"Institutionalisation without Assimilation: The Development of Social Centres Squatting in Bologna from a Comparative Perspective"

Luca Calafati*

(*) University of Milano-Bicocca (Italy), Department of Sociology and Social Research.
Email: l.calafati@campus.unimib.it

Abstract

The paper deals with the development over the past forty years of the social centres squatting movement in Bologna – a major Italian city in which the social centres movement has been comparatively very strong. The paper's main thesis is that the Bologna social centres squatting movement has undergone a process of institutionalisation, which has not yet implied assimilation. This process – also known as 'flexible institutionalisation' – has taken place in spite of the emergence over the past decade of a social environment particularly hostile to squatting. Despite evictions, displacement from the city's core, cases of legalisations and the emergence of de-politicised spaces, Bologna social centres squatting movement still consists of numerous politically active spaces and squatting ready activists. The flexible institutionalisation of Bologna social centres squatting movement is attributed to the interplay of the antagonistic identity of the movement and the new features of the movement's social environment.

Keywords: Social Centres; Bologna; Squatting; Urban Movements; Post-Industrial City.

1. Introduction

The paper deals with the development of the social centres squatting movement over the past forty years in Bologna, a city in which social centres have exceptionally flourished. Urban movements have increasingly attracted the attention of urban scholars within a broader endeavour to understand the post-industrial city in relation to issues such as citizen's participation, welfare innovation, creativity and repression. The paper seeks to enrich this body of literature by providing an empirically grounded account of the relationships between radical movements and urban policies in a major Italian city, using the European context as point of reference.

Considering the call for comparative research in the field of squatting movements crucial, the paper pays particular attention to methodology. Since comparative research requires integration of findings and consistent conceptualisation, the paper stresses rigorous definitions, systematic empirical evidence, classifications and precise spatial localisations. Data sources used in the paper include semi-structured interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, scholarly and activists-related publications and official data sets.

The paper's main thesis is that the Bologna social centres squatting movement (SC squatting movement from now on) has undergone a process of institutionalisation that has not led to assimilation. This process – also known as 'flexible institutionalisation' – has taken place in spite of the formation of a particularly squatting hostile environment in Bologna in the past decade. Despite evictions, displacement from the city core, cases of legalisations and the emergence of de-politicised spaces Bologna SC squatting movement still consists of numerous politically active spaces and squatting ready activists. The 'antagonistic identity' of the movement is proposed in the paper as a key factor explaining the observed 'flexible institutionalisation' of Bologna SC squatting movement.

This paper has five sections. Section 2 discusses the debate on squatting movement development in Western cities. Particular attention is given to post-fordist transition and its relationship with squatting development patterns. Section 3 provides background and methodological information. Section 4 examines recent policies

devised to facilitate citizens' access to disused urban space in conjunction with eviction campaigns and legalisations. Section 5 focuses on the empirical evidence available on Bologna SC squatting development. Section 6 concentrates on Bologna's social centres identity, underling differences and common features.

2. The Debate on the Development of Squatting Movements in Western Cities

Two main theories of the long-term development of squatting movements in Western cities emerge from the scholarly literature of the past 15 years. On the one hand, there is what the paper suggests to call the 'decline theory', whose main traits can be traced back to the work of Margit Mayer (2009, 2013a, 2013b). On the other hand, there is what the paper suggests to call the 'fragmented development theory', which originates from the work of Hans Pruijt (2003, 2004; Prujit, 2013). These two theories were not explicitly formulated, but they are implicit in the work of their authors. Despite some important differences, the two theories share key-assumptions.

The 'decline theory' states that with the transition from fordist to neoliberal urban regimes squatter movements decline. This development is linked to the rise of a social environment[1] characterised by repression of squatters involved in radical political activities and co-optation of squatters involved in cultural and welfare activities. The repression versus co-optation of squatters is related to their potential use in urban development. The theory adds that split-up – and in some cases conflicts – may arise between squatters that cooperate with public authorities and squatters that have an antagonistic relationship with them.

According to Uitermark (2004), in Amsterdam co-optation of squatters has comprised so-called 'breeding ground' policies since the early 2000s. These policies

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[1] Following the notion of 'organizational environment' as used in organizational studies (Duncan, 1972), the notion of social environment refers to the set of exogenous factor with may impact the agency of a social movement. The looser notion of social environment is preferred to the conventionally used notion of political opportunity structure for accuracy reason. The strict notion of political opportunity structure does not include exogenous variables relevant to squatting movements development – like for instance amount of vacant buildings stock or possibility of bottom-up regeneration. Social movements methodologists (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996) argue against further stretching of the notion of political opportunity structure.

aimed at strengthening artistic squats through legalisation and funding (Uitermark, 2004, p. 694). Claire Colomb's work (2012) suggests that in Berlin co-optation of squatters has been carried out under the label of 'creative spaces promotion'. Creative spaces promotion policies – which started to be implemented since the early 2000s – has facilitated temporary use of vacant buildings and public spaces for cultural, social and economic activities fitting the image of the creative city. Those policies were implemented contextually to political squats evictions (Colomb, 2012, p. 124).

Squatter's co-optation in the neoliberal city is explained through the growing need of neoliberal urban regimes to cope with shrinking public welfare, inter-urban competition and rising unemployment (Mayer, 2013a). In the fordist city, characterised by low unemployment, strong public welfare and stable urban economy, squatted social centres were of little use for the city's development. In contrast, in the neoliberal city squatted social centres are increasingly considered a development resource as local welfare provider and cultural incubator.

In Spain, repression has comprised introduction of harsher anti-squats laws. As Miguel Martinez notes (2013, p. 118), the New Penal Code of 1995 'established stronger penalties and laid down the framework for a more severe persecution of squatting (…)'. In Germany, repression included tougher implementation of existing laws. An example is the so-called 'Berlin Line Ordinance' adopted by Berlin's City Council in 1990 (Holm & Kuhn, 2011, p. 172). According to Andrej Holm and Armin Kuhn (ibid), the ordinance *ratio legis* was that 'no new squats would be tolerated, and independently of any criminal charges or eviction notices, squats would be evacuated by police within 24 hours of occupation'.

In a recent work, Mayer (2013b, pp. 6-7) affirmed that economic crisis might reverse the tendency of squatter movements to decline. Referring to the growth of radical social movements driven by the 2009 global recession in Europe and North America, she argues that under such circumstances a substantial and not contingent re-radicalisation of urban movements can occur leading squatter movements to flourish. The decline theory can be classified as a structure-centred theory, in the sense that it focuses on structural variables and assumes actors' behaviour as basically

dependent on the social environment. The underlying idea is that a change in the social environment – whether produced by an urban regime shift or a global economic crisis – generates a change in the behaviour of social movements' actors.

In partial contrast to the 'decline theory', the 'fragmented development theory' affirms that squatter movements may decline – as well as stabilize and grow – depending on both the urban regime *and* the identity of the movement. The theory recognises that some urban regimes make radical movements decline more than others. Prujit (2003, p. 138) shares Mayer's key-thesis that market-oriented urban regimes – like post-fordist urban regimes – stimulate co-optation of squatter movements more than urban regimes embedded in a social-democratic welfare.

Nonetheless, a central point of the fragmented development theory is that the social environment constituted by an urban regime does not fully determine a movement trajectory. The identity of a movement is a crucial variable as well. An urban movement involved in radical actions sharing a particular oppositional identity can consolidate even within an adverse social environment. Prujit (2003) cites the case of the Amsterdam squatter movement, which from his point of view has remained over time a fundamentally radical movement concerned with antagonistic actions in spite of selective repression and co-optation. The fragmented development theory can be classified as an agency-centred theory, in the sense that it assumes the actor's behaviour as rather autonomous from the environment in which it acts.

In order to better capture the trajectories of squatting movements in contemporary cities, Prujit (2003) proposes the notion of 'flexible institutionalisation'. The notion of 'institutionalisation' has been conventionally used in the study of social movements to describe the last phase of social movements' lifecycle. In particular, in the case of movements that become integrated and stabilised into a given social formation. Institutionalisation is linked to the shift from disruptive to conventional repertoire of protests.

'Flexible institutionalisation' refers, instead, to a situation in which a movement consolidates but does not undergo de-radicalisation. In the words of Prujit (2003, p. 136): 'institutionalisation implies that, in the repertoire of action, convention replaces

disruption; in flexible institutionalisation, conventional tactics complements disruptive ones'. Martinez (2013, p. 3) has expanded the concept beyond an eclectic repertoire of protest to include a 'lack of general co-optation of the majority of squatters, so that neither they nor their activities become widely integrated into state institutions, state policies or capitalist firms and interests'.

The debate on the long-term development of squatting movements is still open. Arguably, the major obstacle to overcome is the lack of a substantial number of comparable studies. In the past few years, publications (azozomox, 2014; Dee, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c) and research projects as 'Movokeur 2012-14' (SqEK – Squatting Europe Kollective, 2014) on collecting and analysing comparable data on squatting have greatly increased. These researches are critically important, since a solid empirical base in squatting movements studies has lacked so far.

The present paper situates within this stream of research. By combining insights from the fragmented development theory and the decline theory – and by relying on quantitative and qualitative data collected and arranged on purpose through various sources – the paper looks at the development of Bologna SC squatting movement, paying attention to changes in the structure of the social environment and to the identity of the movement.

3. Why and How Studying SC Squatting in Bologna

The research focuses on social centres squatting and excludes housing squatting. Primarily, the exclusion of housing squatting from the analysis is linked to difficulties in re-constructing the long-term history and geography of this phenomenon in Bologna. Secondly, this methodological choice is linked to the observations that housing squatting cycles differ from SC squatting cycles. Nonetheless, a comparative analysis of SC squatting and housing squatting in Bologna would be of great interest since substantial links exist between the two movements.

The compound noun 'social centre' has been applied to a variety of community projects. In this research, the expression 'social centre' refers to spaces where non–profit public initiatives are regularly organised through self-management by

countercultures, subaltern groups and left-libertarian social movements. Self-management refers to a governance practice characterised by informality, horizontality and autonomy. Informality means that the practice of management does not rest on rigid division of labour. Autonomy means that the centre's activity is independent from public or private institutions, like municipalities, political parties or charities. Horizontality means that the governing body is a public assembly where everyone taking part in the activities of the social centre can participate.

The research focuses on a subset of social centres comprised in the definition given above, namely centres whose establishment implied squatting. It includes centres that remained squatted for all their existence and centres that – after squatting – were legalised. Rented social centres and social centres hosted in public-owned community spaces are not considered. Although connected to social centres, squatted university rooms are not included either. In Italy, the development of those spaces follows partially different paths from squatted social centres.

Bologna – one of the largest Italian cities located in Central Italy – constitutes a thought-provoking case study for analysing the long-term development of SC squatting. SC squatting in Bologna started in the late 1970s, and has since than exceptionally proliferated. As Table 1 shows, in the Municipality of Bologna there were 7 active social centres established through squatting in 2014. With a ratio of 1.8 social centres every 100,000 inhabitants, Bologna has the currently highest concentration of active social centres among Italian largest cities

Table 1: Social Centres in Major Italian Cities (Own elaboration based on Calia, 2014 and Istat, 2015)

City	Population	Social Centres	SC x 100.000
Bologna	386.181	7	1,8
Rome	2.863.322	28	1,0
Milan	1.324.169	8	0,6
Turin	902.137	5	0,6
Florence	377.207	2	0,5

As discussed in the next Section, the social environment of squatting movement has changed significantly during the post-fordist transition of the city. Intense legalisation, possibility of establishing community centres via legal temporary use of vacant buildings and repression waves have remarkably altered the context in which SC squatting has taken place. Consequently, the case of Bologna permits the analysis of the SC squatting movement in interaction with a changing social environment.

The research is based on primary quantitative and qualitative data collected between 2013-2015. Quantitative and spatial analysis of SC squatting in Bologna has been conducted through databases reporting address, year of squatting and year of eviction of social centres established in the Municipality of Bologna. Database construction was challenging due to scarcity of written reliable information. Apart from few exceptions (Consorzio Aaster & alii, 1996), recorded history has been marginal to Italian SC squatting movements for years. In the past decade, publications and projects (Anarcopedia, 2015; Calia, 2014; D'Onofrio & Monteventi, 2011) addressing former and present history of SC squatting have been developed. However, when research was conducted, no systematic record of Bologna SC squatting existed

Quantitative database construction implied different techniques of data-production: a) interviews with long-term activists involved in SC squatting and management of social centres; b) analysis of online media-activism related newspapers ('Zeroincondotta,' 2015) and projects (Anarcopedia, 2015) on SC squatting in Bologna; c) analysis of written documents on SC squatting in Bologna (D'Onofrio & Monteventi, 2011). The attempt was made to be as much accurate and comprehensive as possible. However, as other researchers working on squatting databases through the aforementioned techniques have noted 'it would be impossible to compile a list of all the projects which existed' (Dee, 2014a, p. 4). Nonetheless, the gathered information allows an adequate approximation of the phenomena.

Two databases were created. One database collects all social centres from whose establishment implied squatting that lasted not less than 1-month. The 1-month standard excludes many social centres, yet it increases reliability of information over time-periods when public usage of Internet was absent or limited (cfr. Database

Analysis 4 Cities 2014). The second database reports all squatted social centres from 2005 to the present, including squatting attempts. As shown later, more detailed data were required to improve understating of SC squatting in correspondence to this crucial decade. High Internet diffusion during this time period made construction of a homogeneous database possible.

Qualitative analysis of SC squatting was conducted through information gathered via semi-structured interviews, participant observation and website analysis. Interviews were conducted with activists of almost all social centres operating in Bologna over a period from 2013 to 2015. Information about the social environment was collected through interviews with activists involved in SC squatting, public servants and publications addressing local social movements history (D'Onofrio & Monteventi, 2011; Katsiaficas, 2006 [1997]).

4. Post-fordist Transition and the Emergence of a Squatting Hostile Environment

Continuously governed by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) since post-war period, Bologna was a leading example of Municipal Socialism from the 1950s to the 1970s. A fast growing industrial economy was associated with innovative welfare (Troilo, 2013) and solid urban planning (Cossentino, 2010). Furthermore, a large public service sector linked to University, Hospitals and Public Administration contributed to sustain the city's development.

Post-fordist transition has been a problematic process for Bologna. As Figure 1 shows, Bologna has undergone a substantial de-industrialisation in the core municipality since the 1960s and in the metropolitan area since 1980s. At the same time, it became destination of substantial immigrants. In 2014 Bologna's foreign residents accounted for almost 15% of total population, a figure twice as large as the national average of roughly 8%.

The presence of a large public service sector – and a growing private service sector – reduced the negative effects of de-industrialisation in the middle and upper classes. However, welfare cuts (Cossentino, 2010; Troilo, 2013) and stagnation of

manufacturing sector trapped the working class and immigrants in low-wage labour market and unemployment.

These processes brought a substantial socio-economic polarisation. According to OECD Metropolitan Area Database (OECD, 2015), in 2014 Bologna Metropolitan Area has the second highest GDP per capita among Italy's metropolitan areas (38.000 Euros per Year). In contrast, according to the think-tank Fondazione Leone Moressa (2015), among the Italian largest cities (municipalities) Bologna has the highest social exclusion risk for migrants.

In the past decade, as many other large European cities, the strategy of post-industrial urban development envisaged by Bologna's city administration shifted to the 'creative city model'. The major official strategic development document of the past decade, the *Piano Strutturale Comunale* (2009) considers the strengthening of advanced services – especially financial services, production services and information and communication services – one of the four main goals of Bologna's future development strategy (Comune di Bologna, 2009, p. 17). Advanced service sector expansion is considered critical for securing the city's position in territorial competition.

As Figure 1 shows, the economy of Bologna is still stagnating in terms of total employment. A spatial consequence of economic stagnation has been slow regeneration of urban voids, especially in non-central areas. In the meanwhile, abandoned buildings have become shelter of migrants and Roma people, and occasionally drug dealing spots. Residents of adjacent neighbourhoods feel insecure, blaming the city administration for ineffective security. Almost unknown during previous decades, public security has became a major political concern in Bologna at the turn of the twentieth century (Pavarini, 2006).

Figure 1: Economic Development of Bologna (Own elaboration based on Istat, 2015)[2]

Timeline in Figure 2 syntheses the main changes in the social environment of the squatting movement during the post-fordist transition. Many exogenous variables affect squatting movement development. Following the literature (Colomb, 2012; Mayer, 2013; Prujit, 2003; Uitermark, 2004), Figure 2 focuses on 3 key-variables: a) level of repression; b) possibility of legalisation; c) possibility of establishing community centres through temporary use.

Figure 2: Changes in Social Environment.
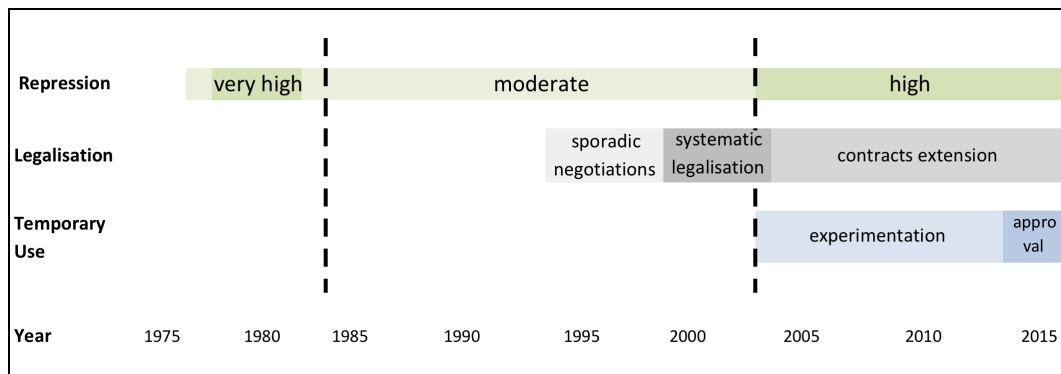
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As shown by the graph, since the birth of the movement in the late 1970s, phases of high repression have alternated phases of moderate repression towards SC squatting. Squatting is illegal in Italy, but squatters – similarly to Germany (Holm & Kuhn, 2011; Pruijt, 2003, p. 143) – were prosecuted with different intensity over the years. However, since the early 2000s, the formation of a social environment considerably different from those of the past is recognizable. This environment is characterised by simultaneous repression and co-optation of activists involved in SC squatting and management. It has been gradually constructed by different centre-left and centre-right administrations. This new environment can be seen as more hostile to SC squatting since it combines positive and negative incentives against SC squatting.

The first step in the formation of the current social environment was an intense phase of legalisation, from 2000 to 2004, in correspondence to the mandate of a centre-right administration. The majority of those legalisations are the result of survival negotiations, i.e. negotiations in 'order to prevent, or delay as much as possible, (…) forthcoming eviction' (Martinez, 2013, p. 12). Nevertheless, there were significant cases of legalisations resulting from high-level negotiations, i.e. negotiations 'explicitly aimed at winning legal occupation of the building for squatters' (ibid). During this period, almost all large squatted centres of Bologna were legalised through some sort of contract. The contracts allowed use of squatted buildings for fixed period of time. When contracts expired, subsequent administrations prolonged contracts in most cases.

The second step was the increase in state repression towards SC squatting. In contrast to previous years, since 2004 zero tolerance towards squatting was implemented. Primarily, zero tolerance consisted in eviction actions towards newly squatted social centres being usually implemented within few days and, in some cases, few hours. Based on rapid eviction of new squats, Bologna zero tolerance policies against SC squatting resemble the 'Berlin Line' ordinance adopted by Berlin's City Council in 1990 (Holm & Kuhn, 2011, p. 172).

The third step in the formation of the new social environment is the creation of institutional channels for community centres establishment through legal temporary-use of vacant buildings. After a decade of experimentation, those channels became official in 2014 with the approval of the *Regolamento sulla Collaborazione tra Cittadini e Amministrazione per la Cura e la Rigenerazione dei Beni Comuni Urbani [Regulation on the Collaboration between Citizen and Administration for the Care and Regeneration of Urban Commons] (Comune di Bologna, 2014).*

The *Regolamento* enables and supports various forms of urban space regeneration within a broader framework of urban commons tutelage and development. Envisaged interventions range from ordinary maintenance of public parks to collective management of disused buildings. Establishment of independent community centres by citizen's groups has become feasible via the *Regolamento*. The *Regolamento* explicitly envisions cultural and social activities for regeneration. Section 7 and Section 8 of Chapter 1 – the Chapter dedicated to general dispositions – are devoted respectively to social innovation and urban creativity promotion. In contrast, the *Regolamento* does not consider political activities. Access to buildings is constrained to public authority's approval of the regeneration project.

Local public officials consider bottom-up regeneration a response to shrinking public budgets and related limitations in municipal capacity to provide welfare, cultural initiatives and ordinary maintenance of public spaces. Furthermore, they consider bottom-up regeneration a mean for improving public security, since it impedes abandoned buildings squatting by marginal groups such as migrants and homelessness. The 'Urban Commons Promotion Policies' – as the set of interventions defined by the *Regolamento* might be labelled – share with Berlin's Creative Spaces Promotion Policies the emphasis on citizen's disused space maintenance, socio-cultural activities promotion and the temporary-use logic (cf. Colomb, 2012, p. 140).

**5. Empirical Evidence on Bologna SC Squatting Development**

In Bologna, the first social centre was squatted in 1976. Since than, considering social centres with at least one month of activity, 31 social centres have been active in the city. The average duration is 4,9 years, yet social centres with up to 1 year of duration account for 39% of the total (Table 2). Six centres – which account for 19% of the total – have been active for more than 10 years. Currently, the oldest social centre of Bologna has 21 years of activity.

Table 2: Social Centres Duration (> 1 month).

Class	Freq.	Percent.	Cum.
0-1 Year	12	39	39
2-5 Years	10	32	71
6-10 Years	3	10	81
> 10 Years	6	19	100
Total	31	100	100

Figure 3 displays average duration of existing social centres for every year. As the graph shows, after 1987 average duration has persistently increased. Currently, existing social centres have an average duration of 14 years. It is relevant to underline that, since 2012, also average duration of less enduring centres has increased remarkably, reaching the peak of 4 years. The increase in average duration after the 2000 is mainly linked to legalisations.

Figure 3: Social Centres Duration (>1 month).
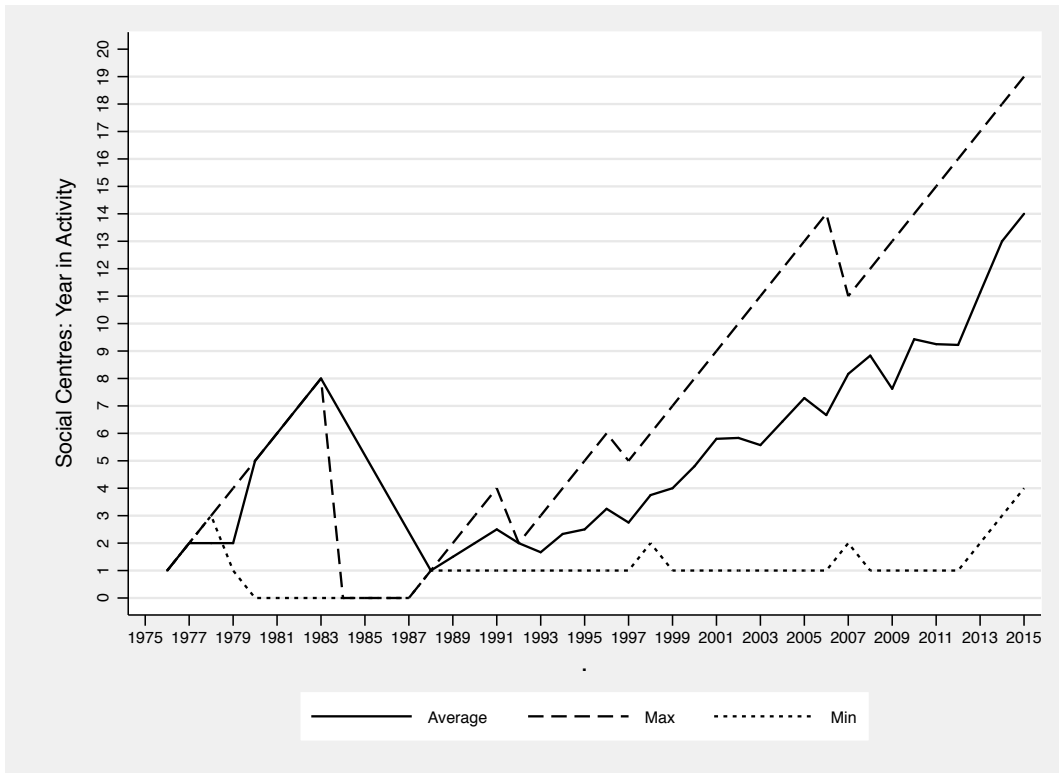
As Figure 4 shows the number of the active social centres in Bologna has increased over the past four decades. Considering the trends of Figure 4 together with changes in social environment as presented in Figure 2 (p. 12), Bologna SC squatting movement development can be divided in 3 phases: a) a first phase that goes from 1976 to the mid 1980s; b) a second phase from 1987 to 2004; c) a third phase from 2004 to the present.

The first phase could be called the 'rise and fall phase' – and lasted until 1987. During this phase, SC squatting emerged has a significant social phenomenon, but was quickly repressed to the point that squatted SC almost disappeared at the end of the period. Oscillations in total number of active social centres between 1976 and 1980 can be attributed to the combination of very high repression and presence of strong autonomous movements willing to squat despite adverse conditions.

Figure 4: Active Social Centre (>1 month) 1976-2015.
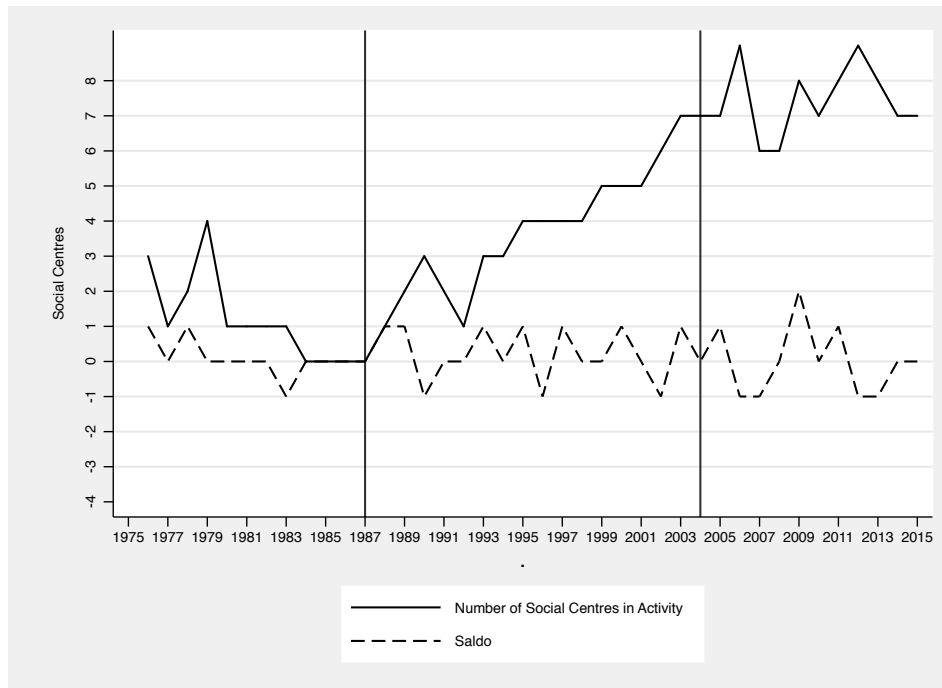
The second phase of Bologna SC squatting movement, which goes from 1987 to 2004, can be called the 'phase of growth': the number of active social centres increased almost continuously. This trend was associated with a moderate level of repression. The third phase of Bologna SC squatting movement – from 2004 to the present – could be called the 'phase of stability'. Evictions of previously established centres were almost absent. However, the oscillations of the graph show that new centres have had difficulties in consolidating. As a result, the number of currently active social centres is the same as in 2004.

The assessment of SC squatting evolution during the phase of stability must consider the changes in the social environment, which have taken place since the 2000s (cf. Section 2). A more SC squatting hostile social environment consolidated. Yet the establishment of new centres since 2004 can be taken as evidence that this change has not significantly altered the propensity to squat. However, oscillations in total

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number of SC point to the fact that increased repression has made new SC establishment more challenging.

This hypothesis is confirmed in Figure 5, which tracks the number of new SC established (>1month of activity) since 1976 and the total number of SC squatting attempts since 2005. No considerable changes can be seen before and after 2004 in relation to the establishment of new SC with more than 1 month of activity. Similarly, no decline can be seen in relation to the number of squatting attempts since 2005, though oscillations are significant. The gap between squatting attempts and established new centres since 2009 confirms that establishing social centres through squatting is increasingly difficult. Since 2012, no squatting attempt has succeeded in establishing social centres with more than 1 month of activity.

The exception in Bologna SC squatting movement is the *Planimetrie Culturali Association*. Established in 2004, the *Planimetre Culturali Association* is the only case of a group of squatters that has become a *Zwischenutzungagentur* (Lanz, 2012, p. 10) – i.e. a professional agency that facilitates legal temporary use of vacant spaces by negotiating with local authorities and property owners. *Planimetrie Culturali* has established 3 community centres in vacant buildings since 2004, and has become a 'best practice' in the period of experimentation that brought to the approval of the 'Temporary Use Regulation' discussed in Section 3.

In the establishment of a community centre, *Planimetrie Culturali* emphasises cooperation with the city administration, culture and welfare over politics, and brands itself as an association providing 'voluntary safekeeping of disused buildings'. The community centres founded by *Planimetrie Culturali* are valued as alternative cultural venues by SC activists. Because of its closeness to city-administration and little interest in politics, SC activists do not identify *Planimetrie Culturali* as a *realtà di movimento* ('movement reality'), i.e. a radical movement actor.

Figure 5: New Social Centres 1976-2015.
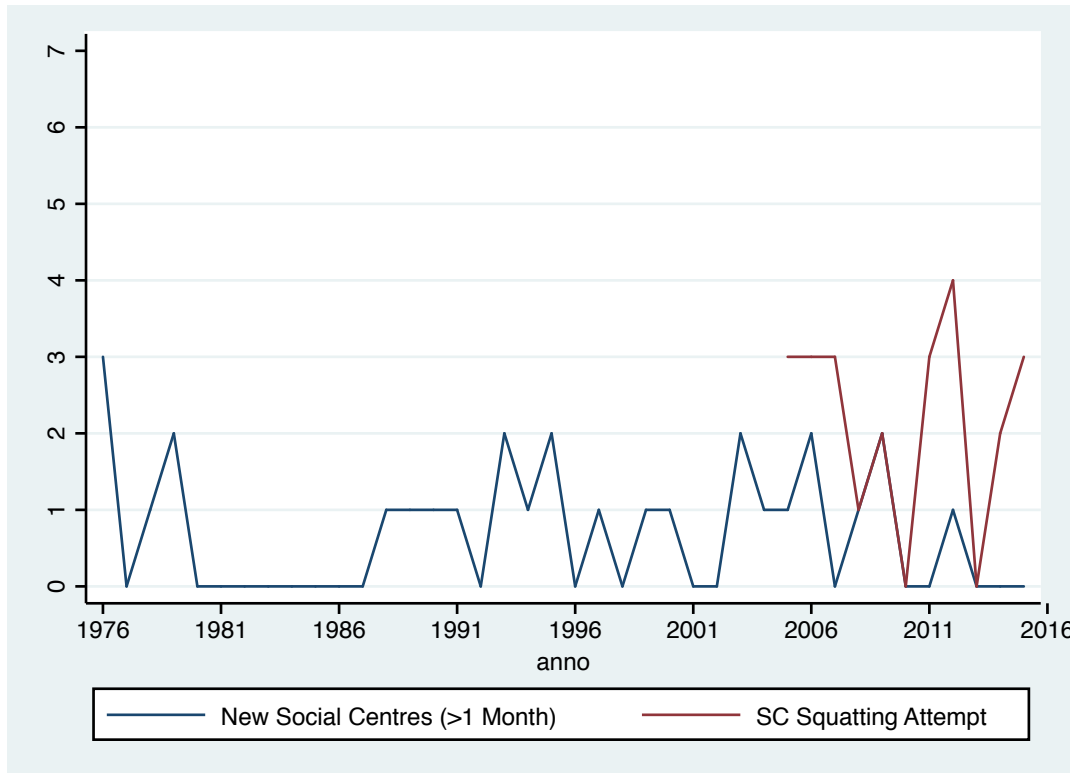
Spatial analysis of SC squatting adds relevant information. Map 1 tracks change in social centres localisation in the Municipality of Bologna for 4 time-periods. As Map 1a shows, SC squatting started as a phenomenon that mainly involved the city centre. Out of the 6 squatted social centres present in the city from 1976 to 1985, 4 were located in the city's core. From 1987 to 1995, SC squatting expanded outside the city centre while remaining present in central areas. In contrast, from 1996 to the present, SC squatting experienced displacement from the city's core. Over this time period, the majority of social centres – 9 out of 12 from 1996 to 2005 and 10 out of 13 from 2006 to 2015 – were located outside the historical centre. Still, 3 social centres have been continuously located in the city's core in the past 20 years.

Map 1: Social Centres Localisation in Bologna 1976-2015 (>1 month of activity).
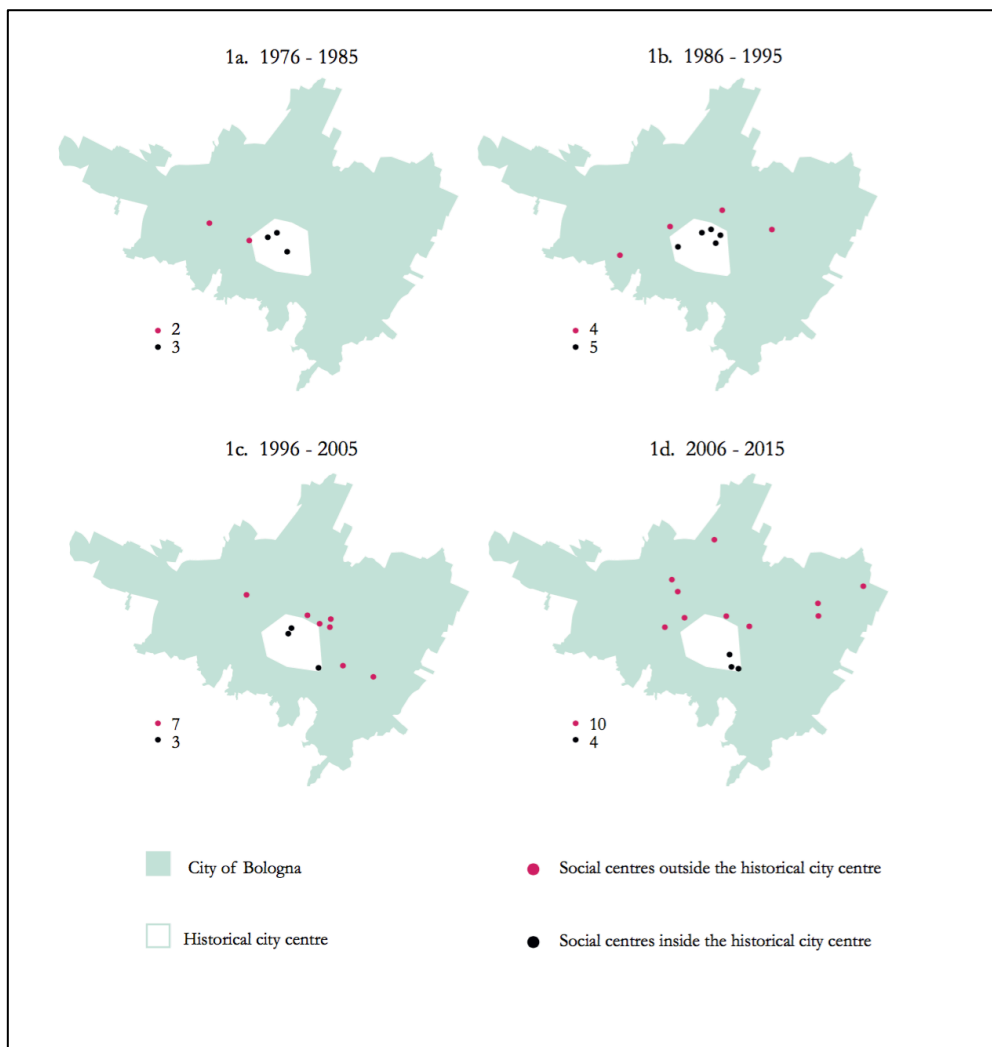
Average duration of social centres established through squatting in the city centre is about 3.8 years. In contrast, average duration of social centres outside the city centre is about 6.3 years. These evidences suggest that repression towards SC squatting has been higher in central areas than outside. Nevertheless, increased repression in the city-centre seems not to have had an impact in squatters' propensity to squat this area of the city, at least during the past decade. Map 2 reports SC squatting attempts from

2005 to 2010. As the map shows, the phenomena continue to impact the historical centre significantly. Almost half of the 22 squatting attempts in the past decade took place in this part of the city.

Map 2: New Social Centres Squatting 2005-2015.
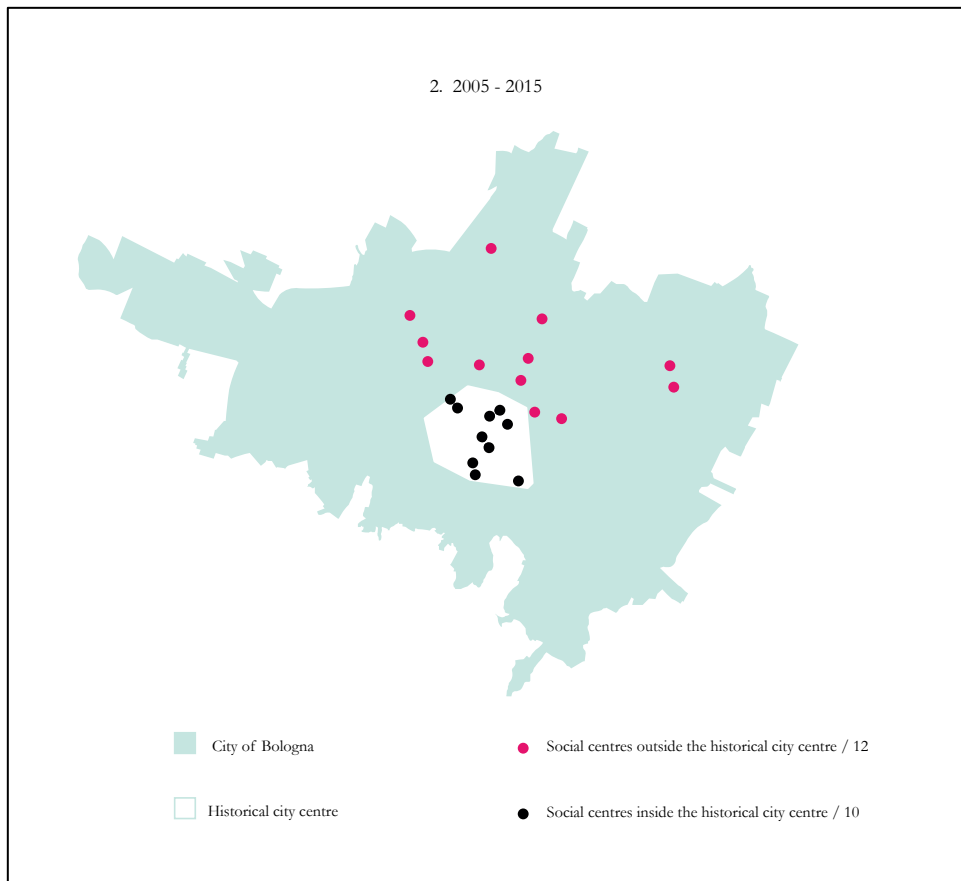
The empirical evidence presented leads to the conclusion that Bologna SC squatting movement development can be considered a case of 'flexible institutionalisation'. The number of active social centres and the average duration of social centres have steadily increased over the years. In the past 15 years, most of those spaces have been legalised to the point that out of the 7 active centres only 2 are currently squatted. However, legalisations, creation of institutional channels for community-centres establishment, on one side, and increase in repression, on the other, have not

diminished social centres' propensity to squat – even in the city centre where evidences suggest that repression is higher.

The sole exception, at least until the present, is the segment of the SC squatting movement linked to the *Planimetrie Culturali Associations*. The development of *Planimetrie Culturali* can be seen as a case of institutionalisation, which resulted in state-integration, as the Municipal Regulation on Temporary Use introduced in 2014 shows.

6. The Antagonistic Identity of Bologna SC Movement

SC squatting started in Bologna in relation to the autonomous movements of the late 1970s (D'Onofrio & Monteventi, 2011). On the one hand, those movements focused on the establishment of autonomous zones – occupied universities, squatted social centres and housing projects – where to prefigure alternatives to the dominant social order. On the other hand, they emphasised conflict with the state, regarded as a repressive institution incapable of progressive politics. Strongly politicised groups – linked ideologically to *Italian Autonomia* (Wright, 2002) – and creative-libertarian groups composed the autonomous movements of this period.

As in other Italian cities (cf. Mudu, 2012), autonomists and libertarian ideologies have continued to be dominant within Bologna's social centres till the present. Some social centres still identify themselves in precise political ideologies. For instance, the social centres established by the Crash collective – the most squatting active collective of the past decade – refer to the political tradition of *Autonomia*. Other social centres have embraced politically fragmented identities. The over 10-year old XM24 conceives its lack of a precise political identity as an asset and labels itself a 'Public Space', to stress its internal diversity and to distance itself from more politically homogeneous centres. A similar attitude can be also traced in other long-lived centres established after the 2000s, like the Vag61.

The post-identitarian turn of some social centres of Bologna over the past decade is linked to the growing diversity of the groups that got involved in SC squatting and management. Collectives involved in SC squatting after the 2000s are related to social

movements as diverse as the LGBT movement, the environmental movement and the migrant rights movement. In recent years, the food sovereignty movement has gained centrality. The largest SC squatting attempt has been conducted with the aim of establishing a local food market in 2015.

In the development of Bologna SC movement, music related sub-cultures were also crucial. During the 1980s, the Punk subculture was intensely active within the movement. For instance, punks were an important component of the centre Isola del Kantiere – a key experience of the second wave of SC squatting. Currently, (post-) Punk collectives are present in the Atlantide social centres and in the aforementioned XM24. During the 1990s, the rave subculture and the hip-hop subculture became strongly involved in SC squatting and management. The reference social centre during this period was Livello 57, which during its 13 years of activity became a national 'reference point' for underground Hip Hop and Electronics. Activists involved in the Rave movement established in 2011 the Officina Tsunami, one of the few spaces that lasted 1 year, after the intensification of repression towards SC squatting started in 2004.

The plurality of social movements and subcultures, which have characterised Bologna SC squatting movement, makes difficult to talk about a shared identity. Some activists interviewed explicitly refused the idea of a unified Bologna SC movement. Nevertheless, interviews and participant observations reveal the existence of a core of key-practices shared by social centres activists, which defines a thin but precise common identity. On the one hand, this shared identity rests on the practice of self-management. As underlined in Section 2, self-management includes absence of formal division of labour, autonomy from state institutions and assembly-based decision-making.

On the other hand, the key practice that defines the identity of Bologna SC movement – and, more broadly, the identity of the Italian SC movement – is squatting. The centrality of squatting in a SC movement identity is not self-evident as it might appear. For instance, the British SC movement (UK Social Centres Network, 2015) recognises rented social centres – like the Cowly Club in Brighton – as part of the SC

movement. In Bologna, rented spaces involved in radical politics and underground culture have strong links with social centres. However, SC activists perceive those spaces as different from social centres.

Bologna's SC activists conceive squatting as a practical mean to get access to disused space for non-profit activities – which would otherwise be difficult to obtain given land-prices, bureaucratic constrains and land-regulations. Nevertheless, interviews suggest that the shared definition of squatting of Bologna SC movement goes beyond an 'entrepreneurial' conception and embraces a 'political' one (cf. Prujit, 2013). Although practical concerns are relevant, SC activists also conceive squatting as a political instrument to be used in order to reduce – or at least challenge – state authority and construct spaces where the influence of the latter is limited. Although it may vary in intensity, antagonism towards the state remains central in the identity of the movement in present days.

In Italy, state-antagonism is related to the broader subject of so-called *rapporto di forza*. With this expression, squatters refer to the power-balance between them and the state. A favourable power-relation for squatters means that state authorities are forced to tolerate existing squatted social centres and the establishment of new squats. This condition is never obtained once for all. Rather it represents a process, which is continuously challenged by state authorities and needs to be re-performed through actions by squatters. Besides social legitimateness, SC activists regard sustained squatting decisive in the establishment of a favourable power-balance.

The antagonistic identity explains much of the development of Bologna SC squatting movement. Firstly, it explains the lack of interest in institutional channels for community centres creation. Those channels allow the state-actor to maintain control over length of use and general content of social centres' activities. Such high degree of state-control is considered unacceptable for a movement concerned with challenging state-power. Secondly, antagonistic identity clarifies why legalisations have not prevented activists of legalised spaces to continue participating in SC squatting. As underlined in Section 3, legalisations were mostly 'survival legalisations', and are not expression of refusal towards the practice of squatting.

Thirdly, the antagonistic identity of Bologna SC squatting movement explains why increased repression has not reduced propensity to squat. Political squatters do not contemplate only the success rate of a squatting action when considering starting one. Political squatters may squat precisely because repression is high and they believe that through squatting they could force the state to lower repression.

7. Conclusion

In Bologna the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial city has been accompanied by the formation of a more squatting hostile environment, characterized by positive and negative incentives to SC squatting. Positive incentives are represented by legalisations and by the possibility of establishing community centres through legal temporary use of vacant urban space. Negative incentives are represented by the intensification of repression towards new squatted social centres. This change in the social environment started to emerge in the 2000s.

The change in the social environment occurred within a wider context of local economy stagnation, significant unemployment, abundant vacant urban space, reduction in municipal capacity to deliver welfare services, and urban elites' growing interest in the 'creative city model'. These changes are remarkably similar to trends observed in other European cities like Amsterdam and Berlin and are consistent with key-assumptions of what the paper called the 'decline theory'.

In contrast to the decline theory's expected outcome, the formation of a more squatting hostile environment has not caused a substantial decline of SC squatting in Bologna so far. As the above-presented empirical evidence shows, the number of currently active social centres – although not considerably growing since a decade – amounts to 7, one the highest level ever reached. Besides, only one case of co-optation into state-institutions is recognizable. Finally, average duration of squatted social centres continues to increase, while the propensity towards SC squatting has not fallen, even in the city centre where repression is particularly high.

The only sign of weakening of Bologna SC movement can be detected in the difficulties that new centres have in consolidating since 2004 – and in particular since 2010. Despite several squatting attempts, in the past four years only one centre with more than 1 month of duration has been established. However, it is arguably too early to conceptualise this phenomenon as a sign of substantial decline.

The overall development of Bologna SC squatting movement can be considered a case of flexible institutionalisation. As the legalisation-induced increase in average duration shows, there has been a process of institutionalisation of social centres in Bologna, but such institutionalisation has not prevented the movement to continue to use squatting as a way to reclaim vacant urban space. The 'antagonistic identity' of the movement arguably explains this development. The identity of Bologna SC squatting movement is characterised by antagonism towards the state and a political conception of squatting. Antagonistic identity has led activists involved in SC squatting and management to ignore institutional channels for community centre reaction and to continue squatting despite increase in repression.

In accordance with the 'fragmented development theory', the case of Bologna shows that the formation of a more squatting hostile environment does not lead necessarily to substantial squatting decline. As in the case of Amsterdam, the oppositional identity of Bologna SC squatting movement has brought the movement to consolidate despite co-optation attempts and increased repression. The case study of Bologna confirms the relevance of combining actor-centred and structure-centred perspectives in the study of squatting movements.

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