotic and unfriendly – the confrontation will hardly result in a peaceful resolution, especially when the same relation is affected by power disparities.

5.2.2 Recipients

While social struggles revindications are formulated mostly to respond to municipality carelessness and, more in general, to a whole system – comprised of policymakers, multinationals, private speculators, and more – that reproduces power relations – not only between rich and poor but also nourishing a *war between poor*[41] – they are also focused at alleviating relative distresses of the population. I hence consider this second category of targets, recognizable as 'positive' – meaning those supported and included by the struggles – an ensemble of many different social groups: neighbourhood residents, activities participants, people in need (e.g., homeless, immigrants, unemployed). These targets are quite important for the development of activities. As a matter of fact, if administrators are the aim of revindications, the population is their object.

To start with, it is important to understand the kind of relations that struggles have with the spaces they settled in.

> *There was something next to the airport, almost in the Peretola neighbourhood. It was a big building[...]never used, left there. We occupied that one, more as a disruptive action than anything else. 'you broke that one there, we're going to reoccupy elsewhere to call you back to responsibility'. We knew we didn't give a damn about being in Peretola, in the middle of nowhere. The thing of being, at least in a place to do something with the neighbourhood, was always our priority. That place didn't lend itself to that purpose.*[42]

This activist is talking about a temporary occupation of *Next Emerson*, after the eviction of the social struggle from an older facility. It is crucial to notice that the focus on finding *a place to do something with the neighbourhood* is more important than occupying a facility just for the sake of squatting (*We occupied that one, more as a disruptive action than anything else)*.

> *As residents of the city centre, we felt it was a neighbourhood that maintained a social fabric in which we could fit [...] If you make an occupation in Santa Croce or Duomo, you have no one to refer to. These neighbourhoods are already largely emptied of residents and services. There was a possibility of struggle here, within the centre of Florence, besides it being a neighbourhood where many of us were born and raised*[43]

The priority of both activists, despite the differences in terms of location of corresponding occupations – one in the periphery, the other in the city centre – is to be in a context where is possible to integrate with the pre-existent population (*'a social fabric in which we could fit'*). This is to say that, in both cases, the choice of a specific space in which to integrate, is pondered by the same purposes of the struggle.

[41] F., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[42] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[43] *Ibid.*

Another important feature is the status of social relations that struggles have developed with residents, especially regarding the social fights carried on. For what regards *Via del Leone*, the bond between locals and the struggle seems strong. As a matter of fact, residents respond quite positively to squat initiatives.

> *Over the years we have managed to get active together with locals in territorial battles. Because they are people who are interested in the territory they live in. In short, there is a fair amount of resilience. I would call it that. Among the most important battles there is the one on the Santa Rosa Health care centre. We won it because it's still there. Actually, they upgraded it. They wanted to relocate it and, instead, we won*[44]

> *I find the occupation of Leone a beautiful thing. It doesn't bother me* [...] *I find it a place of mediation* [...] *It has always been a very good function of the association. Pre-pandemic there were always meetings about the use of Tasso square, the Children's room, the use of outdoor spaces. I tell you, they were wonderful as events. With residents, via del Leone and whoever was interested* […] *I am glad, among other things, that they give support to people who have needs or difficulties, who are just in transit. It is a nice function*[45]

San Frediano, for its central position and the continuous urban restructuration, seems to be a good area to arise social fights based on anti-gentrification motives. On the other side of the city, in the *Castello* neighbourhood, the situation appears different. This is an almost exclusively residential area, which hosts scarce social attractions, apart from what is offered by *Next Emerson* and a few other local associations. Here, activists recognize that the area might not be perfect to cultivate an active and claiming population.

> *we had struggled with the fact that the neighbourhood doesn't have a militant nature. We couldn't explain 'look, if you sometimes force things, you may get achievements'*[46]

It is likely that, due to demographic and urban differences between the two cases, social fights do not equally grasp the different neighbourhoods. It is also probable that being *Castello* mostly residential, the possibilities for residents to witness and debate about urban changes – which would see privates taking over social spaces – are fewer than in San Frediano, where sociality and urban change are daily contested matters. In any case, further consideration is important. While activities of *Via del Leone* are mostly conducted outside of the squat walls, trying to involve the majority of participants directly on the streets, *Next Emerson* displays the opposite situation, offering the majority of its activities inside the facility. Hence, it is important to notice that, because of different locations and sizes, the impact on social contexts should not be analysed in the same way. In the case of *Next Emerson* then, residents' participation in "outdoor" social fights might not be a good indicator. In its place, a suitable alternative could be monitoring the participation of people in the activities offered within the centre. And, with regard to this point, participation is certainly high.

> *That is, we ultimately perform a kind of public service here, doing things that the City of Florence is not able to do anyway. Because, for example, the skate park, they have one out in the open, the other one belongs to a private person in Prato, the closest one. You know? Even the tango. They wouldn't have the capacity to organize groups in this way, to have people so satisfied. Not that they couldn't organize a tango group! It's that there wouldn't be the same participation and satisfaction of people.*[47]

As a matter of fact, apart from activities known in the whole province, even outside of regional boundaries, *Next Emerson* periodically organizes neighbourhood assemblies, to debate issues of the area among all its neighbours. In short, if participation in activities is a good metre for success, it is right to say that both struggles present positive results, especially for major activities – *Via del Leone* helpdesks, and specific courses, such as the tango one, of *Next Emerson*. However, despite attendance may be a good indicator, not every local appreciate the presence of squats of social centres within the neighbourhood

[44] F., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[45] G., activist and worker of *Fuori Binario*, personal interview
[46] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[47] Ibid.

The neighbourhood is quite taking care of the people who live here. There are two souls, though, between residents and merchants. One that is bothered by the occupations, by the people who live here, by who wander in the square. Every now and then they send these videos depicting 'the degradation'. Others, instead, are in supportive and in solidarity with Via del Leone[48]

We do what we can. In the sense that many of us live or have lived in Castello, or otherwise gravitate to these areas; so, there is a relationship with the neighbourhood as people who do propose things. It's not just a 'hello' 'hello, we catch each other later at the bar' [...]but it's not like in the neighbourhood we're liked by everyone either[49]

Essentially, struggles are not worried about the possibility of not being appreciated, since they are conscious of what it might represent (for 'common' people) a squat as a neighbour. Still, they consider it important to maintain a propositional relation with the neighbourhood, in order to, at least, try in engaging residents (*We do what we can*). In doing this, the two centres have different ways of approaching people. While *Next Emerson* tries to involve more people to be part of the space, to shape it (socially, politically and physically) tuning different tastes and necessities – which gives the space a collective social trait – *Via del Leone* tends to recreate this same condition directly into public spaces. By turning streets or squares into their 'operational stage' – which includes tasks such as involving non-activists, spurring them in expressing their opinion, and discussing potential changes in the neighbourhood – they are simultaneously conferring public spaces both a social and a political connotation. For instance, *Next Emerson* often promotes constructional workshops, in which creations, designed and crafted by participants, are functional parts of the centre (e.g., bar counter, art installations, wood oven, etc.). Similarly, *Via del Leone* frequently organises participative neighbourhood assemblies, to discuss initiatives to shape public spaces according to residents' will and needs. One of these – attended by residents and several local associations and occupations – in 2019, proposed the municipality restructuration of Tasso square 'from below', to match residents' necessities[50]. Imaginably, this was never considered a possible project by the municipality.

To conclude, it is possible to identify, maybe arguably, the differences in unfolding activities both as an enactment of different (free) socialities – through the internal activities of *Next Emerson* – and the reclaim of the right shape to the city – since, through *Via del Leone* activities, such public spaces are reclaimed for collective needs of socialisation or fights.

5.2.3 Non-involved

Urban struggles, as it will be analysed while explaining the principles, create solidarities and mutual help networks, both to improve their and resident's life. These have the main function of satisfying the needs of the population, especially for its most disadvantaged part, and creating social and political alternatives to a reality they dislike. Overall, it is possible to say that, to a certain extent, these networks work. According to activists, to increase their efficiency, larger portions of the population should be engaged in social fights. Indeed, the easiest approachable subjects are the ones directly involved in struggles activities: for instance, helpdesk recipients of *Via del Leone*, and participants in *Next Emerson* workshops. In other words, recipients of every kind can be considered both beneficiaries and potential allies in social struggles.

However, I consider that exists another target towards which social struggles are aiming, which I will name here 'non-involved'. This category is comprised of every individual that has never been interacting with this kind of urban realities, whether or not knowledgeable of their existence, and of all those that do not agree or do not want to be involved in participative socio-political projects. This can be either the most or the least important target, depending on the 'side' they pick in the struggle – either contrasting social struggle, hence negatively, supporting, hence positively, or maintaining a detached position, thus neutrally. Of course, this category – if it can be considered as such – involve all sort of different individuals. For instance, one can support the cause of social struggles without being committed to fighting with and for them, resulting in moral support more than substantial action. Another could be willing to fight the dismantlement of the urban and

[48] G., activist and worker of *Fuori Binario*, personal interview
[49] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[50] https://viadelleone.noblogs.org/reinventiamo-piazza-tasso-sabato-30-novembre/

social fabric of the city, but without knowing how to channel her dissent against responsible subjects through collective actions - such as *Via del Leone* or *Next Emerson*. Still, others can be completely against or completely indifferent to social centres. Considering that the 'non-involved' are not really a social group, or at least not a homogeneous one, it is the hardest to engage.

> *certainly, we are trying to reach out to those young kids who broke the ropes and ripped up the concrete blocks the night we decided to have the Jam and take back the church parvis. Because those kids are exactly the people who are going to be here and who are going to be fighting our struggles the years to come. And we are fully aware that we need more awareness among the very young* [...] *Because it's actually from high school that many struggles start, this year we were super amazed that we met a transfeminist collective of only high school girls who have done important things, and they are in high school!!* […] *Because actually the people who are interested are there, it just needs to be made clear to them that they are actually interested in things like that*[51]

Activists already identified future generations as a positive 'non-involved' target. Social centres are extremely aware of the energy that young generations have and, consequently, they are enthusiastic to provide them with outlets of free expression – such as the same occupation, or the experience of social fights. As a matter of fact, militants believe that is really important to render citizens' voices 'audible' in the urban context (*people who are interested are there, it just needs to be made clear to them that they are actually interested)*

> *we're not going to be here in our 50s, or maybe we will, though. Maybe we'll be talking about gentrification but we won't be living at the occupation. We probably won't be part of a political assembly anymore and it can't all die just like that.*[52]

Furthermore, involving the younger in the fight would mean guaranteeing the continuity of the struggle. This is crucial since militants are committed to building a relationship with the ground, both physically and socially. This means intimately bonding with neighbourhood residents while fighting the gentrification of the town – preferably shoulder-to-shoulder. And, to make a relationship the more mutually reliable and socially pleasant as possible, continuity over time is crucial.

> *Spaces like this create strong communities and possibilities, including sharing on a personal level, which, in an increasingly parcelled out and individual world, in which a war between the poor is in act, are breaths of fresh air for the well-being of those who experience them*[53]

Militants are eager to show the possibilities of an occupation, because they seem in constant research – and in production – of incentives. The more these places are known in the community – and their ideals shared – the larger might be the group willing to fight for a collective cause.

Nonetheless, there is a large group of 'non-involved' that has been identified as 'negative'.

> *The amoebae in the neighbourhood who ' there's chaos, nice! we piss on the church for no reason and do random things'. Moreover, some are harassing people. And, despite being pushed away, they came back thinking 'whatever, there is a lot of mess no one will notice me' [...] they are precisely those people who are neither of a reality nor affiliated with anyone of a reality, nor minimally interested in what actually can be done*[54]

'Negative' since, oppositely to the young high schools' collectives, these targets – normally identified as single persons – seem less willing to cooperate for a shared and peaceful sociality (*despite being pushed away, they came back*). Even though I did not focus extensively on this specific target – both due to the argument sensitivity and to personal focus on the collective action, rather than individual one – it could be noteworthy to report that activists, even if reluctant to specific social behaviours – such as harassment, discrimination, or the disrespectful for public spaces – are willing to open a communicative channel with this counterpart, to

[51] M., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[52] Ibid
[53] F., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[54] M., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview

establish a fair social equilibrium. However, regardless of the effects that a potential involvement of these parts of the population – either 'positive' or 'negative' targets – would have on the social fight, they do not want to force others into their battles.

> *Yes, we try, without imposing ourselves. When we realize we can't agree on what to do, we either continue on our own, otherwise 'it is what it is' [...] we wouldn't want to be perceived as the ones dragging them into struggles they don't feel like doing. Nor to be the ones doing them for them. We don't want to be defenders of justice. If you are living something that is wrong for us, but you don't give a damn, it means that we will come to terms in ten years with the fact that we haven't done enough in the past*[55]

This attitude shows respect for people unwilling to join the fight while highlighting struggles' determination in continuing their fights regardless of the – even just moral – support received by other actors.

5.2.4 Networking with other struggles

As expressed in different ways throughout this chapter, struggles are, of course, social. This is because, in addition to the fact that relations might be socially compelling, they serve the struggles' purpose of implementing different socialities. Activists are keen supporters of social collaboration, arguing that, even when individual awareness is something good, when not coupled with others' actions, it might result in a stalemate.

> *Even if you focus on changing your lifestyle, though, it's not like you can do something yourself. That is, it takes a network, in my opinion, to create the change. That is, the individual is not enough.*[56]

As reported later in the 'Mutualism' section, the reciprocal contribution that struggles provide one another seems vital for their survival. Struggles have a dynamic system of social entanglements, both outside and inside their specific groups. This means that assemblies members change a lot over time, as well as the interaction with different struggles.

> *A characteristic of long-standing occupations is to have an assembly that changes over time* [...] *this way of interacting has led us to have many relationships with many people. For example, we met people who run the house of the people in Cercina, and people who also come to the tango. And this has allowed us to organize, for example, popular walks to a partisan memorial*[57]

Activists of the same struggle might 'belong' to other realities, and function as connecting points between two or more of them. For instance, *Via del Leone* helped *Mondeggi Bene Comune*, a rural community of the Florentine countryside, in setting up a local vegetable market in Tasso square, while *Next Emerson* collaborates with different local associations to organize an annual walk in memory of partisans' fights. Struggles can create big events – such as parades and protests – in a short time, just by connecting the existing network of relationships among different realities. This ensures quick responses (of days, or even hours, like for help desks, as we will see) to ordinances that take weeks or more to be implemented.

If the changeability of assemblies' members allows struggles to have always new kinds of initiatives – or to find new motivated members for old activities – it might also have repercussions on relations with surrounding struggles.

> *The problem is that very often, when it comes to pulling the strings, there is no one there. It's something that's unfortunate because you see that in the end, then, the neighborhood could be much more supportive, but it is very much so in the facade. There are, for example, projects that we all did together in the municipality, based on volunteer work, and then people disappeared. Another thing that I am quite critical sometimes of the occupation is that the kids are on rotation. There are special guys like the T., and yet some guys disappear and change, because they go elsewhere. And you have to start all*

[55] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[56] F., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[57] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview

over again with relationships, introducing yourself, reconnecting, making yourself understood. This is unfortunate because if one thinks in the discourse of commitment. Commitment has no deadline, it has to be fixed if it is there.[58]

On some occasions, which normally entailed routine activities, it has been reported, as this interviewee states, a lack of participation, by activists of the same struggles, other civil society organizations, or the population initially involved. While during big events (marches and protests) participation is high, even including the 'non-involved', during day-to-day activities it seems that social centres have difficulty in maintaining consistent participation. This could result in a weakening of the fight and, more importantly, in people losing faith in actions (and potentialities) that social struggles pursue. After all, as Holloway states, consistency after cathartic moments has to be maintained for the changes to happen (Holloway, 2010).

In short, relations within and outside struggles are crucial in terms of continuity for the activities and the fights pursued. New members and acquaintances mean greater potentialities for action, as well as quick responsiveness to the fast change of urban and social fabrics in the city. On the other hand, the fast switching of activists within a struggle might result in intermittent fights, which in its turn could spark discouragement in residents and people that rely on it.

It is important to say that these are not to be considered fixed categories: as a matter of fact, some of the targets might 'spill over' into another category or change from one category to another. For instance, future generations might not only be 'not-involved' but also recipients. For instance, while the majority of "super young" – here intended as high school students – are not aware or not involved with the possibilities that social struggles might provide them – thus are 'non-involved' – few school collectives are already in contact and operating with them – hence already recipients. This is to say that a broad category such as 'future generations', depending on their stance on the social fight, might be in one category or another. Similarly, the composition of these categories might change: a 'non-involved' becomes a recipient the moment she participates in social centres activities; or, vice versa, when a recipient – or another struggling entity – stops having relations with the centres, she becomes 'non-involved', and so on.

Also, it is crucial to conceive that these are not the only social actors moving on the urban fabric – 'pulling the strings'. Indeed, all private investors are constantly shaping the city, more than every other actor presented here. As explained earlier, I did not include them in my research because, even when activists definitely consider private speculators as 'enemies' – and formulate a lot of claims against these – I want to focus on those claims directed to institutions, which are those entities directly responsible to protect citizens' needs and will. Even if investors' actions tremendously shape the urban fabric of cities – "justified" by market laws – these are validated by state institutions, which social struggles consider truly accountable. As a matter of fact, as Holloway (2002) and Harvey (2012) suggest, the mobility of investments is permitted by state institutions which, unquestionably, include local public entities.

This section analysed the targets of the previously displayed revindications. Concerning negative targets, it is possible to state that social struggles are aware of difficulties in facing institutional bodies. Basing themselves on the past operations of administrators, they tend not to trust nor rely on the municipality. As consequence, they enact some practices to overcome this tense relationship. They tend to unfold their activities without engaging too much with institutions and, when they do, it seems important not to be recognized as a distinctive entity or an individual, which would be more easily imputable. In doing so, they are conscious that changes are hard to achieve, but that unity despite (little) differences – actually with recognition and acceptance of such differences – might be helpful for the fight to succeed. When considering the relation between struggles and recipients of their actions, it is important to consider differences in size, location, and type of activities conducted. While both centres reported a good relationship with neighbours, *Via del Leone* seems to grasp more on residents in terms of involvement in social fights, such as the participation of non-activists in the

[58] G., activist and worker of *Fuori Binario*, personal interview

protests against the sale of the Health Care Centre or, as I will mention later, the occupation of a disused and vacant public space – in the past used for children's workshops – together with kids' parents living in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, *Next Emerson* presents great participation in activities, more internal to the facility and of different nature – also not politically related, such as tango courses and hack labs. Despite these differences, both seem to have a good level of participation by the population and, even when there exist non-sympathizers, struggles appear to hold on the neighbourhood positively. For what regards that part of 'non-involved' – or non-interested, or "dis-likers" – in socio-political projects, social struggles are always trying to involve more of them in joining their cause. But, rather than approaching 'non-involved' – either positive or negative – like political institutions do while campaigning – hence by trying to get as more 'undecided' as possible, regardless of their interest in the cause – social struggles appear to be determined in approaching people that show interest in tackling urban issues of different nature, or in developing a different kind of sociality. In short, struggles seem to prefer rather quality – committed people – over quantity. Moreover, struggles report interest for the younger to join the struggles, in order to ensure the continuity and the strength of the fight.

5.3 'Modelling' the urban fabric to settle in

As mentioned throughout the thesis, the premise of leaving as much space as possible for the activists' words and activities to fill the empty signifier of 'the right to the city', indeed persists. It is necessary then, before elaborating personal interpretations, to leave space for every relevant element witnessed on the field. To be more specific, I will now display observations not by analytically explaining each activity of the centres, but through the principles – in the sense of proposed beliefs or behaviours – that struggles put in place while pursuing their fights – 'how' social struggles operate. With regard to this, I pinpointed 4 principles – Mutualism, Horizontality & Self-management, Inspiring mobilisation, and Shadow-ism. I do not consider this as an exhaustive 'list' of principles, nor do I think these as the only characteristics that struggles are fighting over. On the contrary, I think of this as a specific set of principles that are specifically befitting for the Florentine context, and likely not in the totality of its urban struggles. In short, these are only the most striking principles that I witnessed, to different extents, in the two social centres. It may be possible that other city struggles do not consider this list as – fully or partially – relevant, or complete. Moreover, I am not drawing principles after specific literature – even if some, like self-management and mutualism, present a thorough literature, from which I borrowed the name. I will maintain the focus on activists' actions and behaviours from which I interpreted – and was related to – consequent principles.

5.3.1 Mutualism

> *The work we are doing is perfectly in line with the path we have been following in the neighbourhood for seven years, from the struggles in defence of the Nidiaci to the Santa Rosa Health Care unit, the latter being particularly important at this time. The point is to create networks of solidarity, not just in times of need. Networks that will be activated to solve problems at a deeper level, in a logic that goes beyond the individual and becomes one of collective recognition. The concept of identity must serve not to fragment into smaller and smaller groups, but to recognize the other as equal to oneself. I recognize myself as belonging to a community and therefore take action to support the community as a whole. It doesn't matter where you were born or the colour of your skin, everyone, in the communities where they are, should create mutual aid mechanisms from which, in our opinion, we need to start again. Re-establishing those ties that have been torn and that allow people to recognize themselves in the "we."*[59]

[59] Interview to an activist of *Via del Leone*, retrieved from *https://www.stamptoscana.it/reti-solidali-contro-il-covid-i-volontari-la-solidarieta-e-contagiosa/*

The first principle, and likely the most commonly applied among activists, is the one observed in every activity carried out by centres, from the relation with outer actors – such as other struggles or non-struggle-related individuals or groups – to the daily socialisation among activists of the same centre: mutualism. This is what I consider to be the most important feature of centres since it consists in a socio-political project that sparks and permeates all the following principles. As the words of this militant express, social struggles strive to create mutually supportive and inclusive mechanisms by which, within a community, every member should feel and recognize as equally important to everyone else.

> *The thing is, by cooperating with everyone, actually, what one lacks another has. And so on, and so forth* […] *it doesn't create difficulties, in fact, to us, it seems like a smart way of moving as well. Moving on different levels*[60]

As a matter of fact, mutual help and solidarity are core elements of the social life of the struggles in the Florentine area – and, more generally, a shared attribute of nationwide struggles. The idea behind it lies in the fact that "*what one lacks another has*". Struggles want to create a 'giving and taking' kind of society. The struggles optimal – maybe utopic – vision of the society, is the one *in which everyone gives according to their ability and receives according to their needs*[61]. Each struggle develops 'social tools' – such as *Via del Leone* help desks, to overcome food and housing emergencies, or *Next Emerson* charity concerts, to support the Kurdish liberation movement or other causes – in order to resist and overcome difficulties. When merged, these compose a sort of collective 'solidarity' tool set, with the same goal – to overcome detrimental situations – but with a larger purpose: to engage the community as a whole – and to balance inequalities among its members. Since each tool arises from specific struggle aims, clear and directed at something concrete – either general as gentrification, or more focussed, as workers or LGBTQIA+ rights – the more numerous these aims are, the larger will be the set of 'solidarity' tools from which the community can benefit. As mentioned, this relationship model is not limited to social centres but includes the entire community – or at least whoever wants to be part of it.

> *An awareness also of not being alone, in the sense of seeing that the people who help are actually, in the end, the same people who are helped by the very thing that has been set up all together. Organizing, to make community*[62]

What is more, mutualism is not just a booster of urban struggles' life, but its living essence. Solidarity networks provide the basis for further social interactions. Firstly, because mutualism – through an ideal of 'giving and taking' – provides a clear vision of the kind of interactions that struggles fight for, hence a clear purpose of the alternative society they want to realise – or, at least, a defined step towards it. Consequently, for mutualism to materialize, it is fundamental that other actors – activists or not – are enacting the same type of interactions. If this kind of synergy is lost, then the whole city will become a chessboard for subjugating actors – the municipality and investors – to mould. In other words, the more people are involved, the more this kind of community will function. Secondly, mutualism, through the involvement of more participants, provides higher possibilities to overcome critical situations, both for political (social centres) and non-political (citizens) actors – through the above-mentioned solidarity 'tool-set'.

To make it clearer, I will display some examples. During one protest, in the summer of 2021, a few activists have been denounced and, at the very moment of writing this piece, received a verdict. In response, through the mobilization of the citywide solidarity network – composed of urban struggles, sympathetic citizens, and more – Florentine social movements are promoting fundraisings for the legal expenses of the condemned.

Similarly, many non-activists benefitted from *Via del Leone* help desks. Having a central location within the city, the majority of the daily activities of this occupation are focused on residents' emergencies. One anti-eviction and one food help desk are constantly monitoring the condition of locals in need. The first, one of the oldest activities of the centre, is concerned with providing solutions to residents that are about to be – or have already been – evicted. Eviction procedures are usually sudden and fast. When they receive a notification for

[60] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[61] Flier from *Brigata Basaglia*, a local association of therapists that provides phycological support
[62] F., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview

eviction, residents have a short time to leave the house (10 days), after which forced eviction takes place. The occupation, as soon as informed by the tenants, activates its net of social relations on the ground, to 'gather forces' (activists of the same centre, activists of other struggles, locals, etc.) and implement anti-eviction pickets – a resistant action, in which participants physical hamper the entrance of authorities in the house – before the actual eviction of the tenant. If this succeeds, the latter will have more time to find housing or financial alternatives. This activity has been less operative during the research period since the government blocked evictions during the pandemic. Nevertheless, these have strongly restarted during last year. As a matter of fact, according to a representative of SUNIA – literally *United National Tenants and Tenants Union* – in 2022, 130 Florentine families, monthly, faced eviction[63]. Concurrently with the resumption of evictions, anti-eviction pickets restarted. The second help desk (food securitization), on the other hand, was born from the precarious situation induced by the Covid-19 outbreak. More active (twice a month) during the pandemic, and less frequent (once a month) afterwards, this activity gathers residents' alimentary resources to distribute them to people in food emergency conditions. Donations, both monetary or alimentary, are provided by the same residents and vendors of the *San Frediano* neighbourhood.

Another example of mutualism, iconic of the cohesive relation among struggling realities in Florence, is represented by the events of 21st September 2021. On this day, Florence hosted a massive demonstration parade. As a matter of fact, they were three: an LGBTQAI+ pride parade, a 'movement for earth' parade, and a GKN parade. Regarding this last one, a short explanation is needed. GKN, an automobility British multinational, owned a big factory in the Florentine metropolitan area and, in July of 2021, fired overnight all 422 employees through a mail notification. A full mobilization of the workers, that immediately gathered and formed a factory collective, protested against the delocalization of the company and, through the occupation of the facility, avoided the means of production to be dismantled and moved. Leaving aside the results achieved from the collective, which today carries on the struggle, it is important to observe how Florentine struggles reacted to this situation. During my research – which started in June 2021 – every weekly assembly of *Next Emerson* and *Via del Leone* had points in agendas related to GKN and its workers. Every GKN workers' revindication event – a sit-in under the municipality of Florence, a concert to collect money for family workers in need, the same events of the 21st of September – has been attended, promoted, and/or co-organized by members of both struggles, even when there was no apparent connection with GKN workers. The only thing that, apparently, unites these actions, is the struggle itself.

Being it to reclaim workers' rights, provide food security, or help those convicted in affording legal expenses, all these actions represent the possibilities for a community to rely on its members, beyond state or market apparatus. All activists' actions aim to develop a deep-rooted connection with the neighbourhood, through a close-up approach, paying attention to residents' needs and desires. This provides a great sense of community within the neighbourhood which, on some occasions, prefers to relate with centres rather than authorities. For instance, the first *Via del Leone* meeting I attended took place in Tasso square, next to the squat. This is because a couple of days earlier, a group of girls were harassed while playing football on the pitch, and requested the presence of the militants during their next game (at the same time as the assembly), to avoid bothering or dangerous situations. The presence of occupants, apparently, fulfils the girls' need for security more than the presence of, for example, police. I found this event exemplary of the work done throughout the years by militants, whose purpose is to build trustworthy and reciprocal supportive relations among residents.

As a result, and for the sake of this purpose, such mutually supportive relations might be created at the cost of sharing misfortunes.

> *This thing that came about, I remember it quite well when I was in high school, that they had come to explain to us what flexibility was. That this flexibility would have allowed of wonderful things, including, it's most important to choose a profession that you like. Which, however, is a joke to us, here in Next Emerson. In the sense that, beyond the mere critique of the job - whether or not is easy to make my job, that I do to get a salary, something I can enjoy for life - but beyond that, to us what didn't add up was "okay, but the things that no one likes to do, who does them?"* […] *because if everybody does what they*

[63] https://www.controradio.it/%F0%9F%8E%A7emergenza-abitativa-a-firenze-sunia-130-famiglie-al-mese-sfrattate-per-morosita/

like, then there will be a slave class that does the things that nobody likes to do. Because who likes to clean toilets? You know? Who likes to go to the foundry? Nobody, but some people have to. We prefer to say "okay the things that are bummer, we distribute them" rather than saying "let's give 50 euros to him so he cleans the toilets"[64]

As expressed by the militant, '*bummer'* situations, as well as benefits, have to be equally shared. As the anti-picket actions promoted by *Via del Leone* – or the protests in the summer of 2021 – in which participants might be arrested or denounced, any other action could result in negative repercussions for them. Nevertheless, while enacting mutualistic relationships might run towards misfortunes – being arrested or denounced to help somebody not to lose their dwelling – it also provides reparative mechanisms – to receive financial help for legal expenses from the community.

Realize that you can do certain things without having to have something back. As in 'I help you? Just for the pleasure of helping you.' That's kind of missing in the world here. That, and a thousand other things […] Economically you can do a lot of benefits. Give money to people who really need it.[65]

As I argued before, all these actions are conducted with the higher perspective to create a society of 'givers and takers'. When one day a person 'gives' something (donation to the food help-desk, or physical presence during an eviction), the other day she might, in her turn, need to 'receive' it, because of precarious conditions.

Mutualism is here intended as a form of solidarity and reciprocity, that fosters the unification of the community goals, not only to overcome criticalities but to create alternative forms of social organizations. I conceived mutualism as both insurance and stimulus for struggles. Firstly, it is insurance since whenever a community member needs support (either with food, the house, or jobs), likely, the neighbourhood will positively respond to the necessity. As Holloway says, thanks to the *flow of doing* – the collective way of acting upon a submissive power such as eviction or food emergency – a despairing situation (the despair scream) can be turned into a proactive action (hoping scream) (Holloway, 2002). Hence, a community based on mutualism is something that people can relate to and rely on, as long as they act collectively. Secondly, it is a stimulus because if stability is achieved (maintaining the house or securing food) thanks to the collective force of such relations, it is possible that such force cannot merely be used to maintain a balance, but to create a space to create the wanted balance – to decide upon the fate of a community, not just to make it surviving to the deficiencies of institutional services. This is why a force such as Mutualism has not to be confused with, for example, charitable behaviours.

To summarise, the mutualistic mechanism does not only entail political struggles – intended as a plurality of conscious individuals that have a political aim – but, potentially, every non-political individual or group – either a homeless, an immigrant, a sexual violence victim, or a resident family – which, in any way, experienced societal injustice, and need support. In response, social struggles activate and, together with the whole solidarity net, act for the removal of the societal barrier. The mutualistic framework witnessed in Florentine's struggles is what allows them to strengthen one another actions. In short, this 'mutualistic' framework is able to provide individual and collective subsistence to the community, and it represents the foundational element of a collective social identity (*Re-establishing those ties that have been torn and that allow people to recognize themselves in the "we."*).

5.3.2 Internal structure: Horizontality & self-management

It is clear how social centres relate with each other and with non-political actors, to create a community based on reciprocal support. The mutualistic approach, through the solidarity mechanisms it creates, is crucial for the survivance of some actors – both political and not – and for the creation of alternative urban social logic. Moreover, mutualism is the spark that brings politics – hence the kind of decisional process implemented – into the activities of centres. As said, throughout the ethic it unfolds in social relations, mutualism permeates all other principles. In short, even when the decisional processes have their own characteristics – horizontal

[64] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[65] F., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview

and autogestion – these emerge from the mutualistic framework – solidarity and support – since this is the very reason for social struggles existence – creating a community that can involve each member's need, especially of the most disadvantaged. Horizontal decision-making processes and self-management (*autogestion*) are foundational elements for the internal organization of social centres. This section is conceived to exhaustively explain such attributes. To start with, it is peculiar how transparent the communication operates among activists, regardless of their period of permanence in the struggle. Weekly meetings represent the most patent evidence of social centres' political processes.

> *We write everyone on the blackboard so that the points are written down and known to all. We don't ask everyone to speak, because it seems to us to be almost intimidating. We try to keep the tone of the discussion relaxed and calm, even a bit laid back, so that everyone feels comfortable and contributes things*[66]

These open meetings are mediated by two or three activists, usually on rotation, and debated collectively – trying to be as inclusive as possible. Choices are taken consensually, rather than on the majority. Weekly meetings are slow, redundant and, sometimes, inconclusive. However, they are exhaustive, transparent and rightful. Opened to everybody who would like to contribute to debates, weekly meetings are indeed one of the strongholds of social centres and, undoubtfully, represent the most important element of horizontality within the decision-making process. The way sociality is conducted in social centres is in strong connection with the way political aims are pursued. To reproduce a pyramidal society, based on relations that would attribute, for example, more agency to the 'older', would correspond to the annihilation of the political project as a whole.

As a matter of fact, if mutualism represents the social engine of centres, horizontal self-management, which constitutes the basis of the organisation within the struggles, is the political one – which allows the *capacity-to-do* to regain its collective characteristic. Decisions are developed in a constant loop of debating feedbacks, to grasp perspectives from the whole group. This, besides putting each other at ease, allows militants not to think unilaterally, but to examine the debated matter from every possible point of view. For this to work – professing a respectful sociality to enable horizontal politics, and vice versa – a strong belief and support in the success of the socio-political project is requested. As one of the activists told me "*if you want to live in* [Via del] *Leone, you have to actively do politics"*. Politics is so intrinsic within struggle projects that, even activities apparently non-political result being as such. This is the case with the *Next Emerson* Tango course.

> *Now Tango is one of the biggest activities we do and it's an activity that takes up ¼ of the social centre activities. They built a dancefloor that is among the biggest in Florence. And the thing grew* [...] *a lot of the Tango people have an average age that is over 40. And yet they really like the self-management attitude.* […] *they run the place in all the issues: from cleaning toilets, to organizing lectures, to everything else. And they self-organize the course, which is completely free, but very structured.* [...] *They have a very horizontal level of management. This one is not a political experience directly, but, in the end, it is.* [...] *this is a super experience of self-management.* […] *the self-management perspective is an important shift, in my opinion. Because it really migrates the power dynamic* […] *you assume responsibilities; therefore, you also assume that you have power over a place, with all the responsibilities that entails, and then, you gain that you can imagine and construct it as you have imagined it. So, it empowers your imagination, doesn't it! And it makes you see that you can somehow make a politics that is the management of the polis, and it is not the politics of "I go to vote every 5 years, then somebody will do things for me which, if I don't like, I can complain". I think is the interesting part of running the place.*[67]

Every organizational aspect is, inherently, politicized. Self-managing a facility brings all sorts of responsibilities, as well as possibilities to imagine and create the space at own will – in Park's words, 'after [one] heart's desire'. As a matter of fact, militants are fully aware, having themselves experienced it, of the impact autogestion has on politics, especially as an incentive for human creativity. Politics here is intended,

[66] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[67] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview

obviously, as participative politics, not as institutional. As for the hesitancy to open communication with the municipality, strongly influenced by the past conduct of institutions, activists are averse to what institutions represent for the population (*the politics of "I go to vote every 5 years, then somebody will do things for me which, if I don't like, I can complain"*), especially for what regards their organization and management. In the same way, they are reluctant to unequal economic systems. That is why the monetary sphere is left out as much as possible.

> *none of us take money to be in here, not even in the form of subsistence* […] *this is a debate that ran throughout all social centres in Italy. Many introduced self-wages to support militants. We always chose not to do that, because we felt that within the place it could create dynamics that are, in some way, unhealthy* […] *It seemed to us like self-exploitation.* […] *if we were to make them for money, we would lose the enjoyment of making. We want people who come here, no matter the little they can give, it has to be for the project of the place*[68]

Introducing economic elements in social centres might be destabilizing for the internal social and political equilibrium. Money – for example, personal wages for individual militants – can severely undermine the project. Let us think, for example, about the effects it could have on personal motivation. One day an activist told me that *the great thing about the place is that it's not that everyone has to get into it 100 per cent: do the assembly here, go to the garrison there. Everyone chooses the form and intensity of the involvement*[69]. If this is true – and I personally do not think of a reason why it should not be – then it means that every militant is motivated only by the possibilities offered by the socio-political project (e.g., the chance to teach a sport, to debate politics, to create a communal garden, etc.). Inletting money into this mechanism will probably encourage the salaried in being more active, emarginating all the others (*we felt that within the place it could create dynamics that are, in some way, unhealthy*)

> *we try, where possible, not to create charismatic figures* […] *In an environment that is already set up as a workshop, there may be one who is better at welding than others, who can explain to you how to weld, but you cannot you have a completely passive or subordinate role* […] *our view is the self-management, we have this need to do things, and specialties, and we self-manage it in toto*[70]

Indeed, the way of horizontally conducting activities has to involve outsiders' participation. Being charismatic might be good to influence people's ideals, but when the goal is that of developing a horizontal society, the focus of 'leading' figures – such as wielding instructors or boxing coaches – ought to be that of inspiring criticism and personal involvement among participants.

To summarise, the way activists develop their relations within centres is very important for the social and political features of the struggle. Horizontality seeks not only a fair decision-making process but also the recognition and respect of everyone's ideas. Self-management, instead, pushes activists and participants to assume different degrees of responsibility – from cleaning schedules to organising big events – and to raise awareness around the importance of the project. What is more, to horizontally self-manage a space allows the same activists to freely think and design it how they want. This, taken to an extreme, might represent a first glimpse at the possibilities to self-manage big areas – such as neighbourhoods. In other words, this can represent a fair experiment – yet limited because of its size – of participative democracy.

5.3.3 Taking action and sparking creativity: mobilisation of inactive citizens

My initial expectations on social centres' *modus operandi*, especially regarding specific actions to contrast unwanted management of the urban space, indeed changed throughout the research. Generally, I noticed that it is easy to confuse structured and thoughtful actions – such as protests, parades or physical obstruction to avoid eviction – with a more a-specific rebelliousness. Social centres are frequently represented as the core of insubordination and public disobedience. Media and administrators usually use them as a scapegoat to cover urban problems, frequently ignoring residents' claims, regardless of an existent connection between these and

[68] Ibid.
[69] F., activist of Next Emerson, personal interview
[70] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview

activists' actions. It is common, in Florence as in other parts of Italy, to consider social centres as a rotten apple of urban society. To bring an example, 'Degradation' is a very commonly used word that newspapers use to describe social centres and their surroundings.

This is to say that, despite this section's aim is that of displaying the important role that centres have in sparking proactivity through the population, this characteristic is repeatedly hampered by a depiction of media and institutions. Indeed, discrediting social centres' actions, while making their life harder, slow down their capacity to spread mobilisation among citizens, especially, among the 'non-involved'.

> *I don't know if there is a specific word but, in all this time that I frequent* [Via del] *Leone, it seems to me that we are those people who maybe throw the rock in the water and see how many people look at ripples it makes. I don't know if that's an image that is clear enough.*[71]

Engaging people in socio-political struggles, an already challenging task per se, becomes far more difficult when tackled by authorities and public opinion. Indeed, public disobedience requires a large number of participants and a fair amount of planning to head towards positive outcomes. However, it may not be enough to build up a desired alternative sociality. In point of fact, throughout the research, activists never failed to specify the cruciality that 'word-of-mouth' has in developing a reclaiming population. In other words, besides the inherently political nature of struggles, activists seek the direct involvement of citizens in issues concerning the management of the urban space.

> *To make people see that there are a huge and very wide range of possibilities that perhaps people themselves have never considered, but simply, perhaps, out of sheer ignorance, but just in the sense of ignoring, the term. Not really knowing* [...] *If nobody points things out to anybody, nobody will notice them. While in reality very little is really all it takes to get young people interested in*[72]

I had the chance to participate in one particular event – and to listen to testimonies of several others – that might simplify the principle. On the 18th of June 2021, at the very beginning of my research on the field, the Florentine movement of urban struggles organized a public jam session as a protest against the privatization of Santo Spirito square. To make it clearer, Santo Spirito is a historical and popular square, close to the *Via del Leone* occupation. Like other squares in the city, it always hosted a great number of festivals, street markets and folkloristic games. Known in the past for its criminality, the square has been tried to be restructured – physically and socially – since late '800 (Pellegrino, 2015), to replace its residents. Attempts of physical and social reconfiguration go on until today. Several concessions, to open nightclubs and pubs, have been released by the municipality and, in conjunction with it, major restrictions have been set on the use of public soils – such as the ban to sit on sidewalks or parvises. Specifically, during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, limitations have been severely increased – such as limited entries to the square, or the prohibition to eat, sit, and drink on the church parvis, among others. While some of them were removed after the end of the Covid emergency, many still endure. To bring it back to my previous example, the jam session was organised to express militants' discontent towards privatisation and the consequent lack of spaces for a 'free sociality'. As a response, a large portion (especially youth) of the 'non-involved' population, agreeing on the matter of contestation, supported and joined the protest. The event, pacifically organized and conducted by struggles – among which *Via del Leone* was one of the main promoters – ended with the physical extirpation of the fence by some of the present 'non-involved' youth.

> *We like a lot this rebellion by kids. Newspapers at first said it was social centres, Absolutely not! [...] we wrote communiqués and articles with pictures of those high school kids that ripped out the fence. Same high school kids to whom we told "look, we can get beer from our Pakistani friend and drink it in the parvis. Rather than spend 7 euros on cocktails you'd get at the bar table you can get more beers and be sprawled out on the parvis, without being packed at the table. […] Come, participate in the*

[71] M., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[72] M., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview

assemblies!" and so it was, and we absolutely claimed this thing. That's what I was saying about the rippling stone in the water[73]

During the following months, Santo Spirito hosted several smaller events, from flash mobs to art installations, all overtly challenging the privatization of public squares. Despite all efforts, the square seems to be 'lost'. As a matter of fact, due to intense regulations and a high level of space securitization – both cameras and police patrols constantly monitor the square – urban struggles events have been heavily limited, and the sociality of the square remains related to pubs and nightclubs activities.

I think it's tough. I think this year we had the step-over. Every season we have seen attempts to privatize and close the square. With Covid and related restrictions, assemblages, etc., they have given the coup de grace[74]

Nevertheless, the Florentine urban struggles keep on organizing 'catch-up' assemblies among them, wishing to regain the sociality of the square. This is an explicative example of the inspiration that militants instil in the population – especially in the young – which, despite agreeing on protesting against privatisation, would have probably not exhibited individually their dissent.

Another one is the *Stanzina dei Bambini* (literally, Children's room), located in *Tasso square*, next to *Via del Leone*. Managed by an elder man in the past, this little room used to open during afternoons for children and parents' recreational activities. After the man passed away, and the management attributed to the municipality, the room has been closed and unused for several years[75]. Just after a public assembly, organized by *Via del Leone* and participated by parents of local schools' children, the place was reclaimed by the same parents, which proposed and initiated an occupation of the place.

We created a round of people, we sat there at the table. We discussed, we met with the administration. No one had written an article about the children's room, even if there had been a spontaneous popular activation, which we were able to channel. It was a reverse process. We were the ones who said to the parents "do we care? Because this stuff has been closed forever. I remember as a kid it was cool to go there". The people start saying said "oh, we can do that" they then occupied it. We didn't occupy it, I mean, they did, the moms, the parents, the kids.[76]

Nowadays, after a neat activities abruption due to Coronavirus, the Children's room keeps hosting *Via del Leone* helpdesks.

A similar circumstance occurred in the area close to *Next Emerson*, where the centre tried to claim, as a 'common', a little public garden.

we told the municipality 'before you make a garden here that would never open because you don't have the money, you make the garden and we make a neighbourhood association. You give us the responsibility to do things, even just simple maintenance.' It was also a way to make the residents protagonists of the area they live in, and also a way to cutting red tape whereby maybe you have a garden but, because they don't come and cut your grass, then the children can't go there to play. So, let's say 'we cut the grass', let's make the association that does this stuff here and go[77]

However, before the centre could even start activities in the garden, the municipality allowed a private investor to build a repeater on its soil. While this is a 'non-example' – since the common garden was never realized – the activists' purpose has the same matrix as that of *Via del Leone*, which is to spark the proactivity of residents to regain – even just a bit of – the shaping power over the urban spaces.

[73] Ibid.
[74] F., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[75] https://www.firenzetoday.it/cronaca/stanzina-bambini-piazza-tasso-chiusa.html
[76] L., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[77] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview

All these actions have the same root, which is that of inspiring – either directly or indirectly, as in the case of the jam session, that would have been realised despite 'non-involved' presences – that portion of the population that is not able, or just unaware, to actuate a change. Indeed, struggles pursue the 'activation' of people, whether joining their specific claims or creating new ones. Activists do not casually seek new proselytes to grow their struggles and enhance their 'power'. In line with 'quality over quantity' reasoning in the 'non-involved' section, it seems to me that they try to engage people, especially the most disadvantaged ones, in developing a critical approach towards things they live and – maybe unconsciously – ignore every day. What is important here is the possibility to understand the creative part – as horizontality and self-management – that citizens would gain in critically approaching city issues. As for shaping the squat – in the case of militants, that can model their occupation however they want – taking responsibility for social and political actions in the urban fabric can convey to citizens the possibility to imagine – and luckily create – an urban space suitable to satisfy their necessities.

5.3.4 Shadow-ism

As the last principle, which is more a status than a principle, I pinpointed Shadow-ism. I renamed the term by borrowing the concept of 'shadow economy' (or 'black economy'), that economy which is forbidden or in noncompliance with institutions' regulations, normally constituted during war times. On one hand, shadow-ism is an ironical term that emerges from the common opinion on social centres and relative militants, usually depicted as absconding criminals – which is part of the criminalisation discourse of media and institutions. On the other, not regularly registering (either as a public or private association) is a strategy that social centres implement to give struggles a certain freedom of action. As argued when displaying the relationship between the centres and the municipality of Florence, the former barely gets in contact with the latter, unless strictly necessary. For example, organizing a legal protest implies legal authorizations which, as we saw, militants usually request to 'close' councillors. However, social centres do not want to engage with 'legality'. Of course, common belief sees militants evading a legal status to easily avoid the consequences of their actions, to 'do whatever they want' (nourishing the criminalisation discourse). In reality, this is not (fully) the case. In fact, due to long-term militancy and a series of illegal actions, individual activists are already quite known by authorities and municipality s members. Of course, not everybody has the same 'reputation' but, as in the case of the aforementioned 2021 summer protests, many had already received denunciation or verdicts in the past – meaning that they were already officially recorded.

As mentioned in the 'Municipality' section, the particular reason why activists do not want to legalise the struggles is the related involvement in bureaucratic mechanisms.

> *with legalization, you personify.* [...] *everything could then be traced back to one or more people* [...] *This, however, is a space of struggle. In these terms the struggle would lose meaning.* […] *This space should then become an association. In the world I would like there should not be all the bureaucracy*[78]

The bureaucratization of the struggles would result in a twofold effect. Firstly, legalisation, which entails the creation of a lawful association, would 'personify' the struggle, recognizing one or more individuals to be legally bonded to the space. Consequently, this would generate a shift of responsibilities towards the liable persons which, eventually, would 'risk' more than others. Despite not panicking about lawsuits – as witnessed in the case of protest charges – activists might face a much broader series of repercussions when legally bonded to a physical space. Moreover, an easier identification – and consequent graver charges – may represent an obstruction for the political fight which, for a squat or an illegal occupation, is an inherent and inalienable element. Indeed, *the struggle would lose meaning*[79].

> *We, as an occupied space, don't have to undergo a pressing bureaucracy like associations [...]. I now have occupied and I can do a lot of things. If I had to do an association, how many of those things can*

[78] V., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[79] V., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview

I still continue to do? If I have to give up most of them, we have already chosen that we are not going to do it [...] we don't think we should be the legal solutions for this place to exist[80]

Secondly, the creation of an association would implicate a raise in costs for centres' activities. Of course, lawful activities – be it a Muay Thai course or the projection of a movie in the square – would incur taxes that, as the activist says, would discourage their same implementation (*If I have to give up most of them, we have already chosen that we are not going to do it*). In short, every militant seems quite certain not to want to withstand bureaucracy, which would bring only 'quagmires'.

If one day the city council said ' we want to legalise Via del Leone and so it becomes a social centre full of cultural activities and so on and so forth.' We might even say yes. But we stop living there, find people interested in running a cultural centre. Trusted people clearly, from our circles, maybe involved in theatre, in music, and who want to run such a place and finally have a chance [...] *and we find another place where to do politics*[81]

if we could save the place from speculative mechanisms, so here remains what was already here, we would be willing to legalise it[82]

If the legalisation of a place were to be accepted by its occupants, certainly the struggling action of activists would not placate. It would only change dwelling. Several times I have been told that eviction was not a real concern. Indeed, it is a preoccupation – as in the case of *Next Emerson* that faced two auctions – but in a more logistic sense, and on the consequent efforts of gathering forces to occupy again. Vacant places to be squatted abound in the neighbourhood, and militants are well aware of the possibility to squat them if necessary. In short, kicking out militants from a squat would certainly not stop their political activity. Moreover, militants would only accept legalisation if substitutes will continue all the non-political activities – or, at least, something that could satisfy locals' interests.

the recognition of the commons would an important step. That is, to recognize that yes there is private property, but there is also another thing that is everyone's goods. We recognize that there are commons of all. That it is not that everything is private, or the state runs it. There may be things that are not private, not run by the state, but run by community groups.[83]

Lately we were trying to succeed with individuals from other realities to make the children's room a common good, so that precisely all the people, or associations, or various realities, could do something with it: activities for children, or up art workshops, for the youngest, and not only[84]

Social centres propose, instead of legalising facilities – most likely by dispossessing militants – the legal recognition of 'commons'. Throughout the whole research, and most likely still now, both centres have been striving for the recognition of commons within their neighbourhood – *Via del Leone* for the *Children's room*, and *Next Emerson* for parcels of public gardens. Commons, by definition non-competitive collective goods managed by a community of people, would completely fall within the mutualistic framework, since they could fulfil diverse necessities of community members, depending on the nature of the good – a vegetable garden could provide food, a gym could provide the space to practice specific sports, and so on.

Lastly, activists would acknowledge legalisation as a way for institutions to annihilate the social fight.

is the game they want you to play in my opinion. That's why they legalize places, they say 'oh wait, unfortunately, we haven't been able to evict them, so let's throw them a bone, legalise them and maybe they'll quiet down a little bit' Which often happens by the way […] *Via del Leone is another thing. It expresses a struggle. Legalizing it would mean accepting and allowing certain dynamics to take over*[85]

[80] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[81] L., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[82] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview
[83] Ibid.
[84] M., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[85] L., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview

Legalisation would eventually result in weakening the image of the fight. Militants, besides repelling the idea of closely relating – as we saw, for reasons of distrust towards institutions – with a 'legal framework', are sure that legalisation would destroy the purpose of the struggle itself since it *would mean accepting and allowing certain dynamics to take over*. As in the case of the girls' team asking militants for a watchful eye during their football match, activists' actions prove the importance to create a community that acknowledges and relies on its means, which can validly substitute authorities' apparatuses. This creates an image of the struggle indivisible from the neighbourhood.

> *The creation of a community that knows it can rely on itself. To use means outside of institutional-state one, which are gradually disappearing. Pushed to the extreme, Zapatista community. […] Services should be provided by state agencies. Better to fight for the claim for these. It is important to try creating autonomous forms of countervailing power*[86]

Social centres strive for the realisation of a society that stands 'beyond' the state and 'beyond' the market. As a matter of fact, all the resources, activities, and claims, are respectively gathered, carried on, and formulated outside of the ordinary state and market logic – in the form of *countervailing power*. If struggles were to be legalized, all efforts to achieve – or to move towards, as utopic never reachable – pre-set goals, would be in vain. For struggles to meet these goals, a high degree of 'elasticity' is necessary, and legalisation, on the opposite, is rather stiff. In any case, again, if the centre were to be legalized – or evicted – it is right to affirm that militants would not stop the fight, because at that point they *would move, occupy another place and start all over again. Because the more this system is carried around, the happier*[87] they are.

Activists legitimate what I called 'shadow-ism', which relates substantially to a form of acting 'outside' of state and market rules, because of the desire – and the demand – for opportunities to express oneself outside of 'normal' logic. 'Normality' (or legality), on the contrary, represents a social, economic, and cultural framework that is usually institutional and market-driven, where 'correct' behaviours are separated by the 'deviant' ones – which are punished and corrected. Through an argument that takes inspiration from Foucault's discourse on deviances (1977), legality and everything that may derive from it – such as the decorum that media and institutions are crying out for when social movements light up smoke bombs in squares – reproduce a dynamic that tends to eliminate 'deviant behaviours', providing a limited set of possible realities – hence limited economic systems, socialities, politics, and so on. Shadow-ism – or informality, illegality, or whatever might be called – here is seen just as another framework, by which is possible to operate different and 'wider' ways (cultural, social, and economic) of living, where there would be no annihilation or marginalization of the deviances, but a negotiation of them. Also, this conceptual lens – the fact of having the possibility to think 'out of the box' – helps militants to contemplate the very typology of social fights enacted on the urban ground.

> *I personally think we are victims of this very Western dimension, of the game of chess, a game of annihilation. And we tend to move as if we really have to eliminate. Actually, if I look around, there is no political force of any kind, even with large military apparatuses, that works this way. But our game is more like Go, which is Chinese checkers, where you win by building zones of influence.* […] *And for me it's more like this stuff here, which is you build zones of influence; so, the optics are not to take everything, because I know I can't take everything, but it's to build a zone of influence that expands, or that shrinks. But that's kind of the game for me.* [...] *Compared to what was the wave of the 1970s, no one, to date, thinks in a revolutionary outlet*[88]

I found the 'conceptual solution' provided by this activist very interesting. While he completely accepts and understands that total control, over a city as over a nation, is not possible, he is unveiling the – likely frustrating – controversy that this desire represents for institutions. While it is possible to say that institutions succeeded in dominating substantially every sphere of our life, they cannot prevent different realities from sprouting – autonomous communities like the Zapatista or the Paris Commune, albeit inspiring, are just a glimpse of the immensely wide anti-power movement. Social centres acknowledge that, at this point, *there's no room to bring*

[86] F., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[87] M., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[88] G., activist of *Next Emerson*, personal interview

back or defend anything[89], and, consequently, their objectives are not directed at the annihilation of disliked realities (e.g., capitalism), but towards the creation of something new that does not imply the complete 'conquest', but a genuine people involvement to recreate some different reality – which does not involve power relations. While legality condemns differences, social centres want to 'play' in an environment that nourishes them.

> *In this assembly I like it so much because we are so diverse. That is, there are people that, even politically, really think differently one from the other* […] *That's why* [via del] *Leone in my opinion works. Because the common thing is that 'we keep slowing down this thing that seems bigger than us, that in my opinion we can defeat, in your opinion we can't, but in the meantime we are slowing it down together!' and it's an achievement.*[90]

Diversity is an essential aspect of social realities, both because different ideas and impulses are what might give the fight a more holistic and heterogeneous perspective and because diversity is an element that supports the recognition and acceptance of otherness.

In the end, activists are not afraid of being recognized as legal but, for struggles to be more coherent with their goals, 'playing' within the pre-existent capitalistic framework – hence legality – is not an option. It is fundamental to remember that 'shadow-ism' has nothing to do with acting in order not to be seen, or not to be recognized. While this helps in remaining undetected, the main matter here is to act in a framework that is not instituted either by the state or the market, to which subjugation would mean the annihilation of the fight, submitting struggles to a whole new set of problematics, that could hamper the realisation of objectives. If for example, *Next Emerson* were to be legalised, its free activities (which are on volunteer donations) would have to undergo bureaucratic processes that would raise costs – for the centre and the participants. Consequently, the centre would lose a part of its 'alternativity', since it could not provide anymore that 'freed' sociality that it yearns for. Likewise, if *Via del Leone* would face legalisation, the organization of anti-eviction pickets and spontaneous activities – such as the protest for the health care unit, or the organisation of a cine forum in the square – would be hampered, since authorities could impute easily the legal association, preventing similar events from happening again – also here disabling a potential alternative sociality that, for example, watching collectively a movie in a public space represents.

In a nutshell, this principle refers to the necessity to create a collectively framed social environment, to support the centres' purpose to create a 'desired' community, where behaviours and ideals are negotiated and decided collectively among the same members, leaving aside the mechanical annihilation of any deviance, which are an object of debate as well as any other element of the community.

This chapter had the goal of properly displaying the information collected during the participation in social centres' lives. Specifically, I focus on replying to research sub-questions. Of course, some have changed, due to the impossibility to retrieve specific material, or because my interest veered to different matters. In order to bring back the general ideas behind my thesis, I would like to 'take stock of the situation'. The first sub-question – *What claims are made and what actions are pursued? And who are their targets?* – refers to the first and the second sections of this chapter, respectively claims and relations. For the second sub-question – *How and on the basis of which logics are centres interacting with other social actors? Which are the principles that social struggles want to enact while bonding (or fighting) with them?* – which focuses on the interpretation of militants' behaviours, the principles section is dedicated to answering it. In the next chapter, I will summarise the results, and address the last sub-question – *What alternative urban realities are created?* – arguing majorly through the lens of Holloway and its concept of 'changing the world without taking power' (Holloway, 2002). I will focus on the struggles' potentiality to restore the *capacity-to-do* of people affected by the touristification in Florence. Additionally, I will refer to 'shadow-ism' to analyse the capacity of centres to

[89] F, activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview
[90] M., activist of *Via del Leone*, personal interview

act beyond state control. Lastly, I will reply to the main research question to display the conception of the 'Right to the city' for the two observed social. As I expressed in the theoretical framework chapter, a core argument of this thesis is to fill – with activists' words and activities – the conceptual 'container' that Lefebvre, and later Harvey, provide when displaying their theories on the Right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2012).

6. Discussion & Conclusion

Let me start this chapter by retaking all necessary elements to coherently wrap up what has been done until now. At the start of my research, not without doubts and consequent changes, I pose myself with the following research question

> *How do the social struggles of Via del Leone and Next Emerson advance the 'Right to the city' in Florence (Italy)?*

This emerged from multiple incentives and realisations: the importance of tourism for the city and the unilateral liability of the whole local economy on it; the consequent recognition of bad management of the city, which lead to the neglection of the socio-economic citizens' requests; the urban reactions arising against the huge investments in the city, both spontaneous (e.g., singular protests for one-time fights) or with a structured organization (e.g., associations or illegal struggles). Following these problematics, I focused on displaying the work of two urban struggles, *Next Emerson* and *Via del Leone*, which are active for the reconquest of the right of Florentine citizens to shape their city. Specifically, I inquired into the potentialities of these struggles to produce alternative urban realities to the capitalistic logic, which sees Florence as a product for 'tourism' rather than a space for the healthy development of its citizens. Analysing the actions and the relations of the social centres in the contested urban city of Florence, the research aimed to realise whether such struggles can be seen as 'catalysts' of urban changes, capable to restore the lost political agency of citizens. At the same time, it was important to conceive the elements that *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* considered essential for the 'right to the city' to be diffusely restored among residents, to better comprehend the city's problems from the local community perspective.

To properly answer the main question, I formulated three sub-questions, which I will now answer analytically, to later critically interpret through the chosen theoretical lenses.

> *What claims are made and what actions are pursued? And who are their targets?*

First and foremost, I needed to understand the kind of requests social centres formulate, and the targets – entities or individuals, private or public – towards which claims and consequent actions are aiming. The two social centres pinpoint the high frequency of speculations – mostly by privates, through municipality endorsement – implemented in the city, as one of the principal reasons for citizens' uneasiness. Speculative processes highlighted by the centres are numerous and have different natures: the 'ballyhoo-y' behaviour of local governments in (over)selling public and private properties, which allows the income of huge investments and fosters the process of commodification and privatisation; the deregulation of short-term rents which, through increasing the number of guests and its consequent rise of overall rents, prevents residents' retention in the city; the constant authorisations release to open new commercial retail – bars, hotel and restaurants – which erodes public social places and weaken small local businesses; the lack of public services and infrastructures, especially for the disadvantaged part of the population, which accelerate citizens expulsion from the city.

The corresponding centres' claims, despite I pinpointed three different categories of targets – municipality, recipients, and 'non-involved' – are mainly directed to the administration of the city, which is considered as the 'negative' aim of complaints and claims. More precisely, regarding the sale of public and private properties (and their marketing), activists reprimand the municipality for selling off the socio-cultural heritage of the city. Moreover, they criticize its role as a 'real-estate' intermediary for privates, which allows abundant profits from 'adaptive use' concessions, without allocating sufficient resources to respond to public service improvements. As for the housing emergency, social centres request the rehabilitation of social houses and the implementation of strong restrictions on 'sharing economy' platforms. Similarly, concerning the continuous opening of commercial retails, centres claim regulations to limit wide business expansion, especially for owners of multiple properties. Activists also demand public services and infrastructure to meet residents' basic needs and, most importantly, for the possibility to use public spaces as social spaces free of privatisation and commodification practices, which hamper the recognition of alternative socialities – ways of socialisation that are free from market constrictions. In other words, militants strive for a free expression of (different) citizens'

social necessities, without the obligation to limit oneself to the only fostered sociality, namely that one strictly connected with commercial consumption. Moreover, activists lament the municipality's denial of residents' involvement in the decision-making processes of the city, which see the 'substantial' exclusion of residents from political decisions that directly impact their socio-economic lives (e.g., the decision to convert a health care unit to commercial purposes, or the full privatization of a square, excluding non-commercialised socialities from public spaces). To conclude, what emerges from the analyses of militants' claims is their pessimism towards the possibilities to change the future of the city – by now a 'piece-of-art' only destined to the amusement of visitors – steered by the investments of huge capital and the relative permissions granted by the local government, which constantly disenable the political capability of the citizens.

Another point of this question regards the actions of the social centres. While claims directed to the municipality are supported substantially by actions of public disobedience – such as protesting for the privatisation of a square or the same occupying practice – the majority of everyday actions are directed to the more 'positive' target of recipients – residents, activities participants, people in need – which I consider as the object of the claim. 'Object' since such part of the population is the strongest motivation for centres to take action – trying to enable different realities, more suitable for the citizens – since it is the element whose discontent generates such claims. Through all their activities, being their goal to react to critical situations (e.g., housing emergency), to lead urban social fights (e.g., to avoid the closure of the health care centre) or to provide ludic activities (e.g., tango class), militants destine their effort to create a social network that, interacting among its members, can create suitable social alternatives for everyone that suffers from their urban condition.

The last target of militants is the so-called 'non-involved'. Being this a conglomerate of heterogeneous people, which are not connected – or do not want to be in connection – with social centres, composed by either 'positive' entities (e.g., high school students belonging to political collectives) or 'negative' (e.g., individuals that act conversely to social centres' principles of solidarity and respect), it is a category addressed more passively. Of course, militants strive to encourage, for example, young people to attend public protests, or to change the mind of individuals that behave disrespectfully, but the activities do not seem directly aimed at involving not-interested people, but to sustain and promote the network of those interested – and then, of course, a 'non-involved' becomes involved, for instance, just by participating to a meeting or sharing her opinions.

Moving on to the following sub-question, I focussed on the analysis of principles enacted by the centres.

> *How and on the basis of which logics are centres interacting with other social actors? Which are the principles that social struggles want to enact while bonding (or fighting) with them?*

I array the actions and behaviours of social centres militants in 4 principles: Mutualism, Horizontality & Self-management, Inspiring mobilisation, and Shadow-ism. These are the 4 identified characteristics that *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* constantly enact to move within the social framework of the city.

Regarding Mutualism, centres want their communities to be formed by 'givers' and 'takers', both contributing and receiving accordingly to their own necessities and possibilities. I conceive the mutualistic principle as the social engine of the struggles since it provides a transparent way of socializing among members of the same community. This has not to be considered as a 'blueprint', but as a set of ideals – solidarities, peaceful confrontations, moral respect – which apply differently, depending on the context and the actor confronted. Starting from the necessity of the related neighbourhoods – and starting from militants' own necessity to enact a change – the two social centres started implementing activities that could satisfy those needs. All activities are the result of collaborating relations with residents of the neighbourhood, or with other local urban struggles. From the most urgent – help desks to ensure housing and food emergencies, the organisation of marches against the privatisation of a public facility – to the ones that provide alternative forms of ludic activities – free cine-forums, debates for designing the spatiality of the neighbourhood, the numerous amounts of workshops and sports classes – all them have been designed and promoted with and for the neighbourhood. It is crucial, as stated by some activists, that Mutualism has not to be conceived as a form of charity that covers state

deficiencies, but as a framework to interact among members of the community, to jointly realise a desired social reality which, diverging from the one enacted through state and market institutions, can take care of its citizens from multiple perspectives. Mutualism provides the basis for all the other principles to grasp the social context of the city. A community based on mutualistic relations is an 'aware' community, that may set itself other purposes than the one of 'just surviving' to the lack of the state.

To move on to the next principle, Horizontality & self-management represent the political element of the social centres. Indeed, there is a connection with the previous principle. If the social model adopted is one of solidarity and reciprocal support (mutualism), horizontal and autogestion decision-making processes are the corresponding – rightful – political aspect. Decisions within centres are taken on a consensus base after thorough and transparent meetings, while activities are designed in a way to avoid different levels of 'ranks' among members (horizontality). In addition, self-management entails militants assuming responsibilities for the structural maintenance of the centre, but also thinking and creating it after their *heart's desire*. This confers, in the context of social fights, a strong creative trait to struggles, which enables the proactivity and the imagination of militants. Lastly, respect and recognition of one another ideas are essential for this principle to work.

The Inspiring mobilisation principle rises from the aforementioned creative trait. Militants, while implementing their activities, become aware of the positive effects of assuming responsibilities. This, besides conferring ingenuity to militants – as creatively designing the squats – contributes to sparking proactivity, hence providing centres with a 'kick-start' for concrete accomplishments to change society – regardless of the degree of change. As soon as activists realise this trait in their struggles, they try to extend it to all 'externals'. Through their activities, militants attempt to enlighten participants about the potentialities that 'creativity through responsibility' has. In order to concretise a community in which people are aware of their needs and their potentialities, enlightening on proactive behaviours is crucial. Militants are concerned that a lot of people, not knowing how to enact specific urban problematics (e.g., privatization, gentrification, etc.), end up in a stasis situation, which only results in the submission to such problematics. What militants want to transmit through this principle is people's potentiality, thanks to constant efforts and structured goals, to change their realities – which, in this case, happen to be their city.

The last principle, that of Shadow-ism, represents a constant challenge to institutions. Militants do not want involvement within the municipality's bureaucratic system which, under several lenses, could hamper and annihilate their struggles. First, lawful responsibilities could create a disparity in the repercussions for different activists – such as graver sanctions for the 'accountable' ones – and raise the costs of activities. Second, the legalisation of a squat would considerably weaken the political fight, because the image of the struggle would detach from the neighbourhood image – when the aim of activists is for the former to be recognised as part of the latter. Moreover, this detachment would cause residents to lose faith in the struggles, which at times have been considered more trustworthy than institutions. Social centres rely on this non-formal context for the creation of alternative realities which, through the abolition of 'deviances' marginalisation and annihilation, and the introduction of their negotiation among the members, would include wider and more diverse kinds of socialities (and societies), shaped out of the community necessities.

Having summarised this, let me address the last sub-question, as premised at the end of the previous chapter.

What alternative urban realities are created?

I posed this as last since its answer requires an interpretation of results through the chosen theoretical lenses. The primary step, in order to define what 'alternative urban realities' are, is that of displaying the "given urban reality", which is what happens daily in the city of Florence. As stated previously, I will argue using the concepts of *power-to* and *power-over* provided by Holloway.

As extensively described in the literature review chapter, Florence is a city where citizens have been frequently excluded by decisions that directly influence their daily lives. Private investments are constantly inflowing and, while residents are forced to leave the urban ground, masses of tourists are increasingly coming to experience life in the Renaissance city.

Let us think of this from Holloway's perspective. In the Florentine context, the citizens represent the 'doers' – every day constructing the city, physically and socially – and the city is the 'done' – the result of 'doers' production. By the institution of *power-over* (investors), the doers (citizens) end up being separated by their product (city), and their *power-to* is reduced to a despairing (messianic) scream – negated of its proactive side. Their tasks are not that of designing the city, but of constructing it by the will of the investors. Indeed, as already stated, this condition is endorsed – and favoured – by the municipality, which acts permissively towards the investors, and oppressively against the citizens, preventing the latter from reclaiming the right to design and create the city accordingly to their needs. The *power-to* is thus negated every time that the community is unable to support its citizens: when families are forced to leave households due to unaffordable rents, when a historical shop is replaced by a branded retail shop, when squat and public services are replaced by commercial businesses, and even when a public square is privatised in the sake of 'decorum'. This analysis of the city envisions only negative futures for its residents. Indeed, if investments keep on raising in the future – as it seems to be – the right to shape the city of citizens will be slowly consumed, and the gap between the doing (the city) and the doers (citizens) will furtherly widen. Privates will keep on investing in tourism, while the municipality will continue to receive economic benefits by promoting facilities sales and tax revenues.

The depicted scenario sees citizens as mere victims. Indeed, when confronted with capital and political institutions, individual people have little or no agency to make any transformation, and their 'scream', which ought to be a breakthrough, is reduced to a despairing and ineffective complaint (Holloway, 2002). On the contrary, when the negated *power-to* of individual people is reconstituted within the collective *flow of doing*, and that complaint is transformed into proactive actions, change becomes attainable. Following this reasoning process, drawn by Holloway, it is possible to say that *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* are major actors in the reconstitution of the *flow of doing* of citizens, hence producing alternative realities. Their conduct aims directly at the reconstitution of a 'collective' will, going beyond the desires of individuals, but constantly checking and providing against their (individual) misfortunes (e.g., help desks). These urban struggles give citizens a possibility to act upon the given reality to constitute an alternative one, where residents are the main focus of the city. Through their political projects, *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* want to reconstitute the two sides of the scream – the horror side, which channels fears and frustration, and the hoping side, which shakes and entails reaction –for people to have the possibility to confront a subjugating power – and the related "given" reality. In addition, for this to happen, social centres have – and want – to act outside of state and market logic, in order not to withstand legality mechanisms, which would only hamper the reconstitution of the collective *flow of doing* – through the elimination of 'deviances' and the acceptance of a limited number of realities, usually related to the market development.

What I called 'shadow-ism' in the previous chapter, is what I consider to be an un-negotiable framework in which social struggles act to create alternative realities. Differently from the municipal (or state) framework, which aims at the control of every sphere of people's life – annihilating other forces that act against its development – 'shadow-ism' allows the centres to conduct activities (e.g., cine-forums, sports activities, and any ludic activity) and provide tools (e.g., help desks, anti-eviction pickets, etc.) in a 'non-stiff' context – contrary to a framework constituted with the legalisation of centres. Moreover, decisions are collectively taken within a 'freed' space, which renders them not prone to the annihilation of any other reality – or to the automatic expulsion of 'deviant behaviours' – which are the object of constant negotiation.

What I argue here is the potentiality of the two social struggles to produce alternative realities. To summarise and simplify, it is possible to display the Florentine socio-economic context as double-faceted. On the most predominant side, existent power relations bend residents to the will of capital. Here, individualised citizens, deprived of their *power-to*, are subjugated to the *power-over* constituted by investors and the municipality, which aim (to profit from a touristified city), fosters a further individualisation of the same citizens – through gentrification, privatisation and aforementioned urban processes. On the other side, more concealed and considered less attainable by public opinion, struggles such as *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* attempt to channel the individualised *power-to* into the collective *flow of doing*, which has proven itself to be effective in changing the destiny of the urban (and social) fabric of Florence, and in allowing other struggles to not be annihilated – thanks their 'shadow' framework. Indeed, the first side constitutes a stronger reality that

constantly reproduces itself, slowly consuming other alternative realities, which struggle to survive. However, it would be critical for citizens to start liaising with the second side, because of its growth potential – virtually, the whole citizenship – and the opportunity it confers to the realisation of a desired society. In conclusion, it is important to say that the city is configured in a contested space that, according to social centres, ought to be seen outside of the conquest logic, and within a more tolerant and supportive framework – especially by state institutions.

6.1 Final remarks: The right to shape Florence

Now that I analysed all the results and replied to all sub-questions, I will here retake the main research question to wrap up the analyses and to complement the answer with some personal comments

> ***How do the social struggles of Via del Leone and Next Emerson advance the 'Right to the city' in Florence (Italy)?***

Via del Leone and *Next Emerson* advance a clear reconfiguration of the 'right to the city' in the contested urban space of Florence. The main necessity is that of restoring the lost capacity of people to act upon their city, allowing them to participate in decision-making processes, and letting their necessities and desires be the steering wheel of the urban transformation. More precisely, these social centres strive for the creation of communities based on mutualistic relations, with an internal self-management organization, and that are open to introducing new members that creatively and freely express – and take action on – their (diverse) claims, while critically questioning pre-existent power relations that impede the free unfolding of a multiplicity of different socialities. Moreover, for social centres is crucial to act outside of a legal framework – thus, in its 'shadows' –to reproduce the collectively negotiated alternative realities, without being hindered by the stiffness that bureaucracy presents.

The purpose of these social struggles, similar to Holloway's (2002), is that of awakening residents of the city regarding their possibilities to steer the future of the city, without having to suffer its impacts unconditionally. For this reason, the two social centres are today active social actors within the neighbourhoods, seeking constant negotiations with residents in order to shape the city that the local community wants, in contrast with the one that administrations and private investors are creating. By doing that, the social centres tend to widen the struggling class – as Harvey suggests – trying to include all kinds of urban citizens that struggle with societal injustices, and want to envision a less discomforting city. If this path will be furtherly pursued in the future – and social centres succeed in involving more people in struggle fights – the 'urban class' might also fully reunite the creative and the manual sides of the 'right to the city' – or the horror and the proactive sides of the scream – enabling citizens both to think and to construct (socially and physically) urban spaces after their desires.

Meanwhile, the social centres create 'moments' – protests, neighbourhood assemblies, but also sports activities and workshops – in which people can attain, albeit just temporarily, the junction between creative designs and practical actions – hence reconstitute their *flow of doing* – to shape and change the city. I consider these frames – limited in space and time – as the 'cracks' of Holloway (2010), which have the potential to break through the capitalistic reality, to create an alternative more enjoyable one. *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* are not just 'cracks' *per se*, but through their actions (e.g., neighbourhood meetings, local urban projects, etc.) and the inspiration they attempt to instil into people, they are themselves creators of fissures. It is then the task of the whole population to properly widen the cracks. As shown here, the work of the two social centres provides hopes for the future reconstitution of the *flow of doing* of Florentine people, which have proven great capacities to contrast market and institutional decisions, for the sake of community necessities (e.g., fighting to maintain the health care centre, the parents' occupation of the Children's room, reclaiming a piece of a public garden as common, etc.). Moreover, such struggles filled the empty signifier of the "right to the city" with their and the population's necessities, and all principles thoroughly analysed in the previous chapter constitute its essence. Whenever they claim the right to shape the city, they do it in their ways, with their conditions – mutualistic relations, horizontal and self-managerial organization, sparking mobilisation, and setting their own recreated

‘shadowing’ environment. And, such conditions, are mainly developed through the first and the last principles. These are what enable the centres to create desired spaces, free from marginalising market and state decisions, in which actions and behaviours – whether deviant or not – are constantly debated and negotiated collectively among the members. As stated before, I consider such political projects great examples of participative democracy, that should be exported to other contexts, for the local community to benefit from such ‘models’.

Nevertheless, I feel that some critiques may be made. On the side of the struggles, during some routinary occasions – assemblies meetings or daily activities – a lack of (involved) people and activists’ participation was reported, even when a commitment has already been set between the parties – for example, when a volunteers team of the alimentary help-desk was formed. This can result in weakening both the social fight and the public credibility of struggles. Indeed, to widen the cracks in the walls of capitalism, social movements need to be anti-extraordinary, avoiding stopping at cathartic moments, and constantly reproducing a reality that goes beyond ‘revolutionary’ actions (Holloway, 2010). Hence, a more constant enactment of alternative daily practices of social struggles is essential to prevent the ‘given’ reality from keeping to reproduce itself.

Similarly, I also want to expose a critique towards the population. Throughout the whole thesis, I argue about the impossibility of citizens politically acting upon the changes in their cities, either because of fierce investments or elusive municipal policies. This, as displayed in the theoretical framework chapter, is because citizens, today, are considered not as political individuals – capable of consciously and collectively acting on the changes they want to see in society – but as consumers and, in the urban spaces, as ‘city users’. Indeed, consumerism is a strong and subtle element, which can silently steer the desires of people towards individualism, rendering people sedated and passive in front of the catastrophic evolution of a global society. Nonetheless, criticism is still an option – since we are not constrained by others, but we act under constraints that others set. What I want to say is that between consumerism and politics – considered as a commitment to collectively decide upon our society – we, as individuals, opt for the first one. We silently neglect the potentiality of politics, delegating it to the “ruling class”, which focuses on satisfying consumers’ choices – our choices as market users – rather than citizens’ ones. Our most common form of reaction, nowadays, is passively complaining about the policies enacted by politicians. It is necessary to move from this condition, to actively engage problems in a more practical way. Struggles such as *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* represent viable opportunities for our society to change and, similarly to them, we should reconsider taking a more proactive stance to enact the change we want to see in our cities. After all, our societal views and theirs may be more similar than we imagine.

In my opinion, what has to be changed is people's immobility towards disliked institutions, for the former to establish a new order based on collectively negotiated principles on how to run society. I pose consumerism and politics on the same level because, if we had chosen to actively participate in the latter, negotiating future moves – by foreseeing and checking on potential impacts of political manoeuvres – would have forced us to stop our consumeristic lifestyles to prevent (and mitigate) the crises we are witnessing today. Despite this might be seen as a questionable argument, I consider the active political participation of citizens as healthy for the society as a whole – to prevent social, economic and environmental catastrophes. Social struggles such as *Next Emerson* and *Via del Leone* – as many others in the world – already act accordingly: whenever a decision envisages the weakening of a single community member, is when they know that such a decision has not to be taken.

Lastly, I would like to leave a clear picture of social struggles. As explained above, social struggles are themselves ‘cracks’ in the system and creators of ‘cracks’. I see them as creating time and space frames – literally imaginable as windows – for the population to observe (more closely than our technology can do) the criticalities and pitfalls of a system that presents itself as ‘rightful’. It is then the responsibility of the witnessing population (us) to act to change such a system, preventing others (political class and economic interests) from steering the future path of society. It is crucial to act when is still possible before the efforts of conscient ‘screamers’ might be sedated (Holloway, 2002).

As last, I want to highlight that my research covered only a few problematic issues of the city which, starting from touristification, trickle down to a whole set of repercussions for the local community. There are ‘blank

points' that I did not analyse at all, such as the marginalisation of specific portions of the population and their struggling perspective (LGBTQIA+ movements, immigrant integration, etc.). Future research might cover this gap.

Since this thesis focused on the perspective of urban social struggles, it might interesting to research the perspective of national and local institutions on the political participation of residents. It could analyse the reasons for the less political participation of residents, from the perspective of institutions – and the related challenges.

Further research might also explore if the Covid-19 pandemic brought some changes in the urban and social fabric of the city – either positive or negative for the resident community.

In the end, since this thesis analysed the perspective of urban struggle in Florence, it might be interesting to compare the results with other urban struggles in European cities, specifically those arising from an illegal framework.

6.2 Conclusion

The aim of my thesis has been that of delving into the urban experience of the social struggles of *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* in the disputed space of Florence. Pinpointing as one of the main problems the touristification of the city, I argued about the possibilities of the observed struggles to reproduce alternative realities to the one enacted and envisioned by the municipality and private investors. Framing struggles actions through the theoretical lenses of the "right to the city" (Harvey, 2012) and the concepts of *power-over* and *power-to* (Holloway, 2002), the research focussed on analysing struggles elements that could nourish the production of alternative urban and social realities within the city, opposed to those constantly reproduced by capitalistic dynamics. In other words, this thesis wanted to argue on the potentialities that *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* have in restoring the citizens' capability of (re)creating the social and urban fabrics of Florence.

Through the analysis of the concerning touristification issue in Florence, the problem statement formulated in this research regards the impossibility for Florentine citizens to actively participate in the political life of the community. Drawing from the work of Harvey (2012), I presented the huge investments in the tourist sector of Florence as a measure to foster a loop nourished by economic surpluses and the continuous urban restructuring of the city. As a result, it is right to state that the holders of the right to the city of Florence are private investors, constantly endorsed by municipality policies. Nevertheless, *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* proved themselves able to interrupt this loop, by enacting realities different from the one just described – by the provision of free activities, spaces to actively do politics, and the motivation to react to injustices suffered.

Through the implementation of the four principles – Mutualism, Horizontality & self-management, Inspiring mobilisation, and Shadow-ism – described in the last chapter, *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* present themselves as creators of 'cracks' (Holloway, 2010) – and 'cracks' themselves – into a capitalistic system which interests, in the Florentine context, are carried out by investors and local governments. Mutualism confers the struggles in a context of relations completely different from the capitalistic one, enabling cooperation and solidarity to be constant elements of the sociality enacted. The self-horizontal organization allows them to take responsibility and to set precise aims towards the necessity to reestablish an equal "right to the city", diffused among the real social and manual shapers of the city, namely the citizen (Harvey, 2012). Inspiring mobilisation serves to enlarge the category of struggle while persuading the population on acting upon the urban problems that the social centres repeatedly unveil. Shadow-ism, at last, allows struggles to create a desired environment, realised through the constant negotiation of community members, which prevents the adoption of power relations, since '*Once the logic power is adopted, the struggle against power is already lost'* (Holloway, 2002).

By creating 'frames' of alternative realities – imagined as 'window-sized' limited moments in time and space – that enable people to closely observe the effects of capitalism on the local community, these struggles provide the Florentine population with possibilities to change the 'given' reality produced by a system that depicts itself as perfect (capitalism). What though has always to be maintained in centres' minds, in order for

these to continuously reproduce the limited-in-time-and-space 'frames', is the necessity to maintain daily alternative practices beyond cathartic moments, which are fundamental, but that cannot ensure the full realisation of urban alternative realities (Holloway, 2002).

The experiences of *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* described in this thesis, despite the growth of speculative and depredatory practices in the city centre of Florence – gentrification by touristification, privatization, commodification, and so on – which are gradually consuming the urban and the social fabric of the city, present themselves as active actors that reproduce urban alternative realities, 'freed' from a legal framework, which hinders their agency, and from capitalistic conventions, which sedate individuals (Holloway, 2002). These political projects, thanks to the self-horizontal management that lead to consensual decisions, represent admirable experiments of participatory democracies that are 'replicable' elsewhere – as long as a previous contextualization is enacted and the principles negotiated among militants. Moreover, thanks to the mutualistic framework enacted, *Via del Leone* and *Next Emerson* provide several opportunities to reconnect the two sides – horror and proactive – of the Florentine population's scream (Holloway, 2002), empowering their concrete 'right to the city' (Harvey, 2012) to shape the urban space after their hearts' desires.

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Annex 1. Interview List

Nr.	Reference in-text	Role	Association/Struggle	Date
1	G.	Militant	Next Emerson	09/09/2021
2	F.	Militant	Next Emerson	29/07/2021
3	V.	Militant	Next Emerson	11/08/2021
4	F.	Militant	Via del Leone	12/08/2021
5	L.	Militant	Via del Leone	26/07/2021
6	M.	Militant	Via del Leone	08/09/2021
7	G.	Editorial staff	Fuori Binario	18/08/2021
8	N.	Volunteer	Help-desk	02/10/2021
9	A.	City Councillor	Municipality of Florence	26/10/2021
10	D.	City Councillor	Municipality of Florence	06/10/2021