



Anti-global movements reclaim the city*

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The paper examines the city as an object of contestation from the point of view of the grassroots. After discussing the city as a transforming field of social movements and grassroots mobilizations from the 19th to the 20th century, it examines the action of the recent anti-global or alternative global movements on the city. It focuses especially on the foundation of the European Social Forum during November 2002, in Florence, on the World Charter on the Right to the City, brought forward for discussion at the meeting of the World Social Forum, as well as on the anti-war movement. As an active member of the Greek and European Social Forum and having been aware of the theoretical discourse on urban social movements, the author argues that new formations of social movements—the ‘movement of movements’—are reviving and reshaping, at least in Europe, the meaning of the urban, having the city as a base of their activities and as an object of contestation from their own point of view.

Introduction

The militant demonstrations against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle have created a visible new factor in the conflictive terrain of neo-liberal globalization: it was the first dynamic emergence of the anti-global movement intended to reveal and condemn the role of the WTO in increasing poverty and inequality amongst poor countries. In spite of harsh repression, the activists of Seattle, trying to stop the WTO meeting and so the unpopular decisions of the dominant classes, revived an old truth, namely, that the city is not only the place of power, but also of grassroots resistance.

The anti-global movement, called ‘the movement of movements’, is composed of a variety of movements, whether strong or weak, transnational or national, widespread

or just local and limited, intervening in a broad spectrum of issues deriving from contemporary social and political oppositions. Labour, agrarian, environmental, anti-war, anti-racist, feminist, human rights and cultural movements and many other thematically mobilized groups are meeting, forming national and international networks, undertaking common initiatives, organizing, coordinating and globalizing grassroots resistance to neo-liberal capitalism all around the world (Figures 1 and 2). Millions of people, men and women from different continents, countries, religions and cultures, covering a very broad range of ideological and political beliefs, are weaving their common international action against three main enemies: neo-liberalism, war and racism, through common interventions—meetings, demonstrations, information campaigns and so on.

*This is the paper referred to in the introduction to our special feature in issue 10.3 “Urban social movements: from the ‘right to the city’ to transnational spatialities and flaneur activists”





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Figure 1 Anti-global demonstration in Brussels, 2001.

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Experiencing participation as an active member of the Greek and European Social Forum and being in a way aware of the theoretical discourse on urban social movements, I would like to make some remarks about the close relationship between anti-global movements and the city. I will argue that these new formations of social movements are reviving and reshaping the meaning of ‘the

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urban’, at least in Europe, having the city as the base of their activities. Looking through a broader area of anti-global action, I will focus on the foundation of the European Social Forum during November 2002 in Florence.

Manuel Castells in his important work *The City and the Grassroots* (1983) has, in my opinion, broadened the concept of urban social movements, including in his case studies the examples of the Comunidades de Castilla (1520–22) and the Commune of Paris (1871). These movements were social revolutions challenging the absolutist monarchy and the French State, respectively, and claiming the political power of the city. They were certainly not urban movements in the sense given to this term during the last century, when people mobilized on issues connected with the city, like housing and urban services as means of collective consumption. Castells considered the Comunidades of Castilla citizens’ movements urban, ‘not so much

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Figure 2 Anti-global demonstration in Sevilla, 2002.



because they were based in cities, but because they attempted to impose the city as the basic cell of a new socio-political organization' (Castells, 1983, p. 14). His two examples not only portray explicitly the city as a container and a frame for social and political struggles, but simultaneously define it as a contested object both for powerful groups and the grassroots, and a carrier of all resulting changes. From this perspective, the city could renew its historical role as a political entity, giving material form to the relationship between space and society and connecting popular demands with political institutions. So the city challenges existing spatial and social forms, the exploration of new social meanings and, finally, the demand for an alternative social order.

Such a procedure is closely connected with the political idea of the city—*polis*—and the cityscape as the material environment of the public sphere. In its ancient beginnings, the city was primarily a political settlement, a kind of organized public memory for mortal human beings, securing the actions of human society against the ravages of time. As Hannah Arendt puts it:

'The organization of the polis, physically secured, by the wall around the city and physiognomically guaranteed by its laws—lest the succeeding generations change its identity beyond recognition—is a kind of organized remembrance. It assures the mortal actor that his passing existence and fleeting greatness will never lack the reality that comes from being seen, being heard, and, generally, appearing before an audience of fellow men, who outside the polis could attend only the short duration of the performance.' (Arendt, 1998, p. 198)

Since ancient times, the political meaning of the city has been radically transformed but not lost. Eminent authors, among them Manuel Castells and Henri Lefebvre, have redefined this changing urban meaning in a historical and contemporary context, a meaning not independent of the city's institutions, and the social action and political participation of its

citizens. The crucial timely question is whether the city is nowadays still the terrain of social and political struggles and social movements, if both the dominant classes and the grassroots continue to consider the city as a comprehensive context for their action and hence, as the carrier of a new alternative socio-political meaning. Before coming to the anti-global or alternative global movement and its insistence on the city, I will try to make a brief reference to the relationship between grassroots action and the city from the 19th to the 20th and during the 20th century. This is not the place to embark on a historical review but only to add a reminder of a basic idea, namely, that the relationship between the city and the grassroots is not a given; instead it is transformed according to contemporary urban and socio-political transformations.

Some remarks on the city as a transforming field of social movements and grassroots mobilizations from the 19th to the 20th century

Until the 19th century cities developed as more or less integrated spatial entities, imposing on, not juxtaposed to, the surrounding country, and were points of maximum concentration of power and culture, as well as places of production, exchange and social divisions of labour. They were also places of political institutions permeated with conflicts and, at the same time, expressing common concerns and meanings. The cases of the Ciompi revolt, the unskilled manual workers' uprising in Florence (1378), of the Comunidades of Castilla and the Commune of Paris are conflicts characteristic of the grassroots' position in the city. They didn't feel themselves as foreigners in their own cities; instead they claimed popular participation and changed power relations. The historical cities in the European tradition, still existing as infinitely evolving urban cores, enclosed a multifarious expression of urban cohesion that was overturned during the advent of industry. Henri Lefebvre has described the

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double process of industrialization and urbanization as follows:

‘Industry can do without the old city but does so by constituting agglomeration in which urban features are deteriorating ... Where there is a network of old cities, industry assails it. It appropriates this network and refashions it according to its needs. It also attacks the city, assaults it, takes it, ravages it. It tends to break up the old cores by taking them over. This does not prevent the extension of urban phenomena, cities and agglomerations, industrial towns and suburbs.’ (Lefebvre, 1996, pp. 69–70)

Since then, the city has been in crisis as a well-defined context for resistance against the powerful by subordinated groups. This continuous shapeless expansion of the urban and the uprooting of the local, have radically transformed it as a terrain of social and political conflicts. If the historical city remained explicitly the common object of contestation for both people and authority, the new fragmentary cities and conurbations placed the relation between the grassroots and the city in a new frame. Together with the explosion of the old urban cores, the unlimited extension of the city to its periphery and the great population increase, a new geography has been shaped, based on class, gender, race, on ethnic, cultural and religious divisions, which over time became more extensive and complex. In some cases, the working class remained in deteriorated districts inside the old cities, described by Engels in the case of Manchester. In other cities, for example, Paris, after its radical transformation by Haussmann, the proletariat was pushed out of the centre towards the peripheries. The Paris Commune expressed the re-conquest of the city by the revolutionaries and proved its persistence as the terrain of social and political conflicts. During the process of the industrial revolution, the grassroots had to rediscover their political expression, as well as mobilize in a new urban context. For example, factories and central sites became the new places for

popular uprisings. At the same time, thousands of people remained excluded from work as well as from elementary social care and city life.

From the 19th to the middle of the 20th century, industrial capitalism continued expanding, transforming urban space. Suburbanization, desurbanization and gentrification of historical cores create new urban conditions, resulting from the rapid circulation of capital and the generalized exploitation of space. As David Harvey puts it:

‘Under capitalism there is a perpetual struggle in which capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have to destroy it, usually in the course of crises, at a subsequent point in time. The temporal and geographical ebb and flow of investment in the built environment can be understood only in terms of such a process.’ (Harvey, 1978, p. 124)

During this oscillating movement of capital, social divisions are transformed and the exchange value of space constitutes one of the reasons of the enclosure of ethnic minorities in central devaluated districts or, in other cases, their exclusion to the periphery by the process of gentrification. In order to replace the slums of the 19th century, the state has occasionally undertaken the construction of new settlements in the suburbs. This continually changing human geography of cities put the relation between the grassroots and the city on a new basis and at the same time new objects of popular demands emerged connected with urban space.

Urban space later acquired a double function: it became a place of consumption, itself acting as a commodity alienated from use values. In the context of the welfare state and the increase in the means of collective consumption, social demands pushed national and municipal authorities in European cities to confront the destruction of historical cores and extreme social polarities. During the prolific years of the 1960s, the



urban problematic was developed in theoretical and practical terms, as a result of urban social movements and political uprisings all around Europe. Socio-political struggles of that period stemmed from European *urban* societies. Cities became the scene of the rebelling masses—workers, students, scholars, women, emigrants and so on. Public space was converted into a political market of the new public sphere, a direct democracy of the street. New objects in the political agenda included struggles against gentrification and demolition of historical districts, the occupation of empty houses, demonstrations in favour of urban infrastructure, spontaneous celebrations, the rejection of zoning, demands concerning leisure, issues related to participation, self-management and alternative ways of everyday life. So urbanity became the cohesive tissue of new social and political collectivities; the urban and the local re-emerged as contradictory terrains of the socio-spatial reality of the city, and the city became a contested object both for powerful groups and the grassroots.

The right to the city, as Lefebvre posed it, does not mean only some popular demands related to the city. Restoring the values of the historical city and posing the ‘city as a place of encounters, focus of communication and information ...’ and the urban as a ‘place of desire, permanent disequilibrium, seat of dissolution of normalities and constrains, the moment of play and of the unpredictable’, Lefebvre asks for a deeper relation between the grassroots and the city opposed to the existing urban reality and re-establishing the city as a carrier of human needs and demands. He talks about ‘a critical contradiction: a tendency towards destruction of the city, as well as a tendency towards the intensification of the urban and the urban problematic’ (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 129).

In addition, during the 1960s and 1970s a new relationship was created among people. Concepts like democracy, citizen and citizenship transcended their typical character and were connected to people’s active participation in common affairs and political action.

Collective memory, drawing from the past, made popular history active, and city space was rediscovered as a theatre of collective presence and resistance activities. European cities have forged strong identities, not only because of their heritage, but also because of successive layers of popular resistance and its living presence within the urban context and the collective memory.

Globalized capitalism and the city

After the 1970s, neo-liberalism attacked this urban reality, which was already wounded by industrial capitalism and quickly put into practice a radical restructuring of space. Apart from the different procedures of globalization in theoretical discourse, there are some common assertions and easily perceptible features of the ‘post’ age in the cityscape. Globalized capitalism, based on the globalization of capital and labour, intensified the international distribution of industrial production all over the world, resulting in abandoned and obsolete deindustrialized regions on the one hand and new spatial agglomerations on the other. By moving flows of labour, created by the overturning of traditional productive structures and wars in many countries, and intensifying the flexibility of labour, globalized capitalism pushed existing social inequalities and spatial divisions of class, gender and race to extremes.

Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempen, describing new socio-spatial formations, find at least seven such changed formations defined by spatial and social characteristics: citadels, gentrified neighbourhoods, exclusionary enclaves, urban regions, edge cities, ethnic enclaves and excluded ‘racial’ ghettos (Marcuse and van Kempen, 2000). In spite of the great differences between continents and countries, these forms of polarities characterize many cities of the world. Paris, Rome, Brussels and Athens are not, of course, Los Angeles or New York neither are Calcutta nor Rio de Janeiro but, being under neo-liberal policies, and far from welfare state

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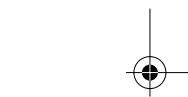
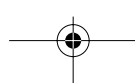
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interventions in social housing, they quickly lose their existing social cohesion and the common sense of belonging.

Privatization is the motivating power of the new, more complicated and stronger social divisions and the restructuring of space. Not only does it deprive the grassroots of public collective possessions, thus producing new forms of poverty, but it also detaches them from the tangible public terrain of community. Excluded in spatial enclaves and living under individualized conditions of work and housing, in the virtual reality of the mass media, people have difficulty in coming into contact with each other and making common demands and collective resistance. Privatization is a total, nearly absolute, process in the age of globalized capitalism, being nevertheless an evolution and enlargement of previous forms of exploitation. What seems to be a clear rupture in relation to the past is what Manuel Castells describes as 'the space of flows' in his *Informational City*:

'The new international economy creates a variable geometry of production and consumption, labour and capital, management and information—a geometry that denies the specific productive meaning of any place outside its position in a network whose shape changes relentlessly in response to the messages of unseen signals and unknown codes. The emergence of the space of flows actually expresses the disarticulation of place-based societies and cultures from the organizations of power and production that continue to dominate society without submitting to its control.' (Castells, 1989, p. 348)

In spite of the radical and justifiable criticism that many authors, among them Peter Marcuse, have levelled at Castells, the citation above gives a good general description of some changes that have occurred in the relation between people and space. Projecting this critical analysis, we come to the topic of power in discourse. Exploitation of labour and space had historically been expressed in

direct means and political authority was visible in the cityscape. The uprooting of decision-making organizations and the imperceptible forms of spatial policies in the era of international globalization, have transformed traditional ways of perceiving and interpreting space, power and society. So, social and political demands and resistance are determined by new aspects, depending less and less on the urban and the local. According to Edward Soja:

'As a result of this unbounding and "reworlding" of cityspace, it has become more difficult than ever before to unravel its so-called "inner workings"—economic, social, cultural, political, psychological—endogenously, that is, from what is happening locally, inside its conventionally defined boundaries. The practices of daily life, the public domain of planning and governance, the formation of urban community and civil society, the processes of urban and regional economic development and change, the arena of urban politics, the constitution of the urban imaginary, and the way in which "the city" is represented, are all increasingly affected by global influences and constraints, significantly reducing what might be called the conceptual autonomy of the urban.' (Soja, 2000, p. 218)

On the other hand, social discrimination and inequality are directly expressed in the political marginalization of the grassroots. To belong to urban society means to participate in the common terrain of either agreements or differences and conflicts. Neo-liberalism destroys social cohesion together with the continuity of the urban tradition, so ideas of democracy and citizenship tend to decrease in meaning. In the same way that human and social rights become a formality for the majority of people, the right to the city becomes abstract and meaningless. It is not only a matter of justice, but of civilization. Globalized capitalism, emerging out of the world market, transforms contemporary cities into agglomerations of individuals lost in space. Deregulation in every economic sector, the breakdown of all barriers to trade

and the free flow of capital, lead to the deregulation and breakdown of political institutions and to the increasing privatization of the public sphere.

This reality affects the expression of grassroots struggles, especially in major cities. There is no doubt that the violent and destructive urban uprising of 1992 in Los Angeles emerged out of a 'police city' with extreme spatial and social polarities. In this case there had been no desire on the part of the rebels to contest the city as their own object. No justice, no peace, or, the city of the rich must be burnt. In a parallel way, the uprising of the young of Algerian descent in the Parisian and other French suburbs in 2005 reveals a deep alienation of these people from urban space. The grey and degraded districts of housing without elementary social infrastructure, like places of work, education, meeting and entertainment, do not constitute any kind of cityscape, so they are not objects of contestation for the excluded young. Perhaps the only way for all those who would like to transform the conditions of everyday life, is to destroy spaces of discrimination rather than claiming them for their own sake.

By contrast, some months later, students from all around the Parisian metropolitan area overwhelmed the centre of Paris, protesting against the first employment contract, and sat in the Sorbonne and the Collège de France, which are two characteristic places of intellectual power. From the very beginning of French history the centre of the capital becomes the symbolic and real object of contestation both for dominant classes in power and for the grassroots. It is not accidental that most of the popular demonstrations in Paris are deployed in the area between three historical squares: Nation, Bastille, République. However, most cities in Europe do not confront the same problems as many American and Asian ones. In these cities, the anti-global movement and especially the European Social Forum are trying to restore grassroots communication and common resistance against the dominant classes.

Urban demands of the anti-global movement

Let's bring to mind the movement against the US war in Iraq. Besides all the other initiatives, undertaken at local and national level, there were some key days during which the World Social Forum organized simultaneous demonstrations in hundreds of cities all around the world. Millions of people shared the common sense of belonging to a global network of cities which were sending their own message for peace, participating in a global public sphere that had been spatialized in urban space. It was not only an anti-war demonstration. It was an alternative meaning of cities as antagonist poles, divided within by neo-liberal capitalism. Just like 'another world is possible'—one of the main chants of the anti-global movement—another perception of unity and inclusion among cities and within every city in particular, is possible, too.

Let's bring to mind Genoa, 5 years ago (Figure 3). The G8 tried to transform one of the most beautiful historical cities into a stronghold of the dominant classes, establishing zones of exclusion and nominating the police as the absolute ruler of the city. People from all over Europe, mainly young ones, responded to the invitation of the Genoa Social Forum and overwhelmed the city under surveillance. It was not only an anti-G8 demonstration. It was a militant demand of active citizenship transcending borders and spatialized within a liberal city. The way that



Figure 3 Anti-global demonstration in Genoa, July 2001.

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the anti-global movement intervenes in city space, fighting against social and political discrimination and inequalities, zones of exclusion and social divisions of space based on class, gender, race, religion and culture, not only puts forward ‘people over profit’—another anti-global chant—but also condemns the use of space as a profitable commodity and restores its use value.

The foundation of the European Social Forum in Florence in 1992 is an integrated example of the relationship between the anti-global movement and the city. One hundred thousand people participated in the congresses, plenaries, workshops and the cultural events, which lasted 1 week, during which nearly 1 million demonstrators flooded the city for the big demonstration against neoliberalism, racism, war and Berlusconi, who tried to prohibit the meeting putting the city under police surveillance (Figure 4). Against the closed and limited city of the dominant classes, the anti-global movement answered

with two chants: ‘Siamo tutti Fiorentini’ and ‘Firenze citta aperta’, asking this way for a common liberating identity, expressed with Florentine citizenship and spatialized in an open city. Not only did the anti-global movement not quit the city of Florence as the seat of its foundation, but instead revived in collective memory the grassroots’ history inscribed in space. It produced the publication *Traces of Another History* (2002), of ARCI (Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana), a cultural organization, coming out of the tradition of the first workers’ associations with about a million members in Italy. ARCI was installed on the site of the ancient Roman Forum that was transformed into the city market and was restored after 1890 as a beautiful square, where music and theatre performances, exhibitions and other happenings, reminded people that this place was not only an open museum for tourists but had been the locus of a vivid popular life through many centuries.



Figure 4 Anti-global demonstration in Florence, during the foundation of the European Social Forum, November 2001.

What do young people of the anti-global movement know of Florentine history? What do these new Davids, fighting against the powerful Goliath of neo-liberal globalization, remember about Michelangelo's David in the Piazza della Signoria with his gaze expressing a reflective internal world, open to the broad Renaissance universe? Have they ever heard that Michelangelo participated in the democratic revolution and sculpted David as an unarmed adolescent of the Democracy of the People?

When the European Social Forum chose Florence as a meeting place, perhaps the history of the city was not in all the organizers' minds. However, movements are like tidal waves which recall history and memory and so, out of the different layers of city space the labour movement, the first grassroots communities, the resistance against fascism and the partisans' struggles, the factory occupations by the workers, the women's cooperatives, the people's clubs, the 'angels of the mud' and many other events, emerged onto its contemporary surface—'traces of another history' in the cityscape. The 'angels of the mud' bear a strong symbolic value. In 1966, a part of Florence, called Oltrano, was flooded and the historic heritage of the city was threatened with total destruction. But, suddenly, thousands of young men and women from countries all around the world rushed, like angels, to help, and succeeded in lodging the victims of the flood and saving the priceless old books in the National Library. The young participants of the European Social Forum came in touch with the tradition of the 'angels of the mud', reviving and transforming social, political and cultural traditions of Florence.

The Forum's meeting place was the Fortezza da Basso, designed by Sangallo and Michelangelo, in order to protect the Medici from interior revolts. The Forum reversed this historical heritage, because all the processes which took place in the Fortezza were permanently open to the participants and the inhabitants of the city. The historic centre of Florence was connected, through people in

motion, with the castle, a point of contact between the old and the new city. Thus, the Forum succeeded in unifying the city especially with the 1 million demonstrators who occupied the totality of public space. The big anti-war demonstration started from Via Spartaco Lavagnini, an avenue outside the Fortezza da Basso. Lavagnini was a union leader murdered by the 'black shirts' in 1921. The workers of FIAT who were condemned to unemployment and marginalization because of neo-liberal policies led the march in November. Another way of reviving the traditions of historic Florence and its religious processions with strong paganistic and carnival elements as well as funeral and wedding rituals, were the demonstrations and other events full of colours, flags, balloons, bands, carnival clothes and masks, recalling the city's medieval history.

Florence has always been an open city (*città aperta*). Famous artists, moving from place to place, have sculpted the city we perceive today and created the works of art which brought Florence into the domain of collective myth. During the Forum it became possible for thousands of people, together with the Ciompi revolt, to revive the architecture of Brunelleschi, Alberti and Vasari, the sculpture of Ghiberti, Donatello, Michelangelo and the paintings of Giotto, Piero de la Francesca, Botticelli, Leonardo and Fra Angelico. The situation is described in ARCI's publication:

'During recent years, the roots of new communities and hopes of redemption have appeared in a topography of new names, unheard of in the traditional guide books and conventional views of Florence ... The "leftovers" of society, the "useless" waste of the progressive abolition of social protection, seek refuge in the "leftover" corners of the city, the unused areas, in the buildings awaiting new roles and new profits ... The multitude of the excluded (or the rebels) in fact organize the fragile foundations of their existence in abandoned factories, in disused public buildings ... The root that these new social urban movements and the new aspirant

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inhabitants are attempting to consolidate in the city are short and fragile but the fabric they are weaving merits care and attention.' (ARCI, 2002, p. 21)

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The anti-global movement claimed the city of Florence in a way similar with that of 'local' urban social movements struggling for a city which would offer work, housing and social security to all its inhabitants. Either at European or at local level, and in many cases at a global one, anti-global movements tend to restore the tradition of the city as the contested object of the grassroots and arena of their contemporary social and political struggles. They oppose new concentrations and segregations that confine city space and demand once again the right to the city. So, at the meeting of the World Social Forum a world network of participants brought forward to discussion a World Charter on the Right to the City. According to its preamble, the Charter

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'[...] is an instrument intended as a contribution to the urban struggle and as an aid in the process of recognition of the right to the city in the international human rights system. The core element of this right is the equitable usufruct of the cities considering the principles of sustainability and social justice. This right shall be understood as a collective right of all city inhabitants, especially those vulnerable and disfavoured, conferring legitimacy of action and organization in according with their usages and customs in the search for full exercise of the right to an adequate standard of living.'

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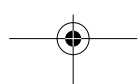
Article 1 defines the right to the city for all its citizens, that is, all persons living in the city either permanently or in transit. The basic principles of the right to the city are: (1) democratic management of the city, (2) the social function of the city, (3) the social function of property, (4) full exercise of citizenship, (5) equality and non-discrimination, (6) special protection for vulnerable persons and groups, (7) the private sector's social undertaking, (8) enhancing economic solidarity and imposing

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progressive policies. The Charter also provides for sustainable and equitable urban development, the participation in the design of the city budget, the transparency in the management of the city, the right to public information, civil and political rights, political participation, the right of association, assembly, expression, democratic use of urban public space as well as economic, social, cultural and environmental rights: access to and supply of domestic and urban public services, right to transport and public mobility, the right of housing, the right to education, to work, to culture and leisure, health and the environment.

This extensive text expresses, in a way, the image of an alternative city as an object of contestation from the point of view of the grassroots and in juxtaposition to the dominant social and political forces. According to the monumental work of Castells' *The City and the Grassroots*, this alternative city comes out of urban struggles and the action of urban social movements. Nowadays these urban movements are not directly revolutionary, as Castells had hoped on the basis of his case studies, but they all challenge the neo-liberal attack on urban space and on the rights to the city.

In the fourth meeting of the European Social Forum in Athens in 2006, with a great number of participants from Eastern Europe and Turkey, a special place—an urban forum—was organized inside the forum with exhibitions, meetings and seminars on urban social movements and the important contemporary problems of the cities and their citizens. As many participants belonged to housing networks, the main topic of the seminars was the right to housing. Other themes, like the ones included in the Charter, were discussed in many other seminars, referring especially to the city, but also to broader issues. This meeting in Athens as well as the action of local groups and transnational networks proves the timeliness of social movements on urban issues and the restoration of the city as an object of contestation from the point of view of the grassroots.





Conclusion

Local, national and transnational action as well as the declarations and the positions of urban social movements, as they spread through the Greek, the European and the World Social Forum, prove that people go on posing urban demands and organizing urban resistance.

Deep socio-spatial divisions, which in some cases lead to the emergence of something like different cities inside the same city, originate in new forms of direct repression and exclusion together with the intensive commercialization of urban space and the dwindling of state intervention in collective consumption and social security. Despite these divisions, people go on creating collectivities and urban social movements or, at least, urban struggles and resistances have not ceased. The ‘movement of movements’ seeks to unite divided cities under the common interests of the grassroots and to fight against the pursuit of power blocs to exclude grassroots movements from urban space through the creation of red zones and prohibitions against popular demonstrations.

The example of Florence is characteristic of the double meaning of the city as an object of contestation from the point of view of the grassroots. On the one hand, an alternative city has been claimed for all its inhabitants and the visitors, Florence, open to popular action and initiative—a ‘citta apperta’—in contrast to the repressive and exclusive policy of Berlusconi and his government. On the other, ARCI, based on a long popular history of resistance, posed for discussion and action the everyday problems of the excluded: the

poor, the emigrants, the homeless, the unemployed and those lacking citizenship rights. In this way, ARCI, demanding elementary rights to the city for everyone, underlined and clarified the content of contemporary urban struggles.

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