Direct Social Actions and Political Influence.

Social Centers at Times of Crisis
in Bologna and Naples

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What do you see, Jeremiah? "I see a branch of the almond tree", I replied.

(Jeremiah 1:11)

Abstract

This dissertation investigates how, since the burst of the 2008 crisis, self-managed social centers adopting Direct Social Actions (DSAs) have shaped political influence at the municipal level. A rich bulk of social sciences scholarship has addressed the political and social dimensions of the crisis, discussing, on the one hand, the transformation of the repertoires of collective engagement, and, on the other hand, the outcomes of specific collective mobilizations, such as anti-austerity protests. However, a systematic reflection on how the use of different forms of action relates to movement consequences, and particularly to political outcomes, is overall missing from the literature. This is especially the case for those modes of collective action, such as DSAs, that are contentious in nature, but cannot be ascribed to the categories of demonstrative and of conventional action.

Adopting a relational research approach, the dissertation employs the causal explanation method of process-tracing, to retrace the sequences of interlocking dynamics through which the pathways of political influence of social centers have unfolded during the decade. In doing so, it offers a framework for analyzing the political influence of collective actors, encompassing three dimensions of change: institutional attitudes, procedural access, and policy.

The empirical analysis focuses on two Italian city cases, Bologna and Naples, and is based, on the one hand, on semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with social centers' activists, local elected officials, and key informants. On the other hand, gathered sources include a set of local press articles (2005-2019), materials produced by collective actors themselves, press releases, and municipal institutional documents (including policy and administrative acts, transcripts, and reports). The interviews and document analysis have been integrated with fieldnotes from local self-managed spaces and institutional settings.

Empirical evidence from the two cases suggests that, during the crisis decade, Direct Social Action has played a relevant role in the pathways of social centers' influence over institutional politics at the local level, prompting distinct relational dynamics in the interplay between collective actors, their broader environment, society at large, and institutional actors. Contributing to the research on the contentious practices of DSA in the Italian context of the crisis, the dissertation uncovers how the structuring, in the societal fabric, of material, territorial and identity responses can translate into an institutional impact, as collective actors intercept the dynamics of representative political competition. At the same time, evidence highlights the relationship between the ways in which practices are mobilized within arenas of interaction, and their role in fostering the political influence of movement actors. Specifically, the analysis underscores the efficacy of DSAs in contributing to trajectories of high political influence, for collective actors that deploy this form of action within a bridging of their social environment.

Acknowledgments

Looking back, I reckon that the road through this research has been built by big and small acts of faith – on my part, but more so, on the part of many others. My gratitude goes to everyone that has allowed me to engage in this project, helping me to keep up the work and to love it for a little over four years.

The trust of the commission that accepted me into the doctoral program at Scuola Normale, in 2017, opened the doors of research for me. During these years at Palazzo Strozzi, I have had the chance to experience firsthand the dedication and hard work of the department's staff and faculty, and an empowering exchange with talented PhD colleagues and COSMOS minds from all over the world, both endless sources of questioning and curiosity.

A special note of gratitude goes to my supervisors, Lorenzo Bosi and Lorenzo Zamponi, whose work has deeply influenced my research path. Their presence, support, constant intellectual stimulus, and understanding, have made a critical difference in this journey. Thank you for believing in the project and accompanying me throughout it. I was lucky to receive the advice of several other brilliant scholars as I navigated the different stages of my PhD. Among them, I notably thank Donatella della Porta, Manuela Caiani, Lorenzo Mosca and Alice Lomonaco for their precious feedback and guidance.

I owe an extraordinary thanks to all those who agreed to somehow be a part of this research. To each interviewee, from elected officials to academics, from activists to journalists and civil servants. This also includes everyone that has helped me get in contact with interviewees and get acquainted with actors, places and realities I was not familiar with. Above all, I am grateful to the many activists that entrusted me with their stories and their views on life, society, politics and struggle. Thank you for sharing the beauty and the setbacks, the hardship and the deliverance that come with the fight for social justice. Thanks for showing me glimpses of a world that is not only possible, but obstinately built on a daily basis. Our encounters are a gift that I carry close, along the road.

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Finally, I am grateful for the support of many loved ones. To the friends and family who were always there during these transformative times. To Loris and our EVO travel companions. To those who are no longer here, yet always are. To my father, for his inexhaustible optimism of the will. To my husband, Angelo, for always being my light.

I take none of it for granted. Two of these four PhD years have unfolded during the Covid-19 pandemic: in such circumstances, care and trust towards someone and what they do (and a researcher, of all people), take on a whole new meaning. For each of these acts of faith, I am just immensely grateful.

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List of abbreviations

AAO – Alternative Action Organization

CSA – *Centro Sociale Autogestito* (self-managed social center)

DemA – *Democrazia e Autonomia* (Democracy and Autonomy)

DSA – Direct Social Action

GJM – Global Justice Movement

No-OCSE Movement – Anti-OECD Movement

o.d.g. – *ordine del giorno* (order of business)

PCI or PC – *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party, 1921-1991)

PD – *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Party, 2007-present)

POS – Political Opportunity Structure

SMOs – Social Movement Organizations

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Focus and contribution of the study

The global crisis sparked in 2008, and the chain reactions of economic, social and political phenomena that have followed, have abruptly unveiled the deep fractures, contradictions and inadequacies of many socioeconomic and political systems. Economic recession and austerity policies have significantly impacted individuals' everyday life, deteriorating material living conditions and social ties. Southern Europe has been heavily affected by these changes. In Italy, in particular, the crisis accelerated pre-existing processes of industrial and productive decline (Ciocca 2010; Pianta 2012), severely impacting the labor market, expanding poverty and deprivation on multiple levels, and amplifying inequalities. At the same time, the years of the crisis have borne significant political phenomena. In the realm of representative politics, democracies have undergone transformations in party systems and governments, from the rise of technocratic executives, to decreasing electoral turnout, to the structuring and affirmation of new and populist political forces. In Italy, the resignation of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in 2011 was followed by the appointment of a technocratic government led by economist Mario Monti, supported by a large coalition majority and invested with the task of restoring the country's public finances by means of austerity policies. Starting with the general election of 2013, which marked the electoral affirmation of the Five Star Movement, the country entered into a complex tripolarism between the Democratic Party, the right-wing (represented notably by Berlusconi and by the Lega), and the M5S. In the background, but at the core of many emerging challenges, was the crisis of parties and their membership, and of traditional political participation, in a general picture of declining trust in representative politics and fading of collective belongings.

Collective action in times of crisis has coincided, first, with a long global wave of mobilizations against austerity. In Southern Europe in particular, the functioning and structures of representative democracy were widely contested. The Italian anti-austerity movement was among the first to mobilize. However, after the exhaustion of the 2008-2011 protest cycle, marked by the mobilization of the student movement and the opposition to the Berlusconi government (with the support of a large network of established civil society and political actors), the Italian anti-austerity movement progressively died down. While institutional forces on the left have struggled, and overall failed, to maximize the political capital of the crisis mobilizations, alternative forms of collective engagement have (re-)emerged, as latent forms of political participation (Bosi & Zamponi 2019).

Following the critical juncture of the crisis, Italy, among other countries suffering the recession's greater economic and social impact, has known a development of local solidarity-based and resilience-driven initiatives, as well as alternative action organizations, providing individuals with ways to cope with socioeconomic hardship, while simultaneously opening new channels of political participation. These forms of engagement bear strong linkages with the crisis of representative institutions and traditional activism, and the growing demands for political disintermediation (Biancalana 2018). They also speak to several relevant strands of academic research, from social innovation, to contentious mutualism and the role of youth activism in regenerating politics in times of crisis (De Luigi et al. 2018; della Porta & Mattoni 2014), to prefigurative politics (Breines 1989; Dinerstein 2015; Holloway 2012).

The research work carried out by Bosi and Zamponi (2015, 2019, 2020) on the resort to such practices in times of hardship, has defined as Direct Social Actions (or DSAs) practices endowed with:

i) a direct nature, in that they are not mediated;
ii) a social character, in that they target society (or parts of society), rather than directly targeting State institutions or other power holders.

Direct Social Actions range from mutualistic and grassroots welfare initiatives, to alternative finance and consumer-producer networks, to housing squats, self-management and the regeneration of spaces, to counter-cultural experimentations. Within this heterogeneity of repertoires, DSAs share some key aspects, inextricably linked to the context of the crisis – and even more, to some of its most significant deep-rooted underlying issues. In fact, in an environment affected by the waning of collective belongings and the fragmentation of social identities, and by a widespread dissatisfaction with political intermediation and the vertical tendency of democratic decision-making, DSAs provide ways to re-materialize and re-territorialize collective action, while also encouraging the repositioning of participants into a collective dimension (Bosi and Zamponi 2020).

The innovation of collective action repertoires, during the crisis' different phases and across forms of mobilization, has been extensively addressed by academic literature. At the same time, scholarship has investigated the outcomes of mobilizations such as the Spanish 15M, or the political and institutional trajectory of the Greek contestation of austerity with the experience of SYRIZA. However, a systematic reflection on how the use of different forms of action relates – and has related, during the crisis – to movement outcomes, is overall missing in contemporary literature. This is particularly the case for those modes of collective action, like DSAs, that are contentious in nature, but cannot be ascribed to the categories of demonstrative and of conventional action. Such limitation speaks to a broader trend in scholarship. Despite the richness and diversity of collective action repertoires, studies interested in how different forms of action contribute to movement outcomes have, for the most part, been limited to a distinction between radical and moderate forms of action (see Uba 2005), and have typically revolved around the effects of protest.

The aim of my PhD dissertation is to explore more deeply the link between practices and outcomes of collective action – particularly, to investigate the role played by DSAs in shaping trajectories of political influence in the decade following the onset of the crisis. Of course, in and of itself, this is a vast research agenda. For the sake of the present work, I have chosen to focus only on the political dimension of movement outcomes (thus, leaving cultural and biographical outcomes aside, for the time being), and specifically on the political influence of collective actors on local institutional politics.

The dissertation seeks to answer the following question: how has Direct Social Action shaped the political influence of self-managed social centers throughout the crisis decade? By examining two specific city cases, Bologna and Naples, the thesis sets out to retrace the pathways of influence of ten social centers on municipal politics across the 2010-2020 decade, exploring the extent to which DSA has affected such trajectories.

The research is intended as the comparative investigation of two case studies, and was always oriented towards theory-building rather than hypothesis-testing. Nonetheless, from the get-go, some elements led to wonder whether the engagement of collective actors in DSA might be associated with stronger political influence.

The factors that make the question of DSA's political consequences especially compelling stem from the nature of these practices, and from the very background of the crisis. While Direct Social Actions are aimed at society, they also inevitably cross paths with

the holders of political and institutional power. DSAs provide alternatives to a mediated political participation in crisis, and often contest the dominant paradigms of production and consumption, whose shortcomings have been made blatantly manifest by the recession. Welfare production, solidarity, alternative economic initiatives, squatting for housing purposes, are all consensus-sensitive actions that invest the prerogatives – and question the effectiveness or validity – of governmental action. In turn, since the burst of the crisis, the complex prism of actors involved in representative politics, has been confronted with the need to address its own crisis of legitimacy and territorial grip. It is reasonable to wonder, then, whether by intervening in the fractures exposed and amplified by the crisis of institutional politics, Direct Social Action may contribute to increasing political influence. In this respect, I propose to look at DSAs not only a means of enriching the repertoires of collective action, but as a channel of democracy from below, in the dynamic interplay between collective and institutional actors.

Furthermore, the crisis has highlighted the centrality of the role of cities and of local sociopolitical contexts. The local dimension makes the effects of the crisis particularly visible; in turn, the crisis deeply affects the daily lives of urban spaces, making the city a scarce and unevenly distributed resource. One of the consequences of these phenomena has been the renewed claim of a right to the city (Carrera 2017). The history of urban struggles and collective action in general, attests to how cities, inherently, constitute fertile environments for the emergence – and the scaling – of collective mobilizations (Miller and Nicholls 2013). Urban contexts combine a high capital of mobilization resources, with a concentration of manifestations of inequality, in addition to smaller-scale issues and more limited, often more accessible, decision-making structures. It follows that municipal arenas are also the environment in which the repercussions of the crisis are most directly experienced, processed, and addressed. Since the 2000s, city systems in Italy have become a pivotal space in the arising and framing of key public debate issues, including national and global ones. Security demands, the increasing complexity of social stratification, issues of democratic representation, are but a few of the challenges that city systems face directly in their daily functioning. The question of democracy in local arenas has been gaining increasing relevance, particularly in reference grassroots processes of participation (Lewanski 2007), democratic innovations, and the dilemmas of localized collective action. In fact, while the crisis is particularly visible in the city, so is institutional politics. Being endowed with significant governmental and policy-making prerogatives, Italian municipalities can, in this respect, act as direct channels in the perpetuation of inequalities, but also as fertile grounds for progress and experimentation. Scholarship on movement outcomes has typically focused on the impact of sub-national collective actors on municipal policy, while other political consequences have been mostly addressed in national-level studies. However, other dimensions of political outcomes can be investigated at the local level, besides policy. In this dissertation, I focus on two others in particular: collective actors' access to decision-making, and their acceptance or recognition on the part of the institutional elite.

This thesis seeks to constitute a small step towards a new research agenda, bridging the literature on the consequences of social movements and the progressing research on repertoires of collective action. It develops this attempt by focusing specifically on the role of DSA on political influence.

At the same time, the dissertation aims to offer an encompassing perspective on political influence, underscoring the relational and dynamic nature of collective pathways of influence. While the thesis is clearly embedded in social movement studies, it relies on, and engages with, several strands of scholarship and disciplines in the social sciences, from political

sociology, to urban sociology, to political science. In retracing different collective actors' trajectories, I have sought to avoid the analytical pitfalls of a research that is too movement-centric, and therefore, have placed a significant focus on accounting for the perspectives of institutional actors and the dynamics unfolding inside institutions themselves.

Among the aims of this work, is also to contribute to the production on the Italian case. On the one hand, this relates to expanding the scientific investigation of local and city environments, which are often neglected in most branches of social research other than the sociology of territory. On the other hand, this involves furthering the investigation of one specific kind of urban actors (that is, self-managed social centers) that has been gradually neglected by academic research, to the benefit of more single-issue mobilizations – though with some noteworthy exceptions (see Piazza 2016; Frazzetta and Piazza 2018; Giannini and Pirone 2018, 2019).

1.2 Analytical approach

The theoretical chapter calls into question some of the scholarly perspectives adopted in the study of collective action outcomes on political institutions, proposing an encompassing analytical framework for the study of political influence. Based on a review of the most compelling aspects highlighted by the literature on movement outcomes, the chapter outlines three key dimensions of political influence on institutions: *institutional attitudes*, *procedural access* and *policy*.

I. The *institutional attitudes* dimension, refers to the extent of recognition of collective actors as legitimate interlocutors on the part of municipal elected officials.

II. The *procedural access* dimension specifies the influence of collective actors over the decision-making process, by proxy of their degree of access to institutions.

III. The *policy* dimension, captures the substantive impact of collective actors on the contents of municipal institutional acts, across the different stages of the policy process (as suggested in Kolb 2007).

The three dimensions are treated as complementary and mutually impactful. In analytical terms, their distinction is intended to further disentangle and appreciate the dynamics and forms of movement influence on institutional politics. With respect to previous scholarly approaches, it aims at providing a general perspective on political influence.

In fact, policy is notoriously the most studied dimension of political outcomes, especially at a subnational or local level (see Amenta and Caren 2004; Amenta et al. 2010; Amenta, Andrews and Caren 2018 for extensive reviews). However, not all the change that is produced by collective actors results in legislation, and at the same time, policy changes do not exhaust the spectrum of movements' political influence. Substantial literature has highlighted the role of actors' access to institutions as a crucial factor in producing outcomes (Banaszak 2010; Böhm 2015), but it has also been suggested that access constitutes an outcome in its own right (Rochon and Mazmanian 1993; Andrews 2001). The present work adopts the latter approach, contending that the ability to access institutions (through formal or informal channels), and to break through the structures of decision-making, substantiates in itself a dimension of influence[1]. On a similar note, scholarship has extensively underscored the role of complementary institutional action in shaping movement influence. Several

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[1] This does not exclusively concern movement impact on institutional change or the procedures of democratic deliberation. Access can be gained both within existing decision-making procedures, and through changes in the configuration of decision-making procedures. Moreover, a gain in procedural access can, but does not have to, be granted through policy change; in turn, policy changes granting access aren't necessarily the result of collective actors' efforts. The access dimension singled out in this framework is intended to provide both a more encompassing and a more specific point of observation on collective actors' influence.

research approaches have viewed the perceived legitimacy of mobilizations, and institutional attitudes towards movement actors, as factors facilitating, or impeding, collective action outcomes (Amenta et al. 2005; Giugni 2004; Jacobs & Helms 2001; Stearns & Almeida 2004). William Gamson (1975, 1990) notably talked about "challenger acceptance" as one of two forms of movement success. While this notion has been gradually discarded in the literature, forms of movement acceptance have been included in other relevant discussions on movement influence (see Amenta and Caren 2004). Granted, institutional attitudes towards movement actors – particularly in their public expressions – tend to be politically informed and strategically filtered. Yet, it is also for this reason that institutional actors can be viewed as gatekeepers of legitimacy, either promoting or, more frequently so, ratifying changes in the societal acceptance and recognition of movement actors. At the same time, institutional attitudes capture the citizenship that a collective actor enjoys within a political system. Thus, in this framework, elected officials' willingness to view collective actors as legitimate interlocutors is acknowledged as the third dimension of influence.

The underlying logic here is that aspects that relate to the institutional configuration of power (Tarrow 1989), or the cognitive and discursive recognition of movement actors and their claims, are not simply the contextual environment in which policy outcomes are produced (as argued by POS theorists), but that they are, in themselves, the outcomes of interactive processes, and that shape actors' general political influence. For this reason, they are investigated in dynamic terms.

In fact, a relational approach to the study of political influence is put forth in this work, embracing a depiction of the social reality "in dynamic, continuous and processual terms" (Emirbayer 1997, p. 289). The theoretical approach of the dissertation builds on consolidated literature on arenas, and particularly on the relational, mechanismic framework put forth by Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou (2015). This entails identifying the main actors whose interplays shape collective trajectories, and the relational dynamics unfolding in the arenas in which actors engage.

Drawing upon key concepts and understandings of movement dynamics of influence in sociological literature, four main arenas of interaction are thus identified. Some general mechanisms are singled out for each arena.

First, is the arena of interaction between the collective actor and its specific social environment. In this arena, movement actors can experience a *bridging* of their social environment (in terms of action focus, practices, networks), or a dynamic of *encapsulation* within narrowing boundaries. In a second arena, the interplay between the collective actor and the broader society determines an actor's more or less central location in the societal space. This can take the form of *legitimization*, or of *focus shift* – both of which can entail direct or indirect effects on the institutional realm. A third arena, then, refers to intra-institutional dynamics of power competition. In this arena, a *disruption of power competition* can occur, also as a result of collective action, producing new alignments; or, conversely, the competition for power can intensify along preexisting lines of conflict, in a *downward spiral of opportunity* that reduces the leeway of collective actors. Lastly, a fourth arena concerns the interaction between a collective actor and institutional politics. Here, a mechanism of *institutionalization*[2] can take place, or, conversely, institutional and movement actors might follow two separate courses, in a dynamic of *partitioning* with little to no interaction. The occurrence (or non-occurrence) of certain mechanisms in a given arena, and the sequences in which they unfold, shape different trajectories of political influence.

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[2] Notably, institutionalization throughout the dissertation is discussed as a "double edged" mechanism, as it entails costs and benefits in shaping trajectories of political influence.

1.3 Self-managed social centers

The dissertation sets out to look at how DSAs affect political influence, through the trajectories of a specific kind of collective actors: the *Centri Sociali Autogestiti* (CSAs), self-managed social centers. Social centers, or, as many experiences are referred to since the 2010s, self-managed social spaces, are social movement organizations (della Porta & Piazza 2008) that have been located by scholarship both within a general European movement of urban occupations (Pruijt 2004a) and among New Social Movements, but that have also been addressed as part of several international, national, and local collective mobilizations, from the Global Justice Movement (della Porta et al. 2006) to LULU struggles (della Porta e Piazza 2008a; 2008b).

Social centers have marked a significant span of Italy's political history. Born around the mid-1970s from the encounter of different radical political traditions and subjectivities (particularly, workerism and the Autonomous movement, paired with urban youth countercultures and anarchism), these collective experiences claimed the city through the practice of occupation, and aimed at building alternative arenas of cultural production and socialization. Rapidly developing across Italy throughout the 1980s, the phenomenon of social centers reached its apogee in the 1990s. In time, social centers have differed in terms of ideological orientation and practices (Diani & Bison 2004; Piazza 2011a), expressing either a more political or a more countercultural connotation. Social centers' differences in approach typically have related to their respective branches of social antagonism, which can be broadly categorized as Marxism-Leninism, post-Autonomy, radical autonomy and anarchism.

Two of social centers' most relevant and interesting features are their relationship to institutional or electoral politics, and their inherent aim to produce change from within society. On the one hand, CSAs were born from what can be considered an anti-institution movement (Mudu 2004; Piazza 2011a), grounded in the willingness to act outside of the existing structures of delegation and formal representation (such as unions and political parties). The discussion on how CSAs should interact with institutional politics, has been at the core of much of the internal differentiations of the social centers' movement. By 1998, about half of Italian CSAs had entered into agreements with the owners of the properties they were once squatting (Mudu 2004), which were often publicly owned. The early 2000s, then, saw an expansion of welfare initiatives organized with and for institutions, and the beginning of CSA activists' engagement in electoral politics. However, electoral engagement remained limited, and typically confined to independent candidacies within radical left lists. On the other hand, social centers have sought to bring about change by acting within society. For most of their history, this entailed creating alternative spaces of social and political relation, experimenting within the walls of a squatted, appropriated spaces. The underlying idea being, that what happens at an institutional level can also be influenced through the radical transformation of everyday life, the practical realization of a different society.

After the fading of the mobilization against globalization in the mid 2000s, social centers experienced a slow phase of decline and questioning, as to their role and to the possible forms of collective action. Against the background of these ongoing processes and questionings, the burst of crisis has prompted the birth of entirely new social centers, and the transformation of many preexisting experiences and dynamics.

In their relationship with representative politics, self-managed spaces that have chosen to engage in the electoral competition have experienced a progressive gain of autonomy, often – alongside several civic actors – filling the role of waning small left-wing parties at a

local level. In addition, despite being also affected by the crisis of political engagement, social centers have managed to keep mobilizing in large protests, and to intervene in the political debate.

At the same time, the crisis has significantly informed the everyday action of social centers. CSAs have kept denouncing the causes of the crisis (such as neoliberal economic paradigms), but many of them have also imagined ways to concretely counter its consequences, providing grassroot responses to socioeconomic grievances and social exclusion. A significant portion of these spaces, either since before 2008 or precisely in light of the burst of the crisis (Bosi and Zamponi 2019), engage in Direct Social Actions. With the crisis, many of these experiences have been increasingly marked by unmediated forms of political participation, offering alternative spaces of social and political identification, amidst fading collective belongings.

1.4 Methods and Data

From a methodological standpoint, the dissertation relies on process tracing (see further Stinchcome 1995; Mahoney 2000; McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007; Beach and Pedersen 2013). This method has been fruitfully applied to the study of collective action outcomes by several social movements' scholars (Andrews 2004; Kolb 2007; Bosi 2016). Process tracing is here adopted to identify the causal mechanisms that, concatenating over time in varying sequences, lead to the outcome of political influence. This allows to retrace the pathways of social centers' political influence in Bologna and Naples across the decade.

I particularly draw upon the research perspective on process tracing developed by Alimi, Bosi & Demetriou (2012, 2015), in three main aspects: first, the idea that concatenations of mechanisms are themselves broken down in different sets of sub-mechanisms; second, a definition of mechanisms based solely on their distinct emergent effect; third, a relational perspective entailing the identification of arenas of interaction (intended as the social contexts in which mechanisms play out).

The thesis is designed as an in-depth analysis of two city cases, Bologna and Naples. These are two regional capitals, with a history of proactive and influential social centers (Dines 1999; Mudu 2004; Piazza 2012), that have maintained a relevant presence of CSAs since the crisis. The two cities differ in size, population and urban configuration – Bologna being smaller and generally more homogeneous –, as well as in the degree of socioeconomic hardship experienced both before and after the crisis (Naples knowing a direr situation). While both Bologna and Naples rest on a tradition of left-wing administrations, the forms of the interaction between the local governments and social centers have also differed in the two cities, especially since the onset of the crisis. During the decade, Bologna's political system has been marked by a continuity of Democratic Party-led administrations, while Naples has known an atypical phase, characterized by the administration of former prosecutor Luigi De Magistris, whose proximity with local movement actors has significantly informed the city debate and political dynamics.

Bologna and Naples represent two examples of urban environments were, indeed, social centers have been influential across the decade. In this sense, their interest as cases of study stems from the political leeway that, overall, has been available to social centers in the two cities, and from their heterogeneous landscapes of self-managed spaces. However, it would be inaccurate to consider this as a selection of "successful" cases. Rather, the investigation of Bologna and Naples provides the opportunity to illustrate an array of diverse trajectories, extents and modes of influence. Different social centers in the two cities have been influential to varying extents across the crisis decade. However, the profound transformations of the

socioeconomic and political sphere have invested all of them. Their different identities, response strategies, practices and interactions are part of a broad story, which this thesis seeks to uncover. The choice of grounding the empirical analysis in two city cases that are rich in social centers, then, is tightly linked to the research question, as it allows to investigate the role of Direct Social Actions across diverse trajectories of more to less influential actors.

Five social centers have been identified to be investigated in each city. The predominant criterion being representativeness, CSAs have been picked to form as heterogeneous a group as possible. Hence, the selection includes social centers born both before and after the crisis; of varying age compositions; engaging in DSAs to different extents; with different ideological backgrounds (though within the realm of the left); with various approaches to electoral and institutional politics; located in different areas of the city and in different types of spaces. In Bologna, this selection coincides with virtually all of the social centers active up to 2019. In Naples, given the large number of active self-managed spaces, an additional selection was made. The experiences identified are all located in different neighborhoods and areas of the city, and have distinct political identities; among them are three spaces defined as urban commons by the recent municipal regulation, and two that have made the choice of pursuing electoral representation.

Data sources consist, on the one hand, of 37 in-depth interviews conducted between 2019 and 2021 with CSA activists, local elected officials, and key informants from the two city cases; these were integrated with field notes. On the other hand, documental sources include a corpus of press articles from four local newspapers (2005-2019), social centers' materials and press releases, institutional documents (municipal policy acts, transcripts, reports).

1.5 Outline of the dissertation

The first part of the dissertation is devoted to laying out the theoretical and methodological foundations of the research.

Chapter 2 develops the analytical framework of the thesis. After reviewing the common threads and gaps found in the literature on political outcomes, the chapter offers a multi-dimensional conceptualization of political influence. It then details the relational approach adopted in the thesis for the study of pathways of influence.

Chapter 3 deals with the methodological structure of the dissertation. Notably, the chapter presents the methods of investigation, the research design (explaining the logic behind case selection), the data sources and collection process, as well as some ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 locates the empirical analysis in the context of the crisis and the Italian environment. Against the background of the crisis – viewed in the various facets of its impact on the socio-economic and the political sphere –, the chapter clarifies the use of Direct Social Action and the role of social centers in the Italian context.

In the second part of the dissertation, the empirical analysis is developed. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 retrace the pathways of influence of social centers in Bologna and Naples respectively. After providing a brief overview the local socio-economic and political environment, each chapter presents the empirical evidence from the single case, detailing the pathway of influence of each social center considered. Each chapter ends with a discussion section that summarizes and compares findings within the city case, with a specific focus on the linkage between DSAs and the emergence of relational dynamics.

Lastly, Chapter 7 compares and discusses the pathways of political influence across cases, in the intent of developing a more general theoretical perspective. The empirical findings of

the research are located within the broader contribution of the thesis to the literature, and put in relation with contemporary debates on democracy, the forms of political engagement and the evolution of social centers as collective actors. The limitations of the study are highlighted, and possible avenues for future research are suggested.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Approach

Crises in general, and the one sparked in 2008 in particular, have been matched by significant turns in the realm of collective action. However, the relationship between the two is a complex one.

A first area of questioning relates to the determinants of mobilization, and to whether the latter can be viewed as a response to the crisis. Indeed, several hypotheses have been put forth regarding the relationship between crises and collective action[3]. Literature based on grievances has discussed whether protest increases in times of economic recession, and whether or not those who are most affected by the crisis are more likely to engage in protest activities, or to form a movement. On this subject, evidence suggests that crises are a fundamental trigger for movement formation, but that it is not necessarily those with the most serious grievances who engage in protest. Who engages in collective action in times of crisis, then, and why? The question of disenfranchised people remains central. Resource-based research, for its part, has sought to understand whether individuals endowed with more resources (material and immaterial), and social groups and people with previous experience of protest participation, are more likely to engage in protest in times of crisis. Indeed, in this respect, different forms of participation have been found to go together, in that people who are strongly embedded in various kinds of organizations and volunteer associations – in other words, are endowed with civic skills and social capital – are more likely to engage in protest during crises. Nonetheless, individuals significantly affected by the crisis are more likely to engage in protest when they are provided with the resources to frame their situation as a social or political problem.

The question there is, then, what factors or contexts prompt mobilization in times of crisis. Political opportunity theorists have wondered whether protest in times of crisis is more likely when opportunities arise in institutionalized political arenas, and to what extent protests are related to policy measures in response to the crisis rather than to the crisis' effects on individual conditions. Kriesi (2014) argues that contentious reactions to hardship are stronger in contexts in which no other institutional channels are available to express discontent. Other scholars highlight the importance of social movements and unions in framing the crisis and influencing individuals' understandings of it, as well as the role for parties in making sense of the role of governments in hard times (Cristancho 2015). The question also remains open of whether contention waves during crises are the result of increased protest on the part of old social movements, or rather instances of crisis bring different constituencies to take the streets.

A second relevant area of research, tightly related to the causes of mobilization, concerns the effects of collective action in times of crisis. With the Great Recession, in the progressive decline of political organizations and the waning of mediated political participation, new room has opened up for actors capable of innovating in terms of action and identity, as well as of aggregating individuals and communities. In cognitive terms, the crisis has opened spaces of political credit and viability for actors denouncing the unsustainability of the dominant models of production and consumption, as well as the shortcomings of democratic structures of representation, and for actors willing to experiment with alternatives. In more relational terms, the challenges faced by political regimes – particularly at the urban level – have confronted political elites with the need to expand their networks in order to keep as

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[3] For an extensive account of opposing theories on this matter, refer to Giugni & Lorenzini (2014).

much grip on the electorate as possible. A tension has arisen, between the opening of new political leeway for movement actors, and the will of institutional political actors to be the ones in charge of the processes of change. From these premises have developed the different trajectories of collective actors across the decade. The question to be answered, then, is what consequences the mobilization of collective actors has entailed, and through which dynamics those effects have come about.

The dissertation engages with this question, through an approach that i) seeks to understand political influence from a more full-fledged perspective than previous literature; ii) grants space to the role of institutional actors, focusing on city environments and municipal institutions; iii) is highly relational.

Independently of the context of the crisis, the political consequences of collective action have been widely explored by scholarship. In that, though literature has progressively departed from the idea of movement "challengers" (Gamson 1975, 1990), and fathoms collective actors as more than just seeking advantages or concessions from institutions, policy outcomes – in their increasingly more complex spectrum – have been the most studied facet of movement impact over institutional politics. However, literature has also unveiled other pivotal dimensions related to collective actors' influence on institutional politics. Two additional aspects stand out as particularly relevant: one relates to the access of movement actors to institutional decision-making arenas and players; the other concerns the acceptance or recognition of collective actors on the part of institutional actors. These dimensions have for the most part been treated by scholarship as 'external' factors, merely facilitating or obstructing movement outcomes on institutions. Conversely, it has been pointed out that they can constitute, in themselves, outcomes of collective action. In spite of scholarship's advancements in acknowledging and addressing these dimensions of movement impact separately, what appears to be missing from prior studies, as a whole, is a general perspective of movement influence on institutional politics. A full-fledged framework, that is, combining policy impact with the procedural access and institutional attitudes dimensions, and thus capable of offering a wider and more nuanced outlook of collective actors' political influence.

The first section of the chapter, section 2.1, is devoted to sketching the literature gap and substantiating in detail the features of the political influence analytical framework. Within the broader reflection on movements' political consequences, I propose a framework that conceptualizes political influence as comprised of three distinct, yet interrelated, dimensions: *institutional attitudes*, *procedural access*, and *policy*. In the empirical part of the thesis, this framework will be applied to the analysis of ten collective actors' pathways during the crisis decade.

Section 2.2 of the chapter, then, explains how the thesis seeks to address a commonly highlighted shortcoming of previous approaches – namely, a limited focus on institutional actors, their agency and dynamics (Jasper and King 2020). In that, I join recent scholarly efforts that have sought to reckon the nuanced relationship between institutional and collective actors, in agreement with scholars that have underscored the need for dynamic understandings of the institution-movement interaction (McAdam & Tarrow 2010). In the thesis, this reasoning is applied to the study of city institutions. Section 2.2 motivates the local scope of the research, addressing the relevance of the city dimension to investigate the relationship between the crisis, collective action and political influence. In fact, over the last decades, urban systems have been at the forefront of the current environmental and social crises, also as fundamental spaces for the reproduction of capital (Harvey 2008, 2012). At the same time, the city is the space where social injustice is more directly experienced, but also interpreted and addressed – that is, a privileged environment for politicization and

political experimentation. The section also discusses the analytical adjustments prompted by the choice to focus on the subnational level.

Lastly, Section 2.3 pinpoints the relational approach developed in the dissertation. This section identifies the four main arenas of interaction in which actors' interplay unfolds, shaping pathways of political influence. Finally, the section provides an overview of the general mechanisms theorized for each arena.

2.1 Political Influence: a movement outcome
2.1.1 The political consequences of social movements

A rich body of literature has seen the light since the 1990s, aiming at expanding the social sciences' knowledge about the social and political change that movements may bring about. Over time, movement outcomes have come to be categorized into three broad domains: biographical (Giugni 2008) cultural (Earl 2004) and political consequences (Amenta et al. 2010; Giugni 2008; Uba 2009). First, collective action can affect activists' biographical trajectories, impacting the attitudes, political commitment, and lifestyle patterns, at an individual but also at an aggregate level. Second, on a cultural level, collective mobilizations can establish and spread performances, values, frames, identities, ideologies. Third, social movements can be at the root of more strictly political change[4].

The present work focuses on political influence. Broadly speaking, political consequences of collective action may take the form of policy or institutional change, or coincide with an impact on elections, political parties, democratization processes. Scholarship has outlined the relevance of some dimensions in particular, as to how collective action affects public institutions.

Gamson's (1975, 1990) seminal work devised two types of social movement success in the interaction with institutions (generally identified in literature as "State" actors): new advantages and acceptance. First, Gamson argued that 'new advantages' can be obtained as the challenger's goals and claims are, at least mainly, realized. Burstein et al. (1995) have later come to refine this notion as an assessment of the extent to which the challenger is able to either get its legislation program on the political agenda, influence its passage into policy or help to ensure its enforcement (see also Banaszak 1996). In this respect, a rich bulk of literature has since focused on the policy outcomes of movement actors (Amenta et al. 2010; Giugni 2004; Giugni et al. 1999; Goldstone & Tilly 2001; Schumaker 1975).

On the other hand, Gamson identified a second type of success in the form of acceptance – that is, a challenger being recognized, by the target of its collective action, as the legitimate representative of a constituency.

Along this line of reasoning, Gamson also discussed the question of challenger inclusion. One of the possible facets of this phenomenon consists of challengers gaining positions of power (political or in governmental bureaucracies), through either election or appointment. The question of the access to intitutions has also made the object of further specifications by Kitschelt (1986), who pinpointed a dimension of "procedural" gains, while more long-term gains in access on the part of challengers are outlined in the works of Cress & Snow (2000), who have talked about representation, and of Kitschelt (1986) and Burstein et al. (1995), who focus on the notion of "structural gains". These different dimensions of theorization all insist on the idea of ongoing connections between State (governmental

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[4] Although in the social reality these arenas of outcomes are mutually intertwined and not always neatly separate, their analytical distinction allows to dive in depth into the different ways in which collective action can produce (or fail to produce) change, and, as the researcher acknowledges that they are mutually related, provide enhanced stimulus to the scholarly understanding of movement outcomes.

institutions) and social movement organizations, or other organizations related to a given social movement.

More recent scholarship has moved away from Gamson's new advantages-acceptance dichotomy and turned to examining the causal influence of movements on political outcomes and processes (Amenta and Caren 2004; Andrews 2004). Multi-dimensional and nuanced approaches have been put forth over the years, intending to integrate the new advantages and the acceptance dimensions. Amenta and Caren (2004), notably, have proposed to distinguish between different types of new advantages, based on the different stages of the decision-making process (setting the agenda, influencing the contents of legislation, implementing policy), and between types of acceptance (be it negotiation, formal recognition, or inclusion through formal representation). Herbert Kitschelt (1986) has argued that social movements can achieve substantive, procedural, and structural gains. In this outlook, the first two dimensions resonate with Gamson's main categories, while the third is construed as a transformation of political structures and – although this notion is not specified in much depth – it can include phenomena such as the constitution of a party or electorally competitive subject on the part of a challenger group.

On a similar note, the framework developed by Felix Kolb (2007) has suggested that political outcomes come in two main forms. On the one hand, political outcomes can be substantive: impacting the political agenda, influencing the context of the policy proposal, exerting a policy impact on the adoption of legislation or similar, orienting the implementation process, shaping the provision of collective goods. On the other hand, political outcomes can be institutional – entailing either procedural change (consultations, negotiations, formal recognition of the challenger by the institution), intra-institutional change (closely related to Gamson's inclusion, with the integration of challenging groups' representatives in positions of status or authority within the targeted institutions), or State transformation.

A review of the vast landscape of scholarly work produced on the political outcomes of collective action on governmental institutions, points in my view to the identification of three main, analytically distinct, domains of movements' political impact. These are policy, access to institutional decision-making, and institutional recognition.

The first question, largely addressed, is indeed that of policy. A rich body of academic literature has tackled the policy outcomes of collective action (see Amenta and Caren 2004; Amenta et al. 2010; Amenta, Andrews and Caren 2018 for extensive reviews on this subject). Quantitative studies on policy change have for the most part measured policy outputs in terms of expenditures, or through time-series data on legislative activity as the dependent variable (Giugni & Passy 1998). Qualitative studies, conversely, tend to focus on the contents of legislation, and the extent to which movement claims are transposed into it. Comparative works on the policy impact of movements point to the role of numerous factors in ensuring the attainment of an outcome. Giugni and Passy (1998) have notably claimed that, in order for powerholders to be compelled to engage in substantial policy reform, a combination is needed of a strong social movement and either a favorable public opinion or the action of a major political ally in the institutional arena. Ciccia and Guzman-Concha (2018), analyzing the impact of the interplay between institutional and non-institutional politics on unemployment insurance policy in times of austerity, find that protest, the degree of problem pressure[5] and the pre-existing configuration of political institutions (pre-existing policy legacies, institutional capacity for reform, and the configuration of power and structure of political alliances) have all played a role in resisting retrenchment in different contexts.

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[5] This concept resonates with the notion of issue saliency.

They also make the case that political partisanship significantly determines the responsiveness of governments to protest, arguing that this is especially true for oppositional allies on the left side of the political spectrum. Research has then found that certain issues and policies to be very difficult for movements to influence, particularly those that are closely tied to the national cleavage structure, surrounded by a very strong public opinion, or for which high levels of political or material resources are at stake (Amenta et al. 2010).

Literature provides ground to believe that a wider perspective, encompassing other dimensions of political outcomes, may prove helpful in expanding the scholarly understanding of policy outcomes. Recent scholarship has underscored the importance of further addressing the influence of movements on political institutions and processes beyond policy outcomes, such as democratization, parties and elections, and bureaucracies (Amenta, Andrews and Caren 2018). As suggested by Giugni (2009), movements can either influence the main determinants of political institutions and outcomes, alter the relationship between such determinants and political institutions and outcomes, or go through alternative pathways to impact those same institutions and outcomes (see Amenta, Andrews and Caren 2018). Indeed, research indicates that policy outcomes are tightly related to – and even contingent on – factors such as political mediation and public opinion. In addition, policy outcomes can play different roles with respect to movement goals. In some cases, as for movements engaged in a single-issue struggle, they can constitute the end result of a mobilization, however long, aimed at changing an institutional provision or ensuring new rights and protection for a specific group or territory. In other cases, for collective actors as self-managed spaces, who engage in multiple struggles both simultaneously and over time, the question of policy outcomes is less straightforward. They can, certainly, speak to the extent to which a specific movement battle or claim has successfully been transposed into an institutional act. But while for LULU or single-issue struggles, the adoption of a given decision can put an end to the mobilization (when the goal is achieved, and at times even when it fails to be), for other struggles policy change is but a small brick in a long and complex pavement.

Policy impact in a strict sense, construed as the "final stage of legislative activity in which policy changes are or are not enacted into law" (Burstein and Linton 2002, p. 382), has been the most studied facet of movements' political outcomes. Collective actors may target institutions both directly and indirectly, in order to achieve a policy goal. They might pick from (and mix) a variety of strategies, from taking up formal lobbying activities, to reaching out to institutions through more informal channels, to working directly on the construction of a sympathetic public opinion through different forms of action (raising awareness through protests and information campaigns, carrying out initiatives to provide alternative models and examples of behaviors, strengthening their network of allies and ties with actors with brokerage potential). In this respect, I would reverse the order of the claim advanced by Burstein (1999), and argue that any hypothesis about the impact of interest groups on public policy also applies to organizations conventionally labeled as social movement organizations (SMOs). Indeed, SMOs may act similarly to interest groups as they attempt to influence policy. In fact, policy literature tends to group movement actors and interest groups under the same category. However, not all stages of the policy process are the same or allow for the same opportunities of influence. Earlier policy stages are often better suited for the occurrence of contaminations and lobbying – both from within and outside the process – than the following, more narrowly institutionally-operated stages. Consistently with public policy literature, which often claims that the impact of SMOs and interest groups is especially significant during earlier stages of the policy process, social movements literature suggests

that the impact of SMOs varies across different stages of policy making, and has found collective actors to be the most influential during agenda-setting and formulation, and less at the stages of adoption and implementation of policies (King et al. 2005; Soule and King 2006). Evidence indicates that the conditions that conventionally contribute to producing mobilization (mobilizing structures, strategies and political contexts) sometimes make it difficult to achieve influence during later stages of the policy process (Amenta et al. 2010). Overall, different political contexts require actors to develop different strategies in order to pursue their policy change goals, and no standard recipe guarantees success. Finally, as for the criteria used to assess the extent of policy outcomes, the approach outlined by Amenta and Young (1999) maintains that the highest sort of impact is the one that provides a group with continuing leverage over the political process. This is deemed to happen on a structural or systemic level of State processes, such as in the devolution of a political authority or the establishment of direct democracy devices. It can therefore occur when democratization is achieved, but also through other instances that provide collective actors with enduring leverage or influence, such as the formation of a political party (Amenta, Andrews and Caren 2018). Overall, however, Amenta and Young's framework sees most collective action as directed towards a medium-level impact, entailing steady benefits to a given group, such as major policy changes or bureaucratic and implementation changes. Finally, Amenta and Young acknowledge the possibility of a minor level of impact, that can take the form of specific institutional decisions or of legislation without any long-term consequences. In line with their theorization, in this dissertation I propose to consider policy outcomes based on their potential for steady change. If policies that aid challenging groups can be interpreted as flows of resources between governmental actors and their challengers (Amenta & Caren 2004), the most important pieces of legislation will be considered to be those that ensure long-term flows of resources, be they material or moral, to collective actors. This entails, as further developed in later sections, that policy changes can be analyzed – and weighted in the overall impact of each actor – based on the extent to which they might allow challenger actors to exert influence over time. These criteria can be applied to the study of the interaction between collective actors and institutions in different arenas, and tailored to the sociopolitical environment and spatial context of reference.

The second domain, variously brought forth by literature, concerns the access of movement actors to institutional decision-making arenas and players.

Significant strands of social movement scholarship have focused on the role of played by the political contexts in which movements operate. First, notably, political opportunity structure models (POS) have developed around the idea that the environment in which movement actors are embedded, determines the dynamics through which their mobilization will articulate. Specifically, POS theory posits that the degree of openness that a political system shows vis-à-vis challenges organizations proves effective in explaining collective action (Kitschelt 1986; Tarrow 1995, 1998). Despite its static nature, POS theory contains the crucial notion that collective action and its consequences are shaped by the political opportunities accessible to a given actor at a certain time[6]. In recent literature, the nature of the relationship between context and actors – structure and agency – has been found to be much more complex, empirically, and has been analytically enriched. In an effort to unpack the dynamics of that foundational idea (that is, how political opportunities relate to outcomes), the focus of scholarship has therefore increasingly shifted to encompass

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[6] Political opportunity is typically conceptualized as the options for action that are available to social movements, and the chance that specific options will bring about desired movement outcomes (for extensive problematizations of the concept, see Koopmans 1999 and Meyer & Minkoff 2004).

strategies and interactions between actors, seeking new ways to acknowledge their agency, choices and mutual impacts. The political mediation model (Amenta, Caren and Olasky 2005; Amenta 2006) has developed on the pivotal intuition that the institutional outcomes of collective actors are always politically mediated, and thus that research needs to include the characteristics of the specific political context and its mediation dynamics in the explanation of movement outcomes. Indeed, outcomes unfold within specific structures of influence, shaped by different levels of decision-making, deliberation mechanisms, and informal practices. These structures are institution-specific and, often, context-specific. If it is true, in general terms, that the characteristics of political institutions influence the prospects of collective action, then, as these conditions change and provide movements with increased access to decision-making, the prospects of movement influence are likely to improve.

But are not changes in such conditions and characteristics, also, outcomes in their own right? Empirically, it is often difficult to distinguish between what would be considered 'structural' factors and outcomes that entail structural changes. Even more, on the analytical level, there is now reasonable consensus among scholars that the depiction of a structure of opportunities does not capture the extent of complexity of a social reality where actors are moved by agency, and make mutually impactful choices. In other words, while a structure of political opportunities can indeed be identified for a specific point or period in time (and used as a tool to assess significant dimensions of inquiry), it is not structurally given – rather, it emerges as the result of actors' interactions. In this respect, some traditional POS dimensions can be investigated as consequences of collective action. In turn, as many other types of outcomes, those same dimensions can play a role in shaping future mobilizations. The POS conceptualization, although heterogenous within literature, contains, on the one hand, institutional elements – such as sociopolitical cleavages, territorial decentralization of institutions, the configuration of power (Tarrow 1989). On the other hand, it highlights discursive factors, cultural and symbolic aspects determining the identities and demands that can emerge in the public and media debate, thereby gaining legitimacy (Morals and Giugni 2011; Koopmans and Olzak 2004). What I contend in this work is that these very elements aren't simply the contextual environment in which policy outcomes are (or aren't) produced – rather, the socio-political configuration of power, and the cognitive and discursive recognition of movement actors and claims are, themselves, outcomes of interactive processes, and should be investigated as such. Their study in conjunction with the policy dimension of movement consequences, can shed new light on scholarly understandings of the impact of collective action.

The spectrum of potential outcomes is undeniably vast. However, with respect to movement impact on institutional decision-making, two dimensions appear to be especially worth highlighting. One, relating to the configuration of power, is the access of movement actors to institutional decision-making. Another, relating to the symbolic recognition of collective actors and claims, is their degree of acceptance on the part of institutional actors.

With respect to access to decision making, different scholars have in fact focused on forms of access as routes to movement influence, for instance through activists holding elected office or as state bureaucrats (Banaszak 2010; Böhm 2015). In Gamson's seminal work (1990), 'success' was deemed to be attained when movements gained access to decision-making and substantive gains were achieved. Conversely, Gamson talked about movements being preempted when substantive gains were obtained without the movement gaining access to the policy process. Kenneth Andrews (2001) has notably opposed a 'movement infrastructure model' for the investigation of movement outcomes, to prior 'action-reaction' models found in literature (based on either disruption or persuasion as means of influence),

and to what he has described as 'access-influence' models (in which the determinant of movement efficacy was the access to the polity through institutionalized tactics, thus discarding the role of disruptive action). This critique was motivated by the fact that, according to Andrews, efficacy is actually greater for movements who are able to deploy both insider and outsider tactics. Nonetheless, Andrews has also argued that access and negotiation are critical features of movements' political influence (Andrews 2001; Andrews and Edwards 2004), and has been among the researchers that have viewed the gaining of access to decision-making as an outcome in itself, one that captures influence beyond the early stages of the policy process, more typically examined by research. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the gaining of access to institutional decision-making might help compensate for the potential lack of resources of collective actors, and enhance institutional responsiveness and accountability. Some scholars have come to argue that the act of incorporating civil society actors into decision-making is, alone, more conducive to the achievement of policy outcomes than the strength of civil society itself. This has been, for one, the case in Donaghy's (2011) work, where the author assessed the impact of municipal housing councils on the adoption of social housing programs in Brazil.

Considering the possibilities of State-movement intersections, Felix Kolb (2007) has employed the label 'political access' to describe the presence of movement activists in institutional positions, as a result of being elected into office or in other capacities[7]. Conceptualizing political access as a sort of overarching mechanism or, rather, as a category for different mechanisms based on a common principle, Kolb (2007) views it as a process by which collective actors first "struggle to gain access to a specific domain of the polity" (for example, through electoral empowerment), then "struggle from within for substantial political change" (Kolb 2007, p. 81). Granted, elected officials may be motivated to grant access to collective actors with the intent of weakening and de-radicalizing movements. However, social movements can achieve long-term political change – Kolb argues – by becoming more integrated into the policy making process. Ultimately, outcomes, and the political impact of access, will be affected by the number and collocation of movement activists within institutions. Furthermore, drawing upon Rochon and Mazmanian's (1993) work, Kolb contends that political outcomes resulting from gaining access will occur indirectly and over time. It is particularly worth recalling how, in turn, Rochon and Mazmanian identify three arenas of 'movement success' in order to make sense of the relationship between social movements and the policy process: changing policy; gaining participation in the policy process; changing social values. Given this framework, Rochon and Mazmanian make the argument – and back it with empirical evidence – that gaining access is the most effective path for SMOs to impact the results of the policy process. On their side, authorities tend to be more inclined to give in to demands for access, than they are to accept demands of policy change. Once collective actors have gained access (or further access) to institutions, they are able to work from within to achieve change. In fact, substantial literature has contributed to scholarship's understanding of the consequences of social movements on institutional change and on transforming the procedures of democratic deliberation (among the most recent works are Baiocchi 2005; Bua & Bussu 2020; Flesher Fominaya 2020; della Porta 2013, 2020; della Porta & Felicetti 2018, 2019). In many instances, such changes coincide precisely with an extension of movements' access, or occur as a result of a new form of access. Several scholars have explicitly talked about 'institutional' outcomes. Kolb, for one, has identified three principal types of such outcomes. Among

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[7] An option found in scholarship is, for example, the inclusion of movement actors in decision-making in light of a technical expertise and perceived legitimacy on a given issue (as in Ganz & Soule 2019).

them, first are 'procedural' changes: in certain instances, movements contribute to altering their relationship with a political sub-institution, engaging in consultation or negotiation with authorities, or receiving formal recognition on their part[8]. A second outcome proposed in Kolb's theorization, is intra-institutional change, transforming the structure or purpose of political sub-institutions (for instance, by extending voting rights, prompting the creation of governmental agencies, or forming political parties). Third, Kolb argues that social movements can alter the relationships between political institutions or spur the creation of new sub-institutions.

I argue that it is analytically relevant to distinguish between the access to decision-making that becomes available to collective actors through a shifting institutional relationship, and their recognition as legitimate interlocutors on the part of authorities. These are two separate and individually complex questions, which is why for the sake of this dissertation I have chosen to distinguish them and to seek their dynamics of interaction. Based on the suggestions put forth by literature, it could be speculated that access tends to come before policy change (or, in some cases, almost simultaneously), not only chronologically, but also in substantial terms. Theoretically speaking, access does not constitute a necessary condition to achieve change, although, empirically, often the two appear as tightly linked. What can be posited is that access to institutional decision-making opens new opportunities for collective actors to bring about change, generating new leeway for political influence.

Finally, a last element variously observed by literature has to do with the acceptance or recognition of collective actors on the part of elected officials.

Indeed, research has extensively shown that a collective actor's outcomes are strongly influenced by its ability to forge alliances and negotiate in the institutional arena (Amenta et al. 2005; Giugni 2004). There is a general consensus among scholars that a challenger's action is more likely to produce results when institutional political actors see benefit in aiding the group represented by that challenger (Jacobs & Helms 2001; Stearns & Almeida 2004), despite the fact that this might often be motivated by electoral considerations (Amenta 2006; Goldstone 2003). Particularly, the political mediation model has posited that, for a movement to be influential, institutional actors need to see the 'challenger' actor as potentially facilitating or disrupting their own goals – for instance, in cementing electoral coalitions, favorably orienting the public opinion, acting on specific beliefs and claims, legitimizing governmental actions. This approach particularly underlines that help or complementary action on the part of like-minded governmental actors is an essential explanatory component of outcomes. The suggestions of the political mediation model's framework have then been refined over the years by other academic works (such as Giugni & Passy 1998), that have moved past the direct and mediated approaches and proposed a joint-effect model. Empirical evidence from these studies has shown that, in order to generate policy reform, multiple conditions need to be in place at the same time: a strong social movement, and either a favorable public opinion or the action of a major political ally within institutional arenas. The likelihood of change increased in presence of all three conditions.

Overall, the role of complementary action and of favorable dispositions on the part of institutional actors, raises the question of how collective actors come to be accepted or recognized as legitimate interlocutors. This dimension clearly relates to Gamson's (1975, 1990) foundational intuition of 'challenger acceptance'. However, some specifications are in order. First, the dynamic nature of the interaction between movement and elected officials

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[8] In this respect, Kolb refers back to Gamson's (1975) challenger 'acceptance'. This type of institutional outcomes resonates partly with the procedural access dimension, and partly with the 'elite attitudes' dimension, detailed in later sections. Kolb deems this first 'procedural' form of change relatively weak and reversible, though paving the way to possible future change.

needs to be further acknowledged (Jasper and King 2020). I attempt to do so in the following sections of this chapter, by developing a relational approach to the study of institutional outcomes and a composite analytical framework acknowledging institutional acceptance as a pivotal dimension of movement influence. Second, acceptance of collective actors, as a notion, needs to be translated into the political context of contemporary democratic regimes. The understanding of acceptance as success has been contested by some authors (Piven and Cloward 1977), and overall acceptance has quite rarely been addressed by scholarship as an object of explanation in its own right (see Gamson 1990: appendix and Amenta & Caren 2004 for a review). Scholarship has often found more useful to focus on Gamson's (1990) "inclusion" – that is, on challenger actors gaining institutional positions through election or appointment, and, thereby, potentially achieving collective benefits (Banaszak 2005; Amenta 2006). This choice was also based on the assumption that, in democratic regimes, authorities tend to recognize challenger organizations. The assumption is, however, only partially true. As a matter of fact, over the last decades, one of the main challenges for many collective actors operating in democratic regimes, has been precisely to work around a line of conflict that demarcates the legitimate, institutionally sanctioned civil coexistence, from the space of social movements and SMOs. In other words, the marginalization of movement actors does not only stem from direct repression or physical confrontation. That is to say, in contemporary democratic regimes, non-acceptance is likely to assume more nuanced and subtle forms. From the perspective of institutional politics, the depiction of collective actors as presenting features deemed incompatible with a civil coexistence within the polity (e.g., violence and disruptive protest tactics, illegitimate occupations, threats to public property), serves as a functional tool to limit and/or withdraw the citizenship rights of movement actors. The recognition of collective actors as legitimate parts of the polity, in this respect, is not a given, and different collective actors tend to receive different treatments, which is why this dimension is key to an investigation of movement influence.

Overall, in spite of scholarship's advancements in acknowledging and addressing these dimensions of influence separately, what appears to be missing from prior studies, as a whole, is a general perspective of movement outcomes on institutional politics. A full-fledged framework, that is, combining the policy impact, with the procedural access and attitude change, and capable of offering a wider and more nuanced outlook of the outcomes of collective action on institutional politics.

2.1.2 (Re-)Conceptualizing Political Influence

In the two city cases that this research explores, different movement actors have adopted different courses of action, strategies, narratives and practices. Some have become more visible in the public debate, some have proven more politically autonomous, and different choices have been carried out with respect to interactions with institutions and electoral representation. This dissertation sets out to investigate the political influence of these different actors, through a widened research perspective on the outcomes of collective action.

The present dissertation identifies political influence as the outcome of collective action to investigate. Political influence, as such, can be conceptualized as a flow; its operational scrutiny across sequences of mechanisms, and its anchoring to a defined timespan, allow to appreciate is value in a specific historical phase and the dynamics that have produced it. In other words, political influence, as addressed in this thesis, captures the impact of collective actors across a given timespan, by pinpointing sequences of influence nodes. This is done along three analytical dimensions that are continuous in nature.

Thus, I (re-)conceptualize the political impact of movement actors vis-à-vis governmental institutions through a threefold definition of political influence. The three dimensions under scrutiny are *institutional attitudes*, *procedural access* and *policy*.

Institutional attitudes. Conventionally construed as an intervening factor potentially affecting political influence, in this framework institutional attitudes are instead analyzed as part of the outcome itself.

Two elements in particular are worth delving into, as to how this aspect speaks to SMOs' political influence. First, institutional actors function as gatekeepers of legitimacy. Undoubtedly, elected officials' attitudes towards movements – particularly in their public expressions – are filtered by numerous strategic and politically informed considerations. However, even the most instrumental position vis-à-vis SMOs is still the result of changes that happen within society and public opinion at large – combined with dynamics occurring in the political-institutional realm. These dynamics are explicitly perused in the present research, through the identification of the causal mechanisms that, as building blocks of collective actors' pathways, shape SMOs' interactions with governmental institutions. It goes without saying that the legitimacy of collective actors does not stem from institutions only, and that legitimacy relates to a broader concern with recognition, also from the public. While institutional actors can, indeed, work as pivotal support agents for movement legitimization and promotion, particularly in the presence of strong and well-placed institutional allies, they more often act as 'ratifying' or 'reacting' agents, acknowledging (through their own political lenses) the relative position of SMOs within society and the larger city environment, and deploy it strategically, for purposes of narrative or political confrontation. It is worth noting that this is the case both for actors who support and actors who oppose the given SMOs[9]. These dynamics, from public opinion formation to conflicts between elected officials, are embedded in the causal mechanisms that make up the trajectories of collective actors. Having traced such pathways, institutional attitudes are adopted as a proxy, albeit filtered, for societal recognition and legitimation.

The second element concerns the right of citizenship of collective actors within their respective institutional systems. The recognition of a social movement organization on the part of institutional actors is a strong indicator of the kind of citizenship that that SMO enjoys within a local political system, and points to what political leeway, credibility capital and potential for the diffusion of ideas that collective actor has at a given moment in time. Attitudes of the political or institutional elite towards movement actors have multiple layers and, as addressed in later sections, have been reckoned by academic research within different interpretive frameworks. Overall, attitudes cannot be treated as a monolithic entity – rather, they often reflect the complexity of sociopolitical environments. In that, their scrutiny constitutes an opportunity for researchers to engage with the micro level and to explore the individual perceptions (and perception formation) of institutional figures[10]. The ways in which elected officials and members of

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[9] Moreover, public opinion and citizens' attitudes towards specific, non-party political actors are hardly easy to retrace empirically. In addition to a general lack of longitudinal data to pin down this question and its evolution in time, the issue further complicates as researchers decide to focus on local arenas and actors. These limitations offer all the more reason to avoid speculating on the possible consequences of societal legitimation, or presuming certain levels of societal recognition for collective actors.

[10] Governmental majorities themselves can include a variety of perspectives;, the degree of acceptance or recognition of a collective actor on the part of different political actors, including minoritarian and opposition ones, are also a significant part

the bureaucracy view movement actors, are shaped by a wide array of determinants: background, personal experience with engagement, ideology, past and current locations inside the institution, and strategic considerations and narratives, only to name a few. The institutional side should not be viewed as a monolithic, or impersonal entity, but as a composite space. In these settings, different levels of government, competing political groups and single individuals hold different attitudes towards social movements and SMOs in their environment. What is more, in time, governmental actors are likely to modify or rethink their attitudes towards one or more social movement organizations. All of these dynamics affect movement influence. In sum, the present analytical framework aims at taking structurally into account the explanatory power of complementary institutional action. It contends that institutional willingness to view collective actors as legitimate interlocutors constitutes a measure of influence in its own right, which relates to (and is mutually impactful with) the policy and access dimensions of political influence.

Procedural access. This dimension captures the influence of collective actors over the decision-making process, by proxy of their degree of access to institutions.
Policy, in itself, is the ratification stage of a longer process promoting change. Yet, as scholarship on movement outcomes has extensively shown, not all change happens through legislation. To account for an actor's gain in access, is to embrace the complexity of that potential. Access may not result in policy change, but it creates spaces of political leverage, opening a way for movements to affect ideas, policies, behaviors within institutions. As research seeks to investigate an actor's trajectory of influence, that access accounts to much. I contend that the ability to access the institution, and to break through the structures of decision-making, can therefore be considered as a dimension of influence in its own right, instead of a mere intervening factor shaping other outcomes. In that it provides political leeway for movement actors, access to institutional decision-making (be it within a formalized procedure, or by means of other channels of interaction) constitutes, in itself, an element of political influence.
The procedural access dimension captures the extent to which a given collective actor is able to gain access to the institution, and thereby to influence the decision-making process, by orienting and impacting institutional choices. By focusing on access as a broad spectrum, this dimension allows to account for the influence of actors, encompassing their impact both within existing decision-making procedures, and over the configuration of decision-making procedures.
In the framework of political influence put forth in these pages, the dimension of procedural access does not concern SMOs' influence as modifying procedural forms per se, or better yet, is not limited to it. Rather, its reasoning originates from the idea that, with respect to a certain (though possibly evolving) institutional setting, collective actors enjoy different degrees of access to the decision-making process. Different actors can procedurally access institutional decision-making to different extents, and these extents and susceptible to changes over time. The modes of this access can range from formalized participatory processes, to the presence of movement activists within the institution, to informal contact links with elected officials and the bureaucracy. In this sense, an increase in an actor's degree of access can, but does not have to, coincide with innovations in the procedural form of decision-making. With respect to procedural

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of the attitudes picture. For these reasons, research on institutional attitudes should encompass the broad spectrum of institutional representation, as much as possible.

innovations, two elements should be borne in mind: first, an extended procedural access can be, but is not necessarily, granted through policy decisions; second, procedural innovations introduced through policy can be, but aren't necessarily only the result of collective actors' efforts. Hence, the procedural dimension, as conceptualized in this work, purposefully refers to the actor-specific dimension of access. Inasmuch as it provides SMOs with the ability to orient or have some say in decision-making, any expansion in access to the institution contributes to increasing the collective actors' political influence.

Policy. This dimension captures the substantive impact of collective actors on changes in policy or specific institutional acts. That is, the impact of movement actors on the contents of legislation or of other institutional acts produced by the governmental actor, across the different stages of the policy process.

Following Kolb's (2007) suggestions on the role of 'agenda' and 'alternatives' impacts on policy[11], the present work attempts to also account for the processes through which collective actors affect agenda setting and the development of policy proposals. These aspects are among the least studied in this strand of literature, mainly due to the difficulties of gathering empirical evidence on them, and to the high sensitivity of actors' recollections to political and instrumental aims. Here, such limitations are tackled by combining the accounts of elected officials with those of activists, and with those of informed third parties. Instances of policy influence are thus pinpointed through a triangulation of perspectives, and perused against documental evidence. A fully objective account of movement actors' policy impact is not the end goal: rather, this approach acknowledges that a comprehensive investigation of policy impact ought to also recognize the capacity of collective actors to claim credit, and to win the acceptance of their narrative of influence (see Meyer 2006).

In assessing the policy dimension of political influence, the following aspects stand out as pivotal: the width of the institutional act's scope; its ability to grant general benefits versus benefits limited to a restricted target; its potential for cross-issue impact versus single-issue. However, minor policy changes and institutional decisions should also be taken into consideration: not only, as addressed in following sections, to allow for the acknowledgment of movement impact on all levels of government (including more localized ones), but also to grant proper analytical space to the potential reciprocity of different dimensions of political influence. Specifically, the possible links and mutual interactions between the policy dimension and other the two components of this framework – that is, the procedural and the attitudes dimensions of influence.

The three dimensions singled out by this framework are not conceptualized as mutually exclusive, but rather as complementary dimensions, with a potential to be reciprocally influential. Their distinction remains nonetheless relevant, as it allows not only to disentangle more clearly the empirical data and thus the underlying mechanisms, but it also provides for a nuanced analytical framework, through which a richer prism of intensities and forms of influence of movement actors on institutional politics can be appreciated. Finally, the relationship between the three dimensions is a relevant and partly open question. Literature

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[11] Kolb (2007) identifies five types of political outcomes: agenda impact, alternatives impact (impacting the contents of policy proposals), policy impact (influence on the adoption of legislation or institutional decision), implementation impact (movement's influence in accelerating, stopping, or slowing down the implementation of an institutional act), and goods impact (gain of provision of collective or public goods). Kolb holds that movements can succeed in one, none, or any combination of these outcomes.

seems to point to the idea that the orientations of institutional actors towards challenging collective actors largely determine the procedural dynamics within institutions. In turn, in its various forms, access enables collective actors to affect the outlook of policy and thereby bring about change, but also to potentially further impact institutional attitudes, given their location within the institutional setting. That is to say, multiple configurations of reciprocity are possible. In strictly abstract terms, each dimension could also function independently of the others. Empirically, however, it seems unlikely that, for one, policy change would occur without the SMO gaining more access to the institution and/or without a shift in institutional attitudes.

2.2 Bringing back the State, studying cities

Though with different nuances, literature has frequently pointed out the necessity for multiple dimensions to be acknowledged in order to explain movements' political influence. One key aspect that has oftentimes been singled out, but overall not much explored, are the State targets of collective action.

Research on the impact of collective action vis-à-vis State institutions has often produced contradictory findings. Literature has conventionally referred to social movement as "challengers" or "claim-makers" (Gamson 1975; Tilly 1995), while some scholars have used more generic and neutral terms such as "benefit-seekers" (Luders 2010), which do not presume the existence of an antagonistic relationship and can be applied more broadly to any interest organization. Schumaker (1975) was among the first scholars to advance a theorization of the dynamics by which public authorities respond to protest actors. Identifying the conditions that make the State responsive towards mobilizations, Schumaker devised two main areas: the internal characteristics of movements, and the characteristics of the environment in which they act. This partition informed much of the subsequent research on State-movements interactions.

On the one hand, when seeking explanatory factors to account for political consequences, most studies on the impact of collective action vis-à-vis State institutions have only addressed the movement side. A strong emphasis has been placed on the SMOs' features presumed to coincide with overall leverage, such as size, durability and tactics, but this emphasis has often been matched by a substantial neglect of State actors, their agency and their internal dynamics. The 'State' itself has remained fairly undertheorized in this area of research (Skrentny 2006), though it has often been implied that institutional perceptions matter, by political process theory (Tarrow 1998) and framing theory among others, and notwithstanding the fact that the relationship between contentious and institutional politics represents one of the core ideas of much theorizing in social movement literature (Ciccia & Guzmán-Concha 2018). Works on political mediation have argued that the impact of collective action is determined by the extent to which a movement 'fits' a government agency's mission (Amenta et al. 1999), while research based on the resource mobilization model has implied that elected officials are moved by mass, well-organized movements (Piven and Cloward 1977; Gamson 1999; Skrentny 2006). Along with the organizational characteristics of movements, scholars have sought to understand the extent to which disruption affects the effects of movements on policymaking (Piven & Cloward 1979; Tarrow 1989), as opposed to moderate forms of action. However, as argued by Jasper and King (2020), even State-heavy conceptualizations of movement behavior have quite often been devoid of the very actors that run governments.

On the other hand, research has focused on the characteristics of the political environment, as well as the opportunities and constraints faced by movements (Kitschelt

1986; Kriesi et al. 1995). The grounding argument of political process theorists, particularly, is that the outcomes of collective action are shaped by the broader political and institutional context in which it takes place, including the structure of political alliances and pre-existing political institutions (Giugni 2004). However, even landmark scholarship of the political process approach has more recently addressed the need to develop dynamic and mechanismic understandings of the ways in which the institutional and the movement political arenas interact, overcoming the static character of categories such as political opportunity structure, organizational resources, movement frames (McAdam & Tarrow 2010). This orientation, applied by McAdam & Tarrow to the study of political contention, can and should also be transposed into other lines of inquiry, including the investigation of the wider political influence of movements vis-à-vis representative institutions.

Efforts at reckoning the complexity of the relationships between institutional and collective actors have come from the analysis of grassroots democratic experiences, in which local governments and social movements interact around a common project. This is for one the case of Baiocchi's *Militants and citizens* (2005), which shows that the interactions between activists and institutional political actors had a significant impact on both civic activism and the forms of political decision-making in participatory budgeting. Baiocchi studies the Porto Alegre experiment from a civil society approach, but, by his own admission (p. 141), the *Orçamento Participativo* experiment could be studied from numerous other perspectives, including impact on municipal governance and dilemmas of parties in power. In his analysis, explicitly relational, Baiocchi advances the concept of state-civil society regimes, by which the OP is viewed as part of a wider pattern of recognition of societal demands by the State. As various segments of civil society (individuals, pressure groups, movements, civic organizations) interact with governmental authorities (through formal and informal settings, with protest and so on), their interactions impinge on the functioning of both the State and civil society, overall structuring the context of civic engagement and the functioning of democracy.

The relationship between State and collective actors has at times been explored through the lens of institutionalization (particularly, see Pruijt 2003 on the institutionalization of urban movements), or of cooptation vs. cooperation (Holdo 2019, 2020). These lines of inquiry have especially looked to understand the determinants of movements institutionalization and their evolution trends with respect to institutional politics, as well as the conditions under which authorities seek to coopt, repress or cooperate with collective actors. The composite dynamics through which institutional elites respond to collective action, and elected officials' agency, have been in part addressed by scholarship. In this sense, there are scholars who have clearly acknowledged the interests of elected officials (Burstein 1999; Luders 2010), while others have addressed the potential of different policy stages to be influenced by collective actors. Among the analytical frameworks that have been proposed, some entail rational and consensus-based considerations (Gamson 1975; Luders 2010) – suggesting that targets discern the threat posed to their interests and the cost of capitulating to movement demands to then react accordingly. However, little interest has been devoted to exploring the nature and constitutive mechanisms of the impact exerted by institutional perceptions on collective action outcomes.

Other studies have put forth arguments centered around the perceived legitimacy and worthiness of a given mobilization (Tilly 1999) or mobilization strategy, for example with more favorable attitudes of State actors vis-à-vis less contentious or nonviolent forms of action (Gilljam et al. 2012; Marien and Hooghe 2013). However, while research has for the most part focused on mass studies – showing that the disruptiveness of events personally

experienced plays a relevant role in shaping individual approval of protest action (Gilljam, Persson, and Karlsson 2012) and pointing out the importance of personal background and media portrayals (Detenber et al. 2007) in influencing the degree of acceptance of protest actions –, the few studies on elite-level attitudes (such as Gilljam, Persson, and Karlsson 2012) do not distinguish between different forms of action.

Finally, it should be noted that the scope of literature's efforts to disentangle institutional responses to movement action has been almost entirely limited to protest. Particularly with respect to collective action during the crisis, not many research works on the influence of collective mobilization have taken into account the diversity of movement forms of action. Among scholars that have sought to explore this topic, Romanos (2013) has addressed the outcomes produced by the combination of protest and conventional action on the part of Spanish 15M activists, around housing issues.

Moreover, even studies addressing the effectiveness of different protest strategies have failed to include the question of institutional attitudes. One notable exception, as to the latter aspect, is provided by Clarissa Hayward's recent work (2019), in which the author considers State dynamics while discussing the role of disruption in producing change. By bringing a step further the claim by McAdam and Piven that disruptive politics can transform the calculus of elected officials (and aspiring elected officials), Hayward argues that disruption can successfully compel dominant groups to take sides on specific issues and hence impact the political agenda – which, in turn, may allow subordinated actors to gain a negotiating position.

However, in the general landscape of research, the need to disentangle State responses to movement action beyond protest, remains largely unaddressed. I contend that in order to further deepen its understanding of the impact of collective struggles, literature needs to take into account the behavior of target actors, faced with specific and different forms of collective action (as argued by Luders 2010), and to keep diving into the questions of how institutional perceptions and responses are shaped.

In the wake of the economic crisis of the early 2010s, academic literature has indeed addressed the role of social movements with respect to governments (as for welfare, urban planning, relationships between State and subnational divisions). Research has devoted significant attention to collective actors' features and forms of action, such as the dimensions of prefigurative politics incarnated by alternative action organizations and Direct Social Action – both in partial continuity with previous studies on the struggle for commons and urban squats, as means of contestation and resilience, and in the attempt to investigate innovative means of grassroots democracy. However, considerably less attention has been devoted to the institutions confronted with those forms of action, the interplays between governmental actors and movements, and the effects resulting from that collective action.

All of these reasons motivate the pursuit of this thesis to contribute to the scholarly debate on the political consequences of collective action, by including an analysis of the impact of institutional perceptions on movement influence, and the role of political practices in affecting both. Particularly, this research is concerned with how the shaping of local elected officials' perceptions relates to different forms of collective action, especially in cases in which movement actors carry out both disruptive and non-disruptive initiatives – such as DSAs along with protests and squatting.

The present work purposefully brings these lines of reasoning into the study of urban political systems – that is, to the local, municipal level. Such choice stems from the reckoning of the municipality as the arena in which the repercussions of the crisis are most directly experienced, processed, and addressed. In other words, the local scope of the research is

motivated by the relevance of the city dimension in investigating the relationship between the crisis, collective action and political influence, as well as the relevance of local politics in the Italian system.

Within neoliberal capitalism, the spatial and relational dimension of the city becomes, in itself, the core of struggle; the right to shape it is claimed. The concept of 'right to the city', first introduced by Henri Lefebvre in his *Le droit à la ville* (1968) and further developed by geographer David Harvey (1982, 1985, 2003, 2008, 2012), has been pivotal in advancing scholarship's understanding of urban mobilizations and movements[12]. If urbanization is a vital part of the process of global capital circulation and unequal development, and, in that, essential to the survival of neoliberal capitalism, the city itself constitutes a frontier of the capitalist socio-economic model (Harvey 1982, 1985, 2008). In phenomena such as gentrification, privatizations, land grabbing, forced evictions, racism, cities manifest the capitalist processes of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey 2003), in which profit is achieved through the commodification of basic rights and resources, and the production of deep segregation dynamics. One of the most affected areas, in this respect, is housing, as attested by the very real estate bubble that was at the genesis of the financial crisis of 2008. In that, according to Harvey, capitalism and the entrepreneurial urban management of neoliberal cities are in acute contradiction with the right to the city (see Bogado et al. 2018). As effectively explained by Pecorelli (2015), the right to the city does not simply refer to the material realm, a claim for physical resources, but also encompasses the immaterial dimension – that is, the relational level of production and transformation of the urban space[13]. The right to the city is to be understood as a collective right; its claiming as a process that articulates through social solidarities (Harvey and Potter 2009, p. 48). The urban context offers a breeding ground for new logics of political and social action, and acts as a relational 'incubator' for the structuring of alliances and networks of activism (Nicholls 2008).

In fact, inherently, cities constitute fertile environments for the emergence of collective grievances and mobilizations, as the rich history of urban struggles attests. Miller and Nicholls (2013) poignantly recall that many social movements that have changed the course of history – such as the US civil rights and gay rights movements – were born from urban mobilizations, initially targeting local policies or provisions and later scaled up to the higher centers of power. As the frontline space where inequality, injustice, and discriminatory and oppressive practices are enacted and experienced, cities constitute relevant arenas of politicization for marginalized groups (Miller and Nicholls 2013). At the same time, their rich political environments and their concentration of resources, practices and knowledge, makes cities favorable spaces for the creation of complex and diverse alliances, which in turn have the potential of sustaining the development of large mobilizations.

In the Italian context, the protagonism of local institutions stems from both the structures of governance and an acquired political centrality.

In the mid-1990s, the organization of local institutions in Italy knew a season of reforms. Among others, law 81 of 1993, providing for the direct election of mayors and a majority system for the election of city councils, shifted the balance of power of municipal institutions in favor of mayors. The law sought to grant further strength and stability to local governments, establishing a direct political legitimation of mayors through popular vote. This was intended to allow the executive function of local governments to enjoy a higher autonomy from political parties, already widely de-legitimized (Allulli 2010). The reforms of

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[12] On the global and contemporary spread of the notion of right to the city, see Costes (2019).
[13] In David Harvey's words, "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city" (2008, p. 25).

the 1990s aimed at enhancing administrative efficiency, but also at increasingly providing local institutions with the tools to place their territories in the broader framework of global economic competition. Local governance, overall, was shaped so as to enhance the powers of mayors and their cabinets (Vandelli 1997; della Porta 2006).

Furthermore, within a European trend of personalization of local government (Martins and Rodrìguez Alvarez 2007), the political relevance of mayors has grown significantly between the late 1990s and the 2000s (Canzan 2016). The notion of a 'party of mayors' started to be mobilized in Italian public discourse, suggesting that mayors, being responsive and reliable politicians, would be well suited to run the country (Vandelli 1997). Against a widespread perception of inefficiency and representativity deficit of national institutions, the decade-long debate around the Italian electoral system and parliamentary democracy has also been marked by the idea of the Prime Minister as the 'mayor of Italy'[14] – that is, the application, at a national level, of the presidential scheme established at a municipal level (Bordignon 2014; Travaini 2014).

From the standpoint of the political debate, city systems have then become an epicenter in the arising and reframing of key public issues. Differently put, the municipal level[15] has increasingly become the space in which the consequences of pivotal issues, including global ones, manifest more directly and intensely.

First, the intensifying terrorist threats on European soil of the 2000s, coupled with the increasing unrest vis-à-vis migratory phenomena and the emergence of new urban configurations between communities, have fueled a general reframing of social problems in terms of security. In this respect, local administrations have been deemed among the institutions most directly in charge of fulfilling citizens' needs for protection (physical and social). For one, recent years have seen an increasing use of municipal ordinances (*ordinanze*, or by-laws) for policing and security purposes and to regulate behavior in public spaces (see Moroni and Chiodelli 2014).

Secondly, especially with the crisis, through the individualization of socioeconomic relations, the increasing complexity of social stratification and fragmentation of identities, and the difficulty of political organizations to connect with (and thus represent) disengaging constituencies, the spatial and territorial dimension of politics has acquired new value. This shift has particularly involved the environment of the city. Urban sociologists have explored how, by nature, the city makes the crisis and its effects visible (see Amendola 2017; Carrera 2017), manifesting marginalities, inequalities, economic hardship. In turn, the crisis affects the daily lives of urban spaces, transferring its effects on urban forms and city social organizations. The crisis exposes the city and its relationships with citizens, while prompting a renewed demand for the city (Carrera 2017) and new claims, not always voiced through words, of a right to the city. In the crisis, the city appears as a scarce resource, unevenly

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[14] This narrative has characterized, for one, the political discourse of former PD leader Matteo Renzi, in his posture on institutional reforms and the dynamization of governmental procedures.

[15] Article 114 of the Italian Constitution states that "the Republic is composed of the Municipalities, the Provinces, the Metropolitan Cities, the Regions and the State. Municipalities, provinces, metropolitan cities and regions are autonomous entities having their own statutes, powers and functions in accordance with the principles laid down in the Constitution. […]". According to Article 117, some regulatory powers are reserved to the Municipalities, provinces and metropolitan cities, as to the organization and implementation of the specific functions that are attributed to them. Administrative functions are attributed to the Municipalities based on principles of subsidiarity, differentiation and proportionality with respect to other government levels. Still, in the Italian system the functions of Municipalities (for the most part, detailed in Art. 14, paragraph 27, of the law decree 78/2010) are significant, and include all of the functions relating to the municipal population and territory, especially in reference to the provision of personal and community services and the organization of public services such as transports; financial and budget management activities; general administrative functions; local economic development and use of territory. Municipalities are thus endowed with independent financial resources (Art 119).

distributed, in which particularly medium and low-income portions of the population redefine the boundaries of their urban map. Cleavages grow more acute and diversities are lived with increases fatigue, in the face of a harder experience of daily life, while securitarian rhetorics proliferate.

At a time of democratic disconnect and social unrest, the question of democracy in local arenas has assumed increased relevance. On the side of scholarship, growing attention has been devoted to the role of movements' claims, actions and practices in shaping democracy, to grassroots processes of participation (Lewanski 2007), dilemmas of collective action and the tensions that can arise between participation and representation (Vitale 2007; Vitale and Podestà 2011). In addition, city government buildings are physically visible to citizens in their daily lives, elected officials walk the streets, administrative subdivisions are located in the neighborhoods. There is a general perception of accessibility that is very different than for national institutions. Similarly, from highly localized matters, such as potholes, constructions and parks, to more encompassing social questions like marginalization and work, politics and policy issues are experienced firsthand within the city.

Perhaps also for these reasons, local administrations have been invested since the early 2000s by the growing democratic trends calling for institutional accountability and responsiveness, as well as enhanced citizen participation.

In fact, the municipal level also stands out as a rich breeding ground for different kinds of interactions involving government and non-government actors. In other words, as a fruitful space for innovative experimentations for dealing with emerging issues. This includes business and civil society formations, but also movement actors, whose potential for both direct confrontation and institutional cooperation is higher in local contexts. For one, local levels of government tend to be overall more accessible to external requests and grievances (including informal ones), due to their territorial proximity. For SMOs interested in making an electoral investment, local consultations are also globally a much more accessible opportunity for impact[16]. In addition, interest groups and lobbying tend to be less structured and common at the local level than at the national one, offering a more balanced playing field for movement actors (Stearns & Almeida 2004). Furthermore, problems at the municipal level are usually more directly and comprehensively addressable, which provides non-government actors with fruitful opportunities of intervention or cooperation in the resolution of local issues. Local social movement organizations can thus gain leverage, as they contribute to advancing causes that exert direct effects on the locality (Stearns & Almeida 2004). In turn, local influence can entail consequences for the diffusion, halting or scaling of wider mobilizations.

For the study of movement influence, the choice to focus the scope of this work on the local level, entails some effects in analytical terms.

It should be noted that literature has found the policy focus to be predominant at the subnational level, as scholars typically investigate the role of movements in influencing the adoption of municipal policies (Amenta, Andrews and Caren 2018)[17]. Indeed, it can prove

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[16] Depending on the features of each political system, municipal elections may be more or less volatile than national ones. In the Italian context, although electoral volatility has increased as a whole at various levels, and particularly in the two city systems considered in the present work, local elections are typically less volatile than other consultations. In this respect, local political systems tend to be more crystallized than the national arena. However, they remain either contestable or at least open to contamination from external political agents, such as social movement actors, through the mobilization of much more limited resources (and votes) than in other consultations, thus granting more accessible opportunities of impact.

[17] Amenta, Andrews and Caren recall, as a noteworthy exception to focusing on policy outcomes, the work of Anna-Britt Coe (2013) on subnational bureaucrats' attitudes toward feminist issues in Peru, and particularly the inconsistencies of elite support across the policy process. Through the comparison of two local cases, Coe's chapter develops an approach to policy elites'

highly insightful to scrutinize the policy impact of movement actors on municipal decision-making. Municipal policies are generally more clearly delimited and have a narrower range of action compared to national (or supranational) acts, which, as recalled, provides opportunities of influence to movements. Bearing this in mind, any analysis of collective action's impact on local policy needs to fathom movement influence based on the actual legislative (and political) prerogatives of the institution in question. The criteria used to assess the impact exerted by an actor through its influence over policy, then, shall be scaled according to the government level under scrutiny.

However, the influence of collective actors on political systems extends beyond their policy outcomes alone. Other political consequences, such as transforming State structures, shaping public opinion, influencing partisan alignments, only to name a few, have been much more widely explored in national-level work. This is often due (as argued by Amenta, Andrews and Caren 2018) to the limited amount of information available about municipal policies and overall, the internal functioning of municipal politics. Working to overcome such paucity of materials, nonetheless, other dimensions of political influence can be uncovered at the local level. Among these, are the impact on the conditions for collective actors' access to decision-making, and consequences on the attitudes of elected officials.

2.3 A relational approach

A relational approach to the study of movement influence is put forth in this research, embracing a depiction of the social reality "in dynamic, continuous and processual terms" (Emirbayer 1997, p. 289) and the recognition of social phenomena as constantly flowing processes, shaped by chains of social interactions and organizations. The development of 'relational sociology' originally stems from the will to overcome the dichotomy between macro-level and micro-level analyses, and to emphasize the role of the meso-level and the analytical relevance of dynamic social patterns (Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou 2015). This theoretical underpinning provides for an alternative to invariant and law-like explanations of social phenomena, acknowledging instead the inextricable link between social ties and culture, and consequently that values and norms are not discrete units – thus, that the understanding of the forms of social interaction cannot prescind from "the recognition of the centrality of the content of interaction that gives rise to such formations and simultaneously is shaped by them" (Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou 2015, p. 25).

The perspective adopted in the thesis does not reject the importance of structural factors: rather, it provides for the dynamic re-conceptualization of elements often treated as static, objective or pre-existing structural elements by academic research. McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow's (2004) framework, originally offered for the study of political mobilization, which proposes to instead "identify the dynamic mechanisms that bring these variables into relation with one another and with other significant actors" (p. 43), is hereby brought into the study of collective action outcomes, and particularly applied to trajectories of political influence, wherefore reconciling the dichotomy between structure and agency through a relational lens.

It follows that a relational perspective is adopted to investigate the strategic interplay between different collective actors and local elected officials, in the changing configurations and mutable constitutive elements of these relationships over time.

To this end, the agency of actors on both sides of the barricade – movement activists and elected officials alike – is purposefully explored. Particularly, while trying to account for the elected officials' attitudes towards self-managed social centers and responses to CSAs'

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support for movement claims, moving beyond individual calculations and focusing on elites' broader perceptions, frames and understandings within a set cultural context.

claims, the dynamic configuration of structures of relation and meaning is perused, as the context for the strategic calculations, interpretations and dispositions (Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou 2015) of elected officials.

Furthermore, particular attention is devoted to the networks taking shape in the interaction between actors, in the intention to account for their dynamics of conflict and coalition-building.

Until the end of the 1970s, political process theory attributed the emergence and impact of collective actors to the structures and opportunities provided (or denied) by the State (McAdam 1982). As new analytical perspectives were put forth in social movement studies, movements have been explored in their interplay with other actors, although, as argued by Jasper and King (2020), literature needs to further account for the strategic role of state actors in these dynamics of interaction. In the effort to capture both the agency of the actors involved – movement and institutional alike – and the changing configurations of the city environments, in order to thoroughly apprehend the constitutive mechanisms that shape the trajectories of collective action and consequently political influence, a discourse of arenas is employed in this thesis. The framework developed in the present work, draws upon consolidated literature on arenas, and particularly upon the relational, mechanismic framework put forth by Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou (2015). Nonetheless, as further detailed in the methodological chapter, some distinctions are adopted.

From the reasoning developed in the previous sections, follows that in a relational perspective, the configuration of the institutional outcomes of social movements is shaped by the dynamic interplay between actors. Specifically, the key components of this interrelation are collective actors, the broader societal environment, and political institutions.

Inherently, regardless of their specific approach or relationship to the societal structures in place, movements exist and seek to affect social change. As a consequence, although collective actors may choose to directly target or lobby institutions in specific instances, their target is first and foremost society. The ways in which different organizations perceive themselves to be situated, with respect to the wider society, are multiple, and vary across movements, time and space. Still, it is both towards and within society that movement actors seek to advance their struggles and generate change, by carrying meanings, influencing opinions, spreading worldviews and identities (della Porta & Diani 2006).

In this perspective, collective actors' relationship to the broader society is essential in two distinct, complementary ways. First, it plays a key role in determining the configuration and boundaries of the social environment of a movement actor. Social environment is hereby understood as the immediate physical and social setting in which actors operate, and of which they are co-constructors: that is, the range of their action, their interaction networks, their cognitive and representation realm. Literature has suggested that some elements in particular are linked to political influence. Among the rich array of elements that compose a social environment is, for one, the perimeter of action and struggle of an organization – in turn, deeply affected by collective identity and how that identity is translated into practices. The spectrum of struggle is shaped by the forms and the objects of collective action, as well as the opportunities for participation and the publics and targets that are envisaged. At the same time, a collective actor's social environment is strongly determined by its network. In fact, relevant theoretical literature on social movements has defined, among the characters of collective actors, the presence of "dense informal networks" (della Porta & Diani 2006) or "informal interaction networks between a plurality of individuals, groups, and/or organizations based on a certain shared purpose and solidarity" (Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou 2015). At the same time, the relevance of networks has been strongly suggested by empirical

research applications. The political and civil society actors, individual or collective, that make up a movement (or movement organization)'s coalition of allies and public of participants, have been found to play a pivotal role in shaping political influence (among several valuable contributions, see Stearns and Almeida's 2004 work on the role of loose coalitions in achieving policy impact). Ally networks are tightly related to the symbolic and action boundaries of collective experiences, as well as often mutually influential: networks can be the result of a shift in collective identities and practices, but also, vice versa, prompt practical and symbolic changes or additions. On the opposite side of the barricade, the configuration of a movement actor's opponents (or, at times, of counter-movements) may also significantly impact its strategies and meanings. Among other elements, it is then worth noting that the shaping of a movement actor's social environment, is also significantly related to its localization in a given territory, and to the forms of its relationship to a specific geographical and socio-cultural realm.

Thus, a relational perspective is key in capturing the unfolding of these interactions, especially in their intrinsically dynamic nature: the social environment of a movement actor should not be intended as a given or static element, but, rather, investigated in its many evolving features and the role that those transformations play in the actor's pathway.

Second, the relationship of movement actors to society matters in how it might affect institutional actors and, thereby, the attainment of movement goals. Movements' drive towards society is both foundational and instrumental to the realization of collective objectives. In fact, not only does the change promoted by collective action involve, first and foremost, societal configurations, but the likelihood of that very collective action impacting legislative change – by getting through to political authorities – increases when ideas or claims are spread, and gain consensus and strength within society. Granted, collective actors approach political authorities, and their own political influence over the institutional realm, in a variety of different ways. The latter depend on both external and internal factors, ranging from movements' ideological frameworks and internal resources, to specific political conjunctures and the dispositions of incumbent politicians, to the extent of societal consensus or support enjoyed at a given moment. In addition, an important distinction stems from the nature of a movement's goals, and the different relationships that collective actors may have to their objectives. While some purposefully target institutions to obtain legislative changes in order to advance their goals, others choose to only walk the symbolic path, incarnating and spreading messages, values, grievances and alternative ways of life, and thereby seek to influence culture. Even so, both cultural and political movements, as argued by della Porta and Diani (2006), tend to make demands on the political system. Those demands, as they are filtered through the lenses of societal support and public opinion, can translate into politically sensitive inputs for decision-makers. Although societal mediation is not the only possible path to movement impact, literature has highlighted time and time again the role of favorable public opinion, brokering action and consensus considerations in shaping institutional responses to movement demands. Differently put, the wider societal arena works as a conjunction node between movement and institutional dynamics.

Relevant literature (see, notably, Jasper and King 2020) has, then, highlighted the necessity to acknowledge and understand institutional dynamics, in order to offer a completer and more balanced picture of collective actors' influence. The interactions occurring between actors in the realm of institutional politics make up for a key part of the picture, as what happens at the institutional level plays a crucial role in shaping collective actors' pathways of political influence. In this respect, intra-institutional dynamics encompass two intertwined levels of actors' interplay. The first relates to the elected officials' reading of

societal inputs (provided in the form of shifting consensus, direct claims, public debates), and to their resulting choices and behaviors. The second, has to do with the more strictly internal dynamics of power competition, within and between different political forces and groupings, and within and between the executive and the legislative level (in the case of local institutions, as in the scope of this dissertation, this distinction concerns the Cabinet and the City Council). The institutional arena is invested by a variety of interactions and evolving dimensions, from bureaucracies, to political leaderships and parties, to governmental and representation configurations. The impact that collective actors might exert on institutional politics, is also contingent upon the form assumed by several relational dynamics that can be found, though in static form, in POS theory. Among them, is the division of power between and within institutional bodies (Kitschelt 1986), which is not only shaped by formal attributions of competences, but also by evolving informal structures of power. The configuration of power can be modified by shifts in electoral consensus and volatility, as well as by divisions among the institutional elites, and the evolving availability of some institutional actors to form alliances (Tarrow 1989) both within and outside the institutional realm. It goes without saying that all of these dynamics have the potential to affect collective action and its outcomes. It is also relevant to note how the relational dynamics occurring in the institutional arena invest both individuals and formalized organizations, such as political parties, which organizations bear complex relational dynamics of their own. Though fairly undertheorized, the impact of social movements on parties' political agendas and discourse (i.e., adopting the themes of collective mobilization) and on organizational changes, has been found to be only partially explained by ideological distance and the perspective of electoral benefits, although interactions between movement actors and parties have been founds to be more likely in the presence of electoral volatility and a certain degree of identity coherence or overlap between movement and party. Instead, cumulative memberships and the presence of mediator actors and groups, taking up movement issues and bringing them into institutions, has been found to explain much of movements' impact on party agendas and discourse (Piccio 2016). Empirics, then, also seems to point to the necessity of reckoning the relational dynamics between these actors, rather than structural factors or variables.

The very relationship between collective actors and political institutions has been addressed by research from different perspectives, many of which have been recalled in earlier sections of this chapter. The variety of academic takes on the interaction between State and movements ranges from studies on the question of institutional responses to mobilization (particularly, on cooperation as opposed to repression), to the investigation of the forms and effects of movement institutionalization, to the institutional factors shaping movement influence (for one, via the structure of political opportunities). Substantial literature has highlighted the crucial role of influential allies and institutional access in order for movements to be effective (McAdam et al. 1996; Tarrow 1995). Of course, this is all the more relevant for State-oriented movement organizations, whose goals either are directly related to State action, or require State leverage (Burstein et al. 1995). In turn, cooperative interplays between State and movement actors can unfold through multiple configurations. A large bulk of research has focused on the impact of institutional activists and movement institutionalization processes in influencing public decision-making. On a different note, Lee Ann Banaszak (2005) has put forth the concept of "State-movement intersection", intended as the presence of self-identified members of a movement holding recognizable State positions. Banaszak highlighted this as a key factor in the creation of institutional locations for movement activists and, in turn, for influencing public policy as well as movement tactics. These are but a few examples of how the interplay between institutional and movement

actors has been variously interpreted by academic research. All of these configurations are susceptible to transformations and shifts over time, in addition to varying across contexts and actors involved. Yet, overall, their common denominator lies in the potential of any State-movement relationship configuration to significantly impact the political influence of collective actors.

Based on these considerations, four main arenas of interaction can be identified, in which the dynamic interplay of actors unfolds and shapes trajectories of political influence. The first is the arena of interaction between the collective actor and its social environment. The second, is the arena in which the collective actor and the broader society interact, generating relational dynamics in the public debate that, in turn, might affect institutions more or less directly. The third arena, is the one where intra-institutional dynamics unfold. Finally, the fourth is the arena of interaction between the collective actor and political institutions.

Across arenas of interaction, some core interlocking mechanisms provide the building blocks of the relational dynamics occurring within each arena.

◊ In the arena of interaction between the collective actor and its specific social environment, *Bridging / Encapsulation*;
◊ In the arena of interaction between the collective actor and the broader society, *Legitimization / Focus Shift*;
◊ In the arena of interaction within institutions, *Disruption of power competition / Downward spiral of political opportunity*;
◊ In the arena of interaction between collective actor and institutions, *Double-Edged Institutionalization/ Partitioning*.

The relational reading, of actors' interactions within specific areas, as developed in this thesis, relates to a rich array of concepts and dynamics discussed in previous academic works. The following sections discuss the features of these mechanisms and their configurations, compared to other scholarly approaches.

As it unfolds, the thesis devotes similar discussions and space to the different mechanisms and arenas. At the same time, it underlines the role of some key mechanisms, the arenas in which they emerge and specific concatenations, in shaping pathways of higher and lower political influence. These mechanisms, in turn, might play a more or less pivotal role in actors' trajectories, based on a series of contextual, contingent or historical, specificities. Each general mechanism is constituted by a series of sub-mechanisms, which are discussed more at length in the empirical chapters, precisely in the intent to address their emergence and unfolding within each one's specific context.

Bridging / Encapsulation, between the collective actor and its social environment

The arena of interaction between collective actors and their social environment is directly related to political identities, practices and strategies, and therefore, in turn, to political influence. Movement actors engage to different extents with other political and non-political actors; they present varying degrees of openness and access to participation, and shape distinct relationships with their surrounding territory. In this work, I identify two opposing mechanisms along the wide spectrum that is the configuration of an actor's social environment. These mechanisms are Bridging and Encapsulation.

Bridging is the mechanism by which a collective actor expands the boundaries of the social environment in which its action unfolds, with the more or less explicit aim of fostering and increasing struggles' salience.

As a label, bridging has been employed by social scientists in different fields to describe phenomena related to the perimeter of collective action. The use of the term has ranged from conceptualizations of the spatial location and boundaries of movement action, to its network and group dynamics, to identity and frames. A strand of literature has also developed in social movements research, focusing on the concept of "bridge building". A highly insightful review and critique of this literature can be found in Coley (2014). Scholars engaged in network analysis have used the term of bridging to describe the process by which a shared frame is achieved, through the joining of multiple ideologically congruent frames (see Snow et al. 1986). In his contribution, Coley (2014) recalls how social movement scholarship has placed increasing interest in the ways that "activists negotiate overlapping positional and cultural differences in the social world" (p. 128). One way, has been by mobilizing "bridging work" or "bridge building" to describe forms of movement interactions explicitly aimed at negotiating conflicts between different collective identities (Roth 2003). Another, has entailed a growing focus on "bridging organizations" in social movements – that is, actors seeking to reduce fear and hostility between groups by increasing their mutual knowledge and encouraging dialogue (Brecher & Costello 1990). Gamson (1992) has also talked about 'bridging' processes to describe dynamics in which links are established between the individual and the cultural level, such as in the development of collective identity or solidarity.

In social capital research, bridging typically refers to a specific kind of social capital, as described in the well-known distinction between bonding and bridging capital proposed by Robert Putnam. In brief, the theory posits that while bonding social capital tends to prevail in homogeneous groups, bridging social capital lies in the ties that link heterogeneous actors across a same cleavage. Other studies have talked about the boundary-bridging role of social movements in the diffusion of contested practices to other environments, including non-movement ones (see, for example, Waeger and Mena 2013). Literature has also discussed bridging as a way of integrating different movements, but also of connecting movement actors with the broader public. These bridging processes can occur at a micro level and result from the action of engaged leaders as well as individual participants in a mobilization. However, literature has also underscored the role of organizational procedures in building bridges, for instance through changes in names and in membership dynamics (Coley 2014). In his reconceptualization of "bridge building", Coley adds the targets of collective action among the beneficiaries of bridge building. Furthermore, in defining the primary goals of bridge building, he adds to policy changes and distributive benefits to include the movement actors' aims for cultural and biographical changes. Indeed, scholars have contrasted the traditional understanding of movement identity, purposefully defined by opposition to targets and outside groups, with the ways in which many collective actors underscore their similarities to "the majority" and are motivated to build bridges towards dominant groups (see Bernstein 1997 and Ghaziani 2011, as quoted in Coley 2014).

In the present work, I argue that this is not only true at the level of identity formation and definition, but also for the broader spectrum of collective action. While movements are defined by the presence of a specific collective identity, and of conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents (della Porta and Diani 2006), research needs to acknowledge the bridging effort that many collective actors engage in, in order to appeal to a larger public and mobilize broader constituencies to foster their struggles. In other words, it aims at bringing together a vaster constellation of heterogeneous actors (be they participants or publics) along a same cleavage. This may involve a reshaping and integration of collective identities, but also a broadening of the focus of political action, a transformation of practices, the opening to a broader coalition of allies. As Coley (2014) rightfully argues, from a movement

perspective, the effort towards building bridges with a wider social environment can also be aimed at neutralizing or converting opponents, and at transforming attitudes toward marginalized social groups. The Bridging mechanism employed here captures this complex dynamic of broadening the social environment, and does so by holding together the spatial dimension (territorial, but also of shifting contexts), the network and coalition dimension, and the inclusion dimension of collective action.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, is the mechanism of *Encapsulation*. This mechanism captures the enclosing of a collective actor within limited boundaries of action and/or within a narrow configuration of allies. In other words, encapsulation describes the enclosing of an actor within the boundaries of a narrow social environment, be it a perimeter of action, a specific spatial context or network configuration.

Studies on identity transformation organizations have notably attributed a radical meaning to this notion, however this has not been the case in social movements literature. Rather, this scholarship has talked about encapsulation to describe the processes by which repression has compelled movement organizations into a narrow perimeter of action. The more extreme examples of this phenomenon have come from groups engaged in armed political violence, that were progressively marginalized and forced to go underground, such as the Italian Brigate Rosse terrorist group or the Weathermen (later Weather Underground) organization in the United States (della Porta 1990). The stories of these collective actors are often characterized by dynamics that reduce the contacts of the organization with the external world and push them into a narrow social environment, such as increasing repression, internal divisions, radicalization, decreasing public support. In this respect, the label of encapsulation inherently captures a dynamic that goes beyond the mere clandestinization of militancy. Instead, the concept of encapsulation, as deployed in this work, refers to the reproduction of relational practices within a bound social environment.

Lastly, it should be noted that the relational nature of these mechanisms comes with a potential for dynamicity. Although they capture two diverging motions – the expansion and the reduction of an actor's social environment –, bridging and encapsulation can occur, successively, in the trajectory of the same collective actor. An actor can be encapsulated inside a social, narrative or territorial enclave, to later progressively bridge its environment, expanding and diversifying it. At the same time, an actor whose early stages had been characterized by a purposeful bridging effort, can, at a later time in its pathway, become encapsulated in a narrow social location. Overall, the shaping or reshaping of an actor's environment drives that actor's location within the broader society and, thereby, affects its potential for political influence.

Legitimization / Focus Shift, the mechanisms of societal space shaping

Based on their overall social environment – including practices and targets, configurations of allies and membership, spatial relationships –, collective actors are situated within the broader society that surrounds them. As recalled, the degrees of integration or autonomy of movement organizations with respect to the surrounding environment can vary. However, whatever the case may be, relevant relational dynamics take place in this societal arena of interaction, which connects movement and State actors.

This is the arena where public opinion and consensus are formed, the arena of collective actors' representation and exposure dynamics. As a result of the dynamics occurring in this arena, movement organizations can gain or lose grip on society and, as a consequence, political leeway. In turn, such dynamics are determined by the complex interplay between

the actors of the system in question, including civil society organizations, individuals, economic actors, collective actors other than the one under scrutiny, and institutions.

Here, I describe the mechanisms of this arena of interaction as the mechanisms of societal space. Surely, they also relate to the social environment of the movement actor – however, as opposed to bridging and encapsulation, these relational dynamics do not entail, per se, a reduction or expansion of the actor's social environment. Instead, by their very occurrence, these mechanisms directly translate into the localization of the collective actor into the broader political ecosystem, and its ability to hold a degree of saliency or centrality in the public debate.

I suggest that the two central mechanisms operating in this arena are Legitimization and Focus Shift.

Legitimization, as a cognitive relational dynamic, has been notably defined by Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou[18] (2012, 2015) as the increase in positive and popularly resonating representations of actors and their actions. Yet, in turn, the legitimization of an actor in the wider society and in public discourse, occurs through a series of interlocking and composite dynamics. It can be determined by an array of deeply interconnected phenomena: the actor's identity work and progressive recognizability, an increase in public support, certification in the media or in the institutional realm, brokering initiatives on the part of established or consensus-sensitive actors (individual or collective) towards the holders of institutional power.

Even more, the legitimization of an actor affects the latter's localization within the political system – meaning, its more or less central place in the public debate, and its saliency as a node of conflict with respect to power competition. First, legitimization speaks to the relative social positionings of different collective actors within a same polity. If we consider the dimensional nature of the public debate (largely, though not exclusively, incarnated by the media), and the political leeway of social movement actors, it appears clear that the space for any political actor, but especially for a collective one, is limited both as a part of the broader society and in political terms[19]. The focus, attention span and time that can be dedicated to discussing a movement or a movement organization is constrained. Hence, the affirmation of one actor (through legitimization) is likely to entail a relative repositioning of other collective actors to whom a similar role was previously attributed in the public discussion – or, vice versa, a shift of focus involving a previously central actor, can open new space for another actor to become salient and possibly legitimized. Of course, saliency does not equate legitimization: however, the two concepts are related in that the mechanism of legitimization captures the relational dynamic by which an actor gains positive exposure, and that exposure is mobilized to cognitively shape a new societal perception of that actor. Furthermore, a legitimized actor – that is, returning to Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou's definition, an actor that is increasingly i) represented, ii) in positive terms and iii) in popularly resonating ways – does not have to be fully accepted or approved of by a polity. Quite the opposite, the legitimization of an actor that wasn't legitimized before – either because it was less known, or because it was represented in more negative terms – can provide a new line of conflict to fuel existing political contrapositions, regardless of the overall prevalence of a positive representation in public discourse. This is especially the case in the early phase, in

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[18] In these authors' works, legitimization is described as a sub-mechanism, part of a broader outbidding dynamic between movement activists and state authorities. Conversely, here, legitimization is defined as a full-fledged mechanism, shaping the arena of interaction between movement actors and the larger society (and thereby, the trajectories of movement influence), and in turn comprised of a series of interlocking sub-mechanisms.

[19] Distinct sub-mechanisms are identified and illustrated in the empirical chapters of this work, specifically concerning *political* space.

which the mechanism of legitimization unfolds within society. That is to say, legitimization entails societal saliency, and therefore political commodities: as different societal actors progressively take sides, those engaged in the competition for power may express support for the movement actor, in the hopes of intercepting societal consensus, or, conversely, stand against it, with the intention of realigning their constituency along a new cleavage. This is how the arena of interaction between the movement actor and the broader society functions as a connecting relational node, between movement and State dynamics.

While, indeed, legitimization can be countered by the unfolding of an opposite mechanism of de-legitimization, the second mechanism that I wish to devote attention to here, is *Focus Shift*. This mechanism captures a shift in the space of action of that movement or movement organization. Its effect is produced, in other words, by a succession of interlocking dynamics that make a collective actor move to a different location in society. In the occurrence of Legitimization, an actor seeks and/or gains exposure, thereby moving to a more central position in the societal space. Conversely, Focus Shift drives the movement actor further away from the center. It is important to note that this does not necessarily have to happen through a dynamic of de-legitimization – rather, as illustrated by the empirical cases presented in this research, this shifting motion can be the natural evolution of highly legitimized movement experiences. Some collective actors, after the conclusion of their legitimization phase and the consolidation of their positive image, have in fact simply lost their centrality in the wider society, leaving room to new actors. This phenomenon can result from different dynamics, from the overpowering affirmation of other actors at the center of the societal space – prompting the shift of older collective actors –, but also purposeful choices on the part of legitimized organizations (such as a changing focus of action), as well as different combinations of these and other dynamics. In this respect, the same dynamics that can expand or reduce the perimeter of an actor's social environment, can also determine a shift in its location within the broader society: it is the case of some sub-mechanisms found in the empirical section of this work, such as the territorialization of collective action, or the shaping of networks. However, that between a collective actor and its social environment, and that between an actor and the wider society, are not overlapping arenas, although they may produce simultaneous effects, and should not be confused analytically. The shaping of an actor's social environment involves the dynamics of that actor with its radius of interactions, and thus determines the amplitude of that radius. Instead, mechanisms of legitimization or, conversely, focus shift, position collective actors in the wider societal space, with respect to other actors.

Disruption of power competition / Downward spiral of political opportunity, intra-institutional dynamics

Several actors operate relationally within the institutional arena. Institutional actors, in this sense, can be acknowledged from both an individual and a collective perspective. Among individual actors, are mainly elected and appointed officials, as well as staff and bureaucracy members. In the collective category are political parties and party factions, assembly groupings, governmental bodies, bureaucracies, as well as pressure groups and organized parties with a direct interest in specific decision-making items or processes. Movement organizations and movement activists, then, may be a part of the institutional arena both as collective and as individual actors. For all the actors operating in the institutional arena, individual and collective memberships and identities can overlap, but also enter into contradiction.

This is due to the fact that intra-institutional interactions are inherently centered around the distribution of power. Governmental action itself, is an exercise of power – in representative democracies, this refers to a power that is temporarily acquired through citizens' delegation. Political power is allocated based on specific relational configurations, that are both structural (in that they depend on the rules of governmental or administrative activity, although these can also be subject to change, by formal means or through evolving practices), and dynamically determined by actors' interplay (such as shifting alliances, the inclusion/exclusion of external actors, mutating political agendas). It follows that, throughout this work, two main mechanisms are underscored as crucial in the institutional arena of interaction, both of which have to do with the competition for power.

In *Dynamics of Contention*, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly list the competition for power among the key mechanisms recurring in protracted episodes of contention. In their work, the label is used to refer to multiple different scenarios, from the political competition between moderates and democrats in the Italian Unification period (spurring the increasing radicality of moderates' actions, in order to neutralize their political adversaries), to the attempt of the Montagnard and the Girondin factions to outbid each other for allies (a key dynamic in the polarization of the conflict between the two fronts) in revolutionary France, to electoral competition as a trigger for fighting in late 1990s Indonesia. What these scenarios have in common is the idea of a dynamic between contenders that leads to factional divisions and re-alignments. On a different note, both McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2004) and Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou (2012, 2015) have applied this label also to the description of internal competition within movement factions. However, the present work focuses on specifically how the dynamics of power competition play out in the institutional arena, to affect trajectories of influence – in this sense, here the notion of power competition refers to intra-institutional dynamics, and echoes the connotation found in McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly's (2004) cases mentioned above.

Adopting the perspective offered by Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou (2012), in this study the mechanisms of power competition are treated as relational dynamics among actors within the institutional arena, "[…] rather than expression of rationality and/or changes in the structure of political opportunity, in the resolute structural sense of the term" (p. 8), as they have often been regarded by scholarship. Where I also draw upon Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou's work, is in the reckoning of the linkage (and mutually influential nature) between the competition for power and the relational and dynamic determination of "opportunity/threat spirals", reflecting changes in the strategic bargaining position of a movement actor, in turn affecting its potential for political leverage (see Tarrow 1998). However, while Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou conceptualized this mechanism as occurring in an arena of interaction lying between the collective actor and the political environment, here this dynamic is narrowed down to a specific mechanism unfolding within the institutional arena. Even more, I contend that in this arena (downward) spirals of political opportunity, as a relational dynamic, comes to be located on the same spectrum (though at opposite ends) as another pivotal mechanism, which is the disruption of power competition.

Moreover, the relational dynamics of power competition elaborated in these pages provide a relevant example of mechanisms whose effects are produced in the institutional arena, but result from sub-mechanisms occurring in other arenas of interactions a well – as opposed to the framework adopted by Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou. In fact, they are also the product of mutually impactful interactions with, and between, citizenry and collective actors.

Amongst the most relevant mechanisms in the institutional arena of interaction, is first the *Disruption of power competition*. If institutional dynamics are generally grounded in the

competition for power, one mechanism that is susceptible of affecting pathways of movement influence on institutional politics, is the disruption of the ongoing competition for power. A disruption of power competition entails the unfolding of a sequence of events that disrupts the habitual dynamics of competition, and causes significant re-alignments in the institutional realm. This can be determined by entirely electoral-institutional dynamics – such as the assuming of power by a new political party or leader, significant majority changes or resignations –, but also be shaped by the behavior of movement actors – choices as to how to engage in conflict with institutions, engagement in electoral politics, the construction and public display of representation beyond the institutional realm. Regardless of the arenas in which its case-specific constitutive dynamics unfold, this mechanism is deemed to occur when the competition for power in the institutional arena is disrupted as a consequence of movement action, to the point that significant new alignments and divisions emerge, as actors re-evaluate their risks and potential benefits.

In the empirical cases analyzed in this work, mechanisms of disruption of the competition for power have been directly linked to the intervention of collective actors, and have coincided with expansive and proactive instances in their trajectories. In fact, some of the experiences considered have reaped the benefits of a competition for power disrupted, for one, by the emergence and affirmation of new political subjects, and found new institutional space and leverage. However, it must be noted that, although such examples are not found in the cases investigated in this research, the disruption of the competition for power could also develop independently from movement action and in detrimental ways for movement organizations – for example, in instances when the re-alignment of institutional actors determines the formation of a stronger opposition against collective actors.

The second key mechanism in this arena, then, is *Downward spiral of political opportunity*. What differentiates this mechanism from the disruption of power competition, is the fact that the competition for power is not so much disrupted, as it is intensified along established cleavages and dividing lines of conflict. In such a setting, the competition for power that takes place in the institutional arena shifts, to increasingly unfold on a terrain of political competition that directly refers to the collective actor. Within the institutional arena, then, political stances are hardened, negotiations become more difficult, the political capital that each actor has at steak (which directly depends on the extent to which they have exposed themselves publicly on a given issue) grows, and the availability of institutional actors to stand with the movement actor decreases. The shifting focus of the competition for power produces a shrinking of the collective actor's leeway – first and foremost, in cognitive terms – *within* the institutional realm. In this sense, the movement actor comes to be the subject of the competition for power, instead of being a potential agent for it (as in the competition disruption mechanism).

Double-Edged Institutionalization / Partitioning, the configurations of interaction between the collective actor and political institutions

The third arena of interaction identified in this research, is the one in which the configuration of the relationship between institutional and collective actors is shaped. The present work identifies two distinct mechanisms, which capture two opposing configurations of such relationship: Institutionalization, which is discussed in its double-edged form, and Partitioning.

The definition of the mechanism of *(double-edged) Institutionalization* deserves some discussion. The question of social movement institutionalization has been extensively addressed by scholarship, and has been variously defined (for an extensive review, see

Staggenborg 2013). Movements have been considered to 'institutionalize' in instances in which they become formalized in structure and professionalized in their leadership, taking the form of established interest groups. The concept of institutionalization has also been used to describe movements shifting to conservative or mainstream goals. However, in this work I focus on two other relevant meanings of institutionalization. Here, institutionalization does not equate the bureaucratization, formalization or legalization of a movement actor. The first meaning refers to instances in which movement ideas, frames, rhetoric, and goals are incorporated into mainstream organizations or practices (Staggenborg 2013). The second meaning, refers to instances in which movements 'institutionalize' in the sense that they operate within institutions.

Institutionalization has often been construed as a stage in a movement's life (possibly the last) associated with the arising of de-radicalization, the shift of repertoires from disruptive to conventional, and even de-politicization. In this sense, it has been frequently understood, both in academic accounts and in movement debates, as a compromising development in the trajectories of collective actors, and even, for some, attesting the 'failing' of the movement itself. Literature adopting this posture has described institutionalization as a form of top-down transformation, underscoring the willingness of State actors to coopt movements, while often underplaying the role of collective agency. Such perspectives stem from a rigid dichotomic view, according to which SMOs are seen as taking action as outsiders, against the institutional insiders (Lima 2020). Certainly, movements challenge established norms and the mainstream political actors – in other words, they contest the rules of the game by which the existing political system is structured. In this respect, collective actors (and social centers in particular) are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents, some of which can be institutional actors. However, this does not mean that collective actors are innately outsiders, or that the institutional realm is not for collective actors to claim. In their effort to bring about change in society, movements and movement organizations may choose to engage with institutional and electoral politics, with the intent to shape those norms and rules of the game directly through institutions. Similarly, by gaining footholds within institutions, movements often become endowed with institutional resources that can help sustain their struggles over time (Staggenborg 2013). In fact, scholars more directly interested in investigating movement outcomes (such as Banaszak 2010), have offered a depiction of institutionalization as a bottom-up dynamic, resulting from a premeditated choice of collective actors, aimed at advancing their goals.

At the same time, as argued by Bosi (2016), these approaches risk underestimating the actual cooptation attempts and assimilative force of the State. The purposeful choice of movement actors to institutionalize does not invalidate the claim that institutionalization entails some risks for collective actors. Social centers' activists, for one, are well aware of such risks, particularly as they operate in local political systems, where institutional leverage tends to be strong and urban actors cannot always count on abundant resources or allies. They often work to balance this risk, with the high potential for influence that is inherent to more local systems. But this is also why many activists fear that institutionalization might lead to the cooptation of the movement, and that the latter would thereby become politically irrelevant. Cooptation, as a notion, has been explored by a large bulk of academic literature (for an insightful recent work, see Trumpy 2008). Generally speaking, cooptation amounts to a strategy by which, through apparently cooperative action, the institutional elite absorbs a collective actor, without granting any new advantages. However, research has shown that, in reality, cooptation is hardly a prevalent occurrence. Holdo's work (2019), for one, has offered a fruitful depiction of the conditions under which 'conflictual cooperation' (as

defined in Giugni and Passy 1998) comes to be more advantageous for both SMOs and institutional actors. What is more, the very integration of movement language and goals within the institutional realm does not have to be ascribed, as it often has been, to cooptation. Conversely, it might be counted as a sign of movement actors' success in disseminating its ideas into mainstream institutions. The line distinguishing the two scenarios is undeniably a fine one. However, where this dividing line between dissemination and cooptation can be identified, is in the extent to which movement claims and frames are, or are not, neutralized in political terms[20] (in the sense that they are made into an empty signifier, and/or no longer attributed to movement actors).

Overall, approaches based on an underlying 'co-optation versus autonomy' divide (as described by Lima, 2020) constrain research's ability to fully understand the impact of collective action, and run the risk of forcing diverse, context-sensitive nuanced dynamics into deterministic analytical grids of institutionalization. A strategic-relational approach (as suggested by Bosi 2016) appears more suitable to capture institutionalization dynamics, without discarding agency from any side and limiting the risk of falling into analytical imbalances. This sort of approach, which I adopt throughout the thesis and illustrate by means of the empirical cases, reckons that institutionalization is the result of competing strategic choices. Collective actor's willingness, in whole or in part, to participate in arena of formal politics, is matched by the consent of State actors to integrate activists and their demands into political institutions (Giugni and Passy 1998; Bosi 2016). This reading presents multiple advantages. Most importantly, it allows for dynamic explanations of institutionalization and its determinant dynamics, devoting proper attention to the shifting and mutually influencing interactions between movement and State actors over time.

Institutionalization can thus be construed as the mechanism by which a collective actor traverses the terrain of formal politics and engages with state institutions (resonating with definition put forth by Suh 2011), and resulting in the integration of either movement ideas, frames, and goals, or of the actor itself, inside institutions. If it is true that, in and of itself, institutionalization is not inherently negative or positive, it can be argued that it is a double-edged dynamic, bearing both threats and opportunities. Particularly in repressive environments – or, more generally, in contexts where the room for collective action outside the institutional perimeter shrinks –, institutionalization has the potential to generate political leeway for collective actors. Even more, State impulses towards the institutionalization of movement experiences can translate into increased legitimacy and validation for the collective actors involved and their claims, no longer reducible to plain 'outsiders' of the polity, while also providing them with relevant resources and channels of influence. From a reversed perspective, the advantages of institutionalization might be balanced by potential challenges for the collective actor: a depotentiation of conflict, difficulties in dealing with movement constituencies and identities, under certain circumstances even reduced saliency.

The counterpart of institutionalization is a mechanism that, here, I define as *Partitioning*. As institutionalization, this mechanism also lies on the spectrum of the relationships between collective actors and institutional politics. However, and conversely, Partitioning captures a dynamic through which the collective and institutional actors proceed in parallel with their respective courses of action, distancing themselves from one another and mostly avoiding mutual interactions as much as possible. In analytical terms, the key advantage of this label is that it describes a configuration of State-movement interaction, beyond the rigid dichotomy that associates institutionalization with de-radicalization, and separation from

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[20] Gamson has notably referred to 'cultural' cooptation to describe appropriations of discourse, customs and symbolic gestures.

institutions with radicalization. Conversely, the extent to which a collective actor decides to engage with institutional politics does not, in itself, equate a certain degree of radicality or of contention. Empirically, the experiences investigated in this study show a more heterogeneous picture. In fact, partitioning is retraced, transversally, in the pathway of highly contentious and radical actors, as much as the trajectories of highly legitimized and normalized actors.

The mobilization of these two opposed analytical concepts, allows to better isolate the effects of the configurations assumed by the relationship between institutional and collective actors. In fact, the relationship between institutionalization and political influence is a complex one, though the empirical cases discussed in later chapters show that institutionalization can be a favorable mechanism in shaping the political influence of collective actors on institutional politics. At the same time, partitioning dynamics do indeed tend to characterize pathways of lower political influence.

In sum, the dissertation adopts a relational approach to the investigation of political influence.

The theoretical underpinning of the dissertation's analytical approach lies in the idea that political influence – be it in policy impact, access to decision-making, or institutional recognition – is the byproduct of open-ended, highly dynamic, and often contingent interplays between actors. On the one hand, this leads to embrace a less static and more actor-centered perspective of movement influence. Therefore, I propose to investigate the political influence of collective actors through a more full-fledged perspective. Elements that have often been treated in the literature as external conditions, either favoring or obstructing movement impact, are here viewed in a relational sense, as part of the political influence that results from actors' mutual interplay within certain arenas. On the other hand, this approach prompts the need to seek mechanismic causal explanations of the empirical cases, while simultaneously pursuing the formulation of a more general theory. Hence, this dissertation engages in an in-depth retracing of actors' pathways of influence, seeking dissimilarities and continuities between trajectories, and identifies some recurring dynamics that shape the political influence of movement actors.

Chapter 3. Research Methods & Data

This chapter is organized in four sections. The first section clarifies the rationale behind the choice of the two city cases of Bologna and Naples, as well as the criteria adopted for the selection of the social centers to be investigated in each case. Section 3.2 discusses the method of process-tracing as employed in the thesis, notably for mechanismic causal explanation within a theory-building approach. This second section also offers some considerations on possible methodological limitations (particularly, relating to attributing causality) and the ways in which the dissertation sets out to address them. Section 3.3, then, presents the data sources of the research and data collection: specifically, it details significant aspects of the fieldwork, including the unfolding of the interviewing process (describing interviews design, participants, techniques) and the documental analysis (consisting of social centers' materials, press contents, and institutional acts). Lastly, the fourth section discusses ethical concerns – such as interviewees' anonymity, strategic considerations and transparency – and reflects on researcher positionality, bias and reflexivity, providing some background on the author's approach.

3.1 Case selection
3.1.1 The two city cases
The two cases under scrutiny are the cities of Bologna and Naples. The aim of this work is to retrace the processes – by means of identifying their underlying mechanisms – that have shaped the political influence of different self-managed spaces in the two cities vis-à-vis city political institutions. Specifically, as previously addressed, I am interested in identifying the role of direct social actions in shaping the political influence of the CSAs that carry them out.

Often times, the literature on movement outcomes has focused on either single qualitative case studies or larger quantitative comparisons. This thesis is designed as an in-depth, qualitative, process-tracing based analysis of two city cases, a research framework that hopefully sheds further light on the nuanced dynamics of movement impact.

Bologna and Naples are major urban centers, seats to two of the largest Italian universities, and both have historically known a significant presence of proactive and influential self-managed spaces (Dines 1999; Mudu 2004; Piazza 2012). What is more, in a general context of decreasing political participation and shrinking political organizations, both cities have maintained a relevant presence of CSAs to this day. Some of the political self-managed spaces in both Bologna and Naples have been involved in forms of representative politics – either locally or on a national level – and urban planning.

Both Bologna and Naples are, and have historically been, governed by left-wing administrations. Luigi De Magistris, mayor of Naples since 2011, was elected moving beyond the traditional scheme of left-wing and right-wing coalitions, with the support of an alternative front[21] that took up many of the movement claims on matters such as landfills and incinerators, and even included some movement members among its candidates (Caruso 2015). Strenghtened between the first and second mandate, De Magistris' proximity with movement actors, and especially with social centers, has constituted a significant part of his

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[21] De Magistris' first coalition was comprised of party and civic actors. De Magistris was notably supported by Italia dei Valori ('Italy of Values'), a small populist party centered around anti-corruption; Federazione della Sinistra (a federation of leftist organizations, among which was especially Rifondazione Comunista); and the list 'Napoli è tua' ('Naples is yours'), which included a variety of local civil society actors.

unorthodox political discourse and charismatic leadership style, as well as a solid pattern of electoral base consolidation.

In Bologna, despite the overall openness of local institutions to bottom-up and civic participatory initiatives, the different internal factions characterizing the governing Democratic Party diverge in their stances vis-à-vis collective actors. While some have maintained a skeptical, at times vehemently critical position on the local government's concessions and openings to social centers, the predominant faction within the city administration, encompassing mayor Virginio Merola and some of his most prominent executive councilors, have developed tight relationships with different urban grassroots movement actors, entertaining privileged communication and negotiation channels. On a purely quantitative note, the preliminary mapping of self-managed social centers conducted in the early stages of the present work shows that self-managed spaces in Naples outnumber those in Bologna, where several squats and political spaces have ceased to exist since the 2000s. However, more nuanced considerations are in order on the quality and degree of influence. For one, the very existence of these political spaces is tightly related to how the question of physical spaces is managed by city administrations. This thesis therefore aims at retracing the mechanismic patterns of collective actors the two city cases, in an attempt to account for a rich spectrum of phenomena, including political and administrative dynamics, contextual economic and cultural factors, the ways in which movement actors have articulated over time, changes in local party systems, and the composition of the two respective institutional elites.

It could be objected that this research only acknowledges 'successful' cases, or cases in which self-managed spaces were indeed influential. Some specifications are in order in this respect. First, the choice of the cases stems precisely from the awareness that the vibrant political landscape of collective action in the two cities, and self-managed spaces specifically, represents quite the exception, and not the norm, in the Italian context. Therefore, the focus of this work being the mechanisms underlying influence, two cities have been selected in which, despite significant differences, margins of political viability do exist for collective actors. Yet, the choice of the two *cities* as cases – instead of specific CSAs – is also motivated by the intent to account for the effects of DSAs on the outcome of influence, while controlling for contextual factors. In fact, the degree of socioeconomic hardship, and the dynamics and outlook of local institutional politics, differ significantly in Bologna and Naples. In these respects, while the main criterion for case selection is found in the political features of Bologna and Naples, the choice of two cities with significantly differing socioeconomic dimensions and experiences of the crisis is purposeful, and also intended to disentangle the extent to which socio-economic differences might shape the dynamics of interaction of self-managed social centers and their pathways of influence.

A second, main reason for the choice to select two cities as cases, stems from a consideration that is more analytical than methodological. In the early stages of the research that has brought me to write this dissertation, I was interested in decrypting the processes through which a few, highly visible social centers had impacted city politics, and the role played by their choice of practices in their ability to influence institutional politics. However, as I started to engage in fieldwork, I soon realized that the empirical reality, as it happens, told a much richer story. The deep changes of the past decades could not be uncovered through a partial account of those who straightforwardly appeared as influential actors, but, rather, my research needed to extend to the interlocking parts of the experience of social centers as a whole, focusing on city cases rather than selecting individual spaces as cases. This choice was not aimed at contextualizing 'success stories' – a highly normative approach

with an intrinsic tendency to flatten the complexity of diverging trajectories, defining first- and second-rate actors. Rather, it was motivated by the willingness to make sense of the role of self-managed spaces in the city of the 21st century, engaging in a wider reflection on their different pathways within urban systems without disregarding the potential of different experiences to mutually explain one another's trajectories. To put this differently, not all CSAs have gained high public visibility on a local and national level; only some spaces have chosen to enter the realm of representative politics; some have engaged in direct social actions, but not others. Yet, the profound transformations in the socioeconomic and political environment of the past years, particularly since the burst of the crisis, have invested all of them. Their differing response strategies, interactions and trajectories are part of a collective history, which needs to be investigated in its entirety if research is willing to make sense of it. What is more, focusing on city cases, allows to avoid inferring, a priori, the nature of the relationship between the visibility of some spaces, or the choice to engage in representative politics, and their outcomes on institutions.

The time frame with respect to which both city cases are investigated coincides with the last two local legislatures (2011-2016 and 2016-2021), namely the two that have unfolded since the onset of the crisis. The patterns of different self-managed experiences – actors that are similar to one another, in that they all fall under the definition of self-managed social center (CSAs), but differ in their choice of practices, strategies and narratives – are compared within the same city context, for both of the cases selected. For each city, the political influence of the actors having opted for DSAs are compared to that of actors that have not. Finally, a comparison between the processes retraced for similar actors in each city will hopefully allow to pinpoint common trends across contexts, and to build a preliminary general theory of the relationship between direct social actions and political outcomes.

3.1.2 Social centers

While in both cities, depending on their background and interactions, different spaces have adopted different courses of action, for all CSAs the crisis has been a critical point of transformation. For some, it has entailed a change in their practices and action focus; for others, the crisis was the trigger that sparked their birth. The application of a political influence framework to this analysis, sets out to explore their varying degrees of impact over municipal politics in the decade following this critical juncture.

For the sake of this work, ten spaces are taken into consideration[22]. The criterion for the selection of self-managed experiences to be analyzed was representativeness. The aim was to achieve a spectrum of spaces as heterogeneous as possible, which is why the research includes social centers' experiences:

  I.   born before and after the crisis
  II.   of varying age compositions (as much as possible, given the type of collective actors, who tend to attract youth)
  III.   resorting to DSAs to different extents (and generally employing a diversified array of practices), as depicted in *Table 3.1*
  IV.   having both embraced and rejected the choice of electoral representation and of running for office
  V.   with more and less media exposure, and varying postures vis-à-vis publicity
  VI.   located within premises having differing locations within the urban environment (city areas) and outlooks (types of building; property rights)

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[22] See *Table 1* in Appendix.

VII. with different ideological backgrounds (though limited to the realm of the left), and hence different histories and attitudes vis-à-vis institutional politics.

Table 3.1 Choice to engage in DSAs among the spaces investigated.

space / use of DSA	Bologna					Naples				
	Crash	Làbas	TPO	Vag61	Xm24	Ex Asilo Filangieri	Ex OPG Je so' Pazzo	Insurgencia	Officina99	Villa Medusa
dominant		●	●		●		●			●
present/ moderate	●			●		●		●		
mostly or completely absent									●	

In Bologna, the selection coincides with all of the self-managed social centers active up to 2019, with the exception of the Circolo Anarchico Berneri. Although I was initially planning to include the Circolo Berneri in this study, this experience, also in light of its ideological foundations, has followed a trajectory that is hardly comparable to those of the other self-managed spaces in the city. The anarchist space "Camillo Berneri" has been located for several decades in a municipal building, under a regular renting contract, and has purposefully remained distant from any institutional dynamics, sought no interaction, nor pursued any outcome with respect to institutional politics. Hence, while the Circolo Berneri is not among the experiences scrutinized in this work, interview and press materials on the space have been analyzed as additional sources on the case of Bologna.

In Naples, given the larger number of active spaces, an additional selection was made, which resulted in the identification of five spaces.

i. Three spaces are included in the 'Delibera sui beni comuni' (municipal Act on the management of Commons), out of a total of 8 spaces identified by the Municipality;
ii. all spaces are located in different neighborhoods and areas of the city, and have distinct political identities;
iii. two have made the choice of electoral representation (though following significantly dissimilar patterns), while the other three have not.

3.2 Methodological Considerations
3.2.1 Process Tracing and Mechanismic Causality

In line with substantial literature that has strongly associated relational approaches to this epistemological and methodological reasoning (Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou 2015), in the present dissertation the investigation of relational dynamics in the urban context unfolds within a mechanism-based research.

Given the comprehensively defined outcome of political influence, this study is willing to explore the trajectories through which different collective actors have politically

influenced local municipal institutions, and particularly to unpack the role played by direct social activism in shaping such processes of influence.

To this end, it employs the method of process tracing (Stinchcome 1995; Mahoney 2000; McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007; (Beach and Pedersen 2013). Processual understandings of the social reality do not conceive causation merely as a regular association between X and Y, controlled for other relevant possible causes (Chalmers 1999: 214; Marini and Singer 1988), but rather focus on the dynamic, interactive influence of causes on outcomes and especially on how causal forces are transmitted through a series of interlocking parts to contribute to producing an outcome (Beach and Pedersen 2013).

Process tracing itself stems from an ontological position in the social sciences that considers the nature of causal relations through a mechanismic understanding (Bennett 2010). The transmission of causal forces from X to Y is theorized to occur through systems of interlocking parts, or "causal mechanisms" (Bunge 1997; Hernes 1998), each part of a causal mechanisms being composed of entities, or factors, engaging in activities that produce change (Machamer 2004). Through each mechanism and each of its sub-parts, X transmits causal forces that together contribute to producing outcomes Y. The explicit conceptualization of the activities that produce change, inherent in the mechanismic approach, allows the research to open the 'black box' of causality, not establishing a mere cause-effect relationship, but tracing the actual processes whereby change is produced.

As a method of causal inference, process tracing entails a theory-guided analysis of whether empirical evidence suggests that a hypothesized causal mechanism was present in a given setting (Beach and Pedersen 2013). However, through the foundational works by McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly (2001) and Tilly & Tarrow (2007), process-tracing has entered the field of social movements studies, and since been fruitfully applied to the study of movement outcomes by numerous scholars (Andrews 2004; Kolb 2007; Bosi 2016). In this respect, it serves, rather, as a method for causal *explanation*. The present work embraces this latter approach, in order to seek out those causal mechanisms that, concatenating over time in different sequences, lead to the outcome of political influence. I adopt the perspective developed by Alimi, Bosi & Demetriou (2012, 2015), according to which different concatenations of mechanisms are themselves broken down, or considered to be constituted by, in different sets of sub-mechanisms. Any given mechanism, Alimi, Bosi & Demetriou assume, can be produced in different contexts by different combinations of sub-mechanisms, unfolding not necessarily prior to the mechanism, but also in synchrony with it, or entertaining a 'loop-like generative pattern' with that mechanism. This treatment of sub-mechanisms captures the particularities of how the same mechanism is constituted in different ways across the objects of study, and "thereby facilitates the understanding of what Falleti and Lynch (2009) call 'portability' of mechanisms from one context to another" (Alimi, Bosi & Demetriou 2015, p. 31). On a similar note, process tracing posits that each part of a mechanism is by itself insufficient to produce an outcome Y, and in conceptualizing causal mechanisms only the parts that are necessary for the mechanisms to produce the outcome are to be acknowledged (Beach and Pedersen 2013). This detailed investigation of the causal story is especially useful to avoid mistaking correlation for causation, and the pitfall of endlessly digressing into ad-hoc and micro-level explanations. In fact, in order to build a theory that can hold outside of its original context, it needs to be possible to argue that the same mechanisms can hypothetically exist in other cases. Thus, although no claims of explanatory sufficiency are made, successful attempts to identify systematic mechanisms in the cases considered can allow process tracing research to go beyond the single case and develop general theories of the phenomena under scrutiny.

Indeed, among the distinctive features of process tracing, is its valuable inductive potential. Having purposefully selected a limited number of city cases, the use of process tracing is the best suited approach for an in-depth investigation of collective actors' pathways, within and across cases. It allows to uncover what mechanisms, amongst a set of plausible ones, is in fact at work and possibly exposed the absence, from empirical observations, of a causal mechanism that the researcher expected to find, and to bring that acknowledgment back into theory development (Vennesson 2008). It provides for the opportunity to reckon the reasons that actors give for their actions, how they conceptualize problems and solutions, how they construe other actors and their social and political environment. The intention behind my epistemological and methodological stances, particularly in light of the object of the research carried out in this dissertation, is well illustrated by the words of Vennesson (2008, p. 233).

> Confronted with the problem of the variety and complexity of human perceptions, preferences and motivations, two types of solutions are available (Simon 1985, 1986, 1995; Frieden 1999: 53–66; Scharpf 2006). One option is to make assumptions about actors' preferences and perceptions. The researcher relies on common-sense intuition or deductive reasoning and makes a judgement call on their plausible or reasonable character (Simon 1985: 297). Hence, there is no point in process tracing. The other option is to acknowledge that preferences and perceptions are empirical questions that only a painstaking empirical investigation can uncover (Simon 1985: 298, 300). From this perspective, it is not enough to add theoretical assumptions about the shape of the utility function, about the actor's expectations or about their attention to their environment. In social sciences, these assumptions must be submitted to a careful empirical test. By using process tracing in this way, a connection that appears as only plausible, or ad hoc, can be integrated in a broader framework with a more consistent overall logic.

Acknowledging the theoretical debate around the notion of mechanism (see Demetriou 2012), the methodological approach of the present thesis embraces the framework suggested by Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou (2012, 2015), which defines mechanisms based not on a distinct antecedent mode, but on their distinct emergent effect. In other words, a mechanism is deemed to exist when its effect is produced, "without this meaning that the effect is produced by some predefined constellation of antecedent events or pattern of interaction" (Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou 2012, p. 9).

The research strategy developed by Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou is particularly compelling, also, on account of the relational way in which it deals with the social context of mechanisms. The reconciliation between structure and agency is a recurring dilemma in the social sciences. Criticizing the limitedness of structural models, Jasper (2004) has addressed this conundrum with the concept of "structured arenas", promoting a study of strategic choices taking into more serious account their cultural and institutional contexts[23]. Fligstein and McAdam (2012) have put forth a theory of fields, in which fields are constituted by interactions among various groups who seek to gain advantageous positions[24]. Field theory has contributed to a more dynamic thinking; however, Fligstein and McAdam's framework considers the aggregate of interactions, which, as claimed by King (2015), does now allow for within-group distinctions and the seeking of how relative positions are formed. Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou move this reasoning into a different direction, recognizing the existence of a constitutive

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[23] On the one hand, Jasper argues, structured arenas shape players and players' decisions and interactions. On the other hand, choices, interactions, all strategic actions and their outcomes are filtered through cultural understandings, while at the same time cultural meanings are used strategically to persuade audiences (*ibid.*).

[24] Fields, in their framework, are structured into 'incumbents' (holding a position of power or advantage) and 'challengers' (vying to disrupt fields), as the rules of the game come to develop within the field. A governance unit as the state, Fligstein and McAdam have posited, emerges to reduce conflict and ensure stability across multiple fields.

relationship between mechanisms and their social context. They term mechanisms' social context 'arenas of interaction' and offer an actor-based conceptualization, in which they consider interacting actors (with their roles and positions of power), rather than the 'rules of the game' proposed by Fligstein and McAdam, as the key elements comprising the context of a mechanism (Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou 2015). The present work draws upon this perspective, while also acknowledging the overlap between different arenas of interaction in the unfolding of single dynamics. While Alimi, Bosi and Demetriou, set out to identify distinct mechanisms for single arenas of interaction, the present research, recognizing actors and their mutual interactions as the structuring agent of social contexts, adopts a nuanced approach, embracing the potential of mechanisms to span multiple arenas. The processes of political influence retraced in these pages, unfold through sequences of causal mechanisms. The effect of each causal mechanism is produced in a specific arena of interaction. Thus, in this respect, distinct causal mechanisms are identified for single arenas. At the same time, mechanisms are comprised of a series of interlocking sub-mechanisms, which result from a complex prism of dynamics, occurring both within and outside that specific arena of interaction, and capturing the interactions of collective actors, institutional actors, and society at large in their mutual combinations.

Some valid methodological contributions on process tracing (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 2019) have sought to systematize the different possible research approaches of this method, particularly distinguishing between theory testing, theory building, and explaining-outcome process tracing. In this respect, this dissertation could be defined as a theory-building research work. However, while this distinction remains a useful theoretical underpinning, the thesis can be better described through its analytical progression. The starting point of this research lies in the recognition of the analytical interest of two city cases, presenting noteworthy empirical manifestations of influence of the CSAs on institutional politics. In other words, the research stems from an interest in investigating the processes that have occurred within two city cases (therefore is in this sense is case-centric), by specifically exploring their political influence through the lens of the crisis, which has prompted many social centers to engage in DSAs, during a time in which many self-managed spaces have also made choice of political representation, and urban regimes and political organizations have been put significantly under strain. The research process then progresses with the search for the causal mechanisms and sub-mechanisms that shape and push forward the development of multiple and different influence trajectories in each environment, exploring the relationship between direct social actions and political outcomes. Interest of this work is not to retrace the mechanisms through which single policy changes have come to light or single issues have been brought to the table, although the effort to reconstruct such dynamics is a key step to the study. Rather, as an end goal this research is seeking the mechanisms that have shaped the different overall configurations of political influence of self-managed spaces in the two cities – defined and investigated through the three dimensions detailed in the previous chapter. This is why the focus is placed on tracing mechanisms and sub-mechanisms that go beyond the dynamics of single struggles or single interactions between State and collective actors, in the attempt to instead capture, as accurately as possible, the composite sequence of dynamics that have shaped the different pathways of influence of each actor on local institutional politics. This research thus sets out to retrace such trajectories as a whole, devoting a particular attention to the role played, in this setting, by the choice of DSAs.

Finally, the end goal to which the thesis aims is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between political practices and influence, building a preliminary mechanismic theory of political influence. Starting from empirics, in light of the evidence

collected on each of the two cases, I look for the main causal mechanisms that the different observed empirical manifestations reflect and seek similarities and dissimilarities both within and across cases.

3.2.2 Possible methodological limitations

Every scholar engaging in movement outcomes research needs to be aware of the methodological constraints and risks of such field. This is especially true in the matter of attributing causality.

One challenging aspect relates to the policy dimension of movement influence. In fact, to establish an actor's impact on institutional decision-making, requires demonstrating that a specific piece of legislation, policy change or institutional decision would not have occurred in the absence of the movement, or if the collective actor had chosen a different strategy. The same needs to be shown for movement impact during the other – even more ineffable – phases of the decision-making process: showing, in other words, that a certain matter would have not been placed on the political agenda; or that certain configurations of policy development would have not emerged. In order to do so, research needs to either establish, quantitatively, that a solid correlation exists between movement action and policy change – and that a cause-effect relationship can be inferred, controlling for other intervening variables –, or to retrace, qualitatively, the process through which a given policy came into being, providing evidence that collective action was a necessary determinant of that process.

Thus, already, attributing policy outcomes to a collective actor is hardly a simple endeavor. Then, if the outcome of interest is the wider spectrum of political influence of an actor (that is, its institutional outcomes beyond just policy), a similar reasoning needs to be applied to other dimensions of impact. For example, the obtainment of greater access to the decision-making process on the part of a collective actor. Attribution of causality, there, entails establishing that a valid and necessary link exists between some specific, interlocking dynamics and the actual attainment of that outcome. Similarly, when seeking to retrace the recognition of a collective actor (or, conversely, its lack of acceptance) by institutional actors, a thorough research needs to account for the role of specific mechanisms in the formation of certain institutional attitudes, and to argue convincingly that such attitudes were formed as a result of those very dynamics.

All of this is complicated by the fact that, typically, multiple actors operate in the same political arenas, hence a variety of actors may have influenced the outcomes under scrutiny (Amenta et al. 2010). With respect to policy, for one, placing the focus on specific areas of policy interest (and the claims) of a given actor, can help to narrow the field of potential explanatory factors in accounting for outcomes. However, this should not lead researchers into a perception of linearity. Even in highly localized or confined matters, in which movement actors appear – in the public and media debate, at least – as the main actors involved, a number of other, and less visible actors are at play (and exerting pressures on institutions). For instance, in the matter of public spaces' concessions in city environments, relevant actors are at play other than movement organizations – private property owners, civil society organizations competing for the same spaces as SMOs, urban planning contractors. In turn, these actors can lobby to institutional actors to achieve certain goals (either in accordance or, often, conflicting with those of movement actors). Thus, other actors and dynamics also impact the trajectories that lead to achieving or not achieving a given outcome, and should also be acknowledged. If this is already true for very localized policy matters, it follows that an even greater complexity accompanies more encompassing

issues, such as social inclusion, housing rights, or environmental struggles, only to name a few.

Similarly, when it comes to movement recognition, not only can third party actors influence institutional attitudes (for example, if a SMO gains societal consensus, or established actors broker to institutions on its behalf), but the attitudes of the institutional elite towards different collective actors can be mutually impactful. In this respect, then, the institutional recognition or acceptance obtained by one collective actor, can be related to that obtained by other actors. Analogous complications can arise while retracing the degree of access to institutions earned by a collective actor. All in all, if the purpose is to retrace the processes by which actors have attained certain outcomes (in the present work, varying extents of political influence), the methodological issues related to attributing causality need to be addressed by thoroughly identifying and linking the causal mechanisms composing the actors' trajectories. Process tracing is not a fully exhaustive effort – interpretive choices are made as to which dimensions are analytically worth exploring and highlighting, and only the mechanisms found as strictly necessary to produce the outcome are reported. However, it allows the researcher to get close and deep into the empirical reality, and to collect rich sets of evidence. Therefore, leveraging the potentialities of this methodology, the present dissertation sets out to mitigate these methodological challenges by making the most out of empirical evidence. This entails purposefully crossing different sources' accounts and actors' perspectives, gathered relying on primary documents, including interviews and testimonies, as well as news accounts.

Additional research design choices contribute to minimizing methodological challenges. Here, in particular, a small number of cases is examined in depth, and the variation in the elements deemed most influential in the determination of the outcome is maximized (as suggested, among others, by King, Keohane & Verba 1994). Conditions vary within cases – the adoption of different forms of action, the backgrounds of the collective actors investigated – and across city cases, in dimensions such as socioeconomic environment, and State-movement interaction regimes (which have also differed, although not radically, in the two cases throughout the timespan considered). In cross-cut, comparisons are drawn between similar collective actors, mobilizing in different forms and adopting different strategies to movement-state interactions, at the same place and time (see Clemens 1997); and between similar actors, mobilizing across different city contexts around the same time.

3.3 Data sources and collection

My fieldwork period in Bologna and Naples stretched from late 2018 to early 2021, with an interruption of several months in between due to Covid-19.

In Bologna, I initially conducted some observation in institutional settings, particularly during sessions of the Council committees on matters directly related to the city's collective actors. Council committees are a much more informal, interactive and intimate setting than the city Council plenary sessions. Although I had a good understanding of the local institutional dynamics to begin with (and was thus largely familiar with the public and formal stances of the different elected officials), my goal during this time was to further familiarize with the more informal facets of the interactions between the institutional elite and movement actors, as well as the role of potential third parties. In this perspective, I observed several committee sessions involving brokering actors or actors concerned, in different ways, by questions overlapping with the city's movement actors' claims and activity (such as welfare and solidarity initiatives, public spaces' concessions, urban planning). I watched the unfolding of interactions among elected officials of different affiliations – interactions that tend to me

much more genuine and relaxed in this context –, as well as between elected officials and activists. This was made possible by the relatively small dimensions of Bologna's municipal machine and the limited number of institutional and movement actors.

In Naples, conversely, the number of different council groupings, the heterogeneity of the Council's composition and overall political landscape, and the variable configuration of the administrative coalition, are different and more complex, and thus call for alternative research strategies than those utilized for the Bolognese case. I started by watching recordings of the city Council's plenary sessions from the current legislature, to get more directly acquainted with the different issues arising in the local institutional debate, and with the stances of the various political groupings and single elected officials. I then moved to the field, with the intent to start familiarizing with the local social centers' landscape, establish relationships with activist and gather contacts for later interviews with elected officials. This strategy proved especially useful since, contrary to the case of Bologna, I had no prior links with either activists or elected officials. It allowed me to get to know the local context more closely, and to perform a selection of interviewees amongst a vast overview of institutional and movement actors.

The knowledge acquired through these initial stages provided an insightful background to then dig into the gathering of empirical data. The material collected during the research consists of interviews and multiple documental sources. On the one hand, the empirical data consist of 37 semi-structured interviews conducted with local activists, elected officials, and key informants from the two cities. On the other hand, a set of documents and materials, comprised of: the local press articles mentioning each of the spaces throughout the 2005-2019 timespan, materials produced by social centers themselves, and institutional documents (including policy and formal acts, transcripts, reports). Lastly, these sources were integrated with field notes and observation in some of the CSAs and during institutional meetings.

3.3.1 Qualitative Interviews Design

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted in the two cities, with both activists and elected officials (in addition to a small integration of interviews with key informants). This type of interviewing provides for a close investigation of the empirical reality, deeply sensitive to nuance, meanings and context. In this respect, it is especially suitable for the sample size, involved actors, and overarching qualitative research approach adopted in the present work.

This process has resulted in a corpus of 37 interviews[25]. Out of a total of 35 interviewees[26], 19 are social center activists (9 in Bologna, 10 in Naples); 13 are elected officials from the current and/or the last administrative mandate (6 in Bologna, 7 in Naples); 3 are key informants from academia, journalism and/or municipal bureaucracy. Further details are accounted for in *Appendix*.

The potential participants that were contacted almost always agreed to an interview. Activists and elected officials were mainly targeted based on their respective positions in their field of political action, the pivotal criterion being the representativeness of the perspectives to be collected. In this respect, I made sure to engage with interviewees of different demographics and political pathways. Interviewees were heterogeneous in terms of gender,

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[25] A selection has been operated based on relevance out of a slightly higher total of interviews conducted.
[26] In two instances, while checking and transcribing data, I found that interviews needed a follow-up, hence a second round was held with the same interviewees.

age[27], occupation, political background, and affiliation. The latter element, illustrated in detail in *Table 3.2*, was particularly relevant for the interviews to elected officials. In Bologna, interviews were conducted with members of about all the Council groupings and parties present, with a particular emphasis on opposition groupings. In Naples, Council groupings are more numerous and frequently vary; what is more, the number of councilors that are part of the joint group (or *gruppo misto* – that is, the groupings of elected officials not adhering to any of the other groupings) is considerable. Therefore, interviewees were selected based on their political affiliation, with the intent to provide for as heterogeneous a sample as possible: representatives were interviewed from right-wing, left-wing and centrist, both mainstream and 'populist', political formations.

Table 3.2 Institutional interviewees' political affiliation.

City	Grouping / party	Political area
Bologna	Lega	Radical right
	Fratelli d'Italia (formerly, Forza Italia grouping)	Radical right (formerly, center-right)
	"Insieme Bologna"	Center-right
	Five Star Movement (M5S)	/
	Democratic Party (PD)	Center-left
	"Coalizione Civica"	Left
Naples	Forza Italia	Center-right
	"La Città"	Center
	Five Star Movement (M5S)	/
	Democratic Party (PD)	Center-left
	"Napoli in Comune a Sinistra"	Left
	DEMA (Democrazia e Autonomia)	Left-populist

The interviewing phase of fieldwork occurred simultaneously for the two city cases. Being based in Bologna for the majority of my fieldwork period, I undertook several trips to Naples for interviews. Interviews were conducted in person all throughout 2019 in the two cities, then in blended mode (both online or by telephone, and in person, depending on the circumstances), throughout 2020 and early 2021.

Interviews lasted on average one hour, with single durations varying from forty-five minutes to two and a half hours. As a general rule, I have not found the shift from face-to-face to online and telephone interviews to have shortened participants' responses. Nonetheless, it did make the overall interaction with interviewees more uneasy, requesting an additional effort of empathy, and more frequent cues (on both my part and the interviewee's) as to how the meeting was proceeding, to make sure that our dialogue was on point. Certainly, trust and open conversations were more easily established during face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, due to the work and personal constraints posed by the pandemic, interviews were often difficult to arrange, even online or by telephone.

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[27] It should be noted that, with respect to social centers' activists, interviewees were on average rather young (usually in their 20s and 30s), but a few activists in their 40s, 50s and 60s were also interviewed.

The interview guides followed an identical template for the two city cases. Interviews to social centers' activists and elected officials drew upon similar theoretical coordinates, but were tailored to the role and position of each category of interviewees in the city political environment. On the one hand, activists were asked among others about the history, evolutions and turning points of their space and the space's practices, the interactions between their space and city institutions, as well as what they perceive to be the outcomes of their collective action. Elected officials' interviews, on the other hand, consisted of colloquia with politicians from different groupings of the Council, as well as with prominent appointed figures in the administration (cabinet members, called *assessori*). Much like activist interviews, the interviews with institutional actors were built according to the three defining dimensions of political influence. After a set of introductory questions on their political background, local politicians were asked to map the social centers in their city, recounting the experiences that they were aware of, and what they perceived as the evolutions or changes of the social centers' landscape over time. Then, they were asked about their attitudes towards different self-managed spaces, about their interactions with them, and to what extent they believed that, during the last decade, each experience has impacted policy, gained access to decision-making, or obtained recognition. This work was integrated with targeted interactions with key informants from city bureaucracy, the local press, and academia. The purpose of such interactions was to complement, and provide further background and links to the main interviews.

Literature has suggested some aspects that should be paid particular attention (see Berry 2002), in order to minimize issues with elite interviewing and open-ended questioning. Throughout the research process, two caveats appeared especially relevant to the present work. The first, was to avoid falling into the illusion of higher objectivity when an interviewee appears more articulate, or simply somehow more likeable to the person conducting the interview. Granted, I was largely interested in the interviewees' point of view (their specific recollections, perspectives and attitudes), and was never expecting to extract objective truth from their accounts – still, to bear this in mind was useful to identify my own biases as they arose during interactions, and challenged me to not stand back from asking further questions when necessary. The second caveat was to triangulate multiple sources, and maintain a critical approach to the emerging empirical material and contents. Researching facts and events before (and beyond) interviewees' accounts is, of course, pivotal. During interviews, it can also be helpful to move away from asking participants about their specific role or impact, and include questions on the role of other actors in the same processes. One very useful technique, also recommended by Berry (2002), consists in asking the subject to critique their own case (in this case questioning, for example, the diverging perspective of other political forces or institutional figures).

3.3.2 Document Analysis

The analysis of selected contents produced by the collective actors considered (flyers, policy proposals and other released materials) was matched by a careful review of institutional contents relating to areas of concern to CSAs, especially in matters of social and environmental policy and relating to the concession of public spaces. Policy acts, administrative documents and formal reports have been analyzed, as well as meeting transcripts, speeches and interventions carried out by elected officials during public institutional gatherings (council sessions and committees).

The contents retrieved have been scrutinized with two main aims. The first, was to help pinpoint time references for the evolution of the interactions between the Municipality and

CSAs, across different negotiation and decision-making phases. The second, was to identify possible congruences between CSAs claims and struggles, and the frames and actions of the Municipality.

At the same time, a rich bulk of press material was collected and analyzed. On the one hand, the press statements released by both self-managed spaces and institutional actors, throughout the decade. On the other hand, all of the local press articles discussing, to different extents, the social centers considered. For each city, I have selected two daily publications from which to extract contents. In Bologna, the local edition of the traditionally progressive national newspaper *Repubblica* (Repubblica Bologna), and the long-standing, rooted, city best-selling conservative newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino*. In Naples, Repubblica Napoli and the right-leaning *Il Mattino*, amongst the most read newspapers in the South of Italy. I have chosen to also look, through the papers' search engines, for articles dating back to before the post-crisis decade. The aim here was to grasp the evolution of collective actors' representation and their public interaction with institutional actors, and how the pre-crisis period could compare to the post-crisis one. I therefore set the search parameters to include all pieces published since the early 2000s, whenever available, up until early 2020 (before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic). After retrieving all the pieces containing the name of each movement actor, articles were explored and selected based on their relevance (discarding, for example, articles containing the name of a CSA by accident, for instance when the same word referred to something else). Notes were taken about all pieces purposefully mentioning the actors under scrutiny, including city events agendas and pieces mentioning CSAs in passing. Then, the content of the remaining articles was analyzed, based on the latter's density. Naturally, press accounts were a useful source of information about the main events involving urban collective actors and their interactions with municipal politics, particularly from a media perspective, which also tends to include voices from the more general city public. They also served as a rich collector of public statements from political and prominent local figures. But in addition, this work yielded a variety of significant data and metadata, from the media coverage of given collective actors in time, to the relevant frames mobilized to portray them, to the identification of hegemonic discourses and implicit assumptions about such actors in the city mainstream debate.

Overall, the combination of these different sources, complementary and often contradictory, was designed to draw a rich picture of how different actors in the urban context perceive movement outcomes, how they make sense of the mechanisms that produce them (through frames, for example) and how they attribute causality. At the same time, while serving as a carrier of subjective constructions and representations of reality, documental evidence has also provided the factual backdrop against which the political influence of urban collective actors can be assessed. Some institutional acts and deliberations speak to how social centers have gained formalized access to decision-making; other administrative documents and reports can show how they have impacted specific policy changes; materials such as transcripts, statements and press releases attest the extent to which they have obtained recognition or acceptance from the institutional elite.

3.4 Ethical concerns and researcher positionality

Since the very first contacts with interviewees, I offered information on the focus of the research, the nature of the questions to be discussed during interviews, and how the data would be used. However, anonymity has also been provided to all interviewees. I was always transparent, with activists and institutional interviewees alike, about the fact that only their

role would be (partially) disclosed in the thesis, and have purposefully treated the data in ways that prevent their personal identification as much as possible.

With respect to activists, this was mainly a matter of good practice, the fundamental objective being to safeguard interviewees from legal and political repercussions. For one, accounts of activists' participation in riots and occupations can threaten interviewees' personal freedom, especially in the case of ongoing judicial proceedings. But, in addition to legal concerns, the interviews conducted for this thesis are also highly politically sensitive. They entail inquiring about movement activists' interactions with institutional figures, be they positive or negative, genuine or instrumental, carried out publicly or under the radar. The contents emerging from interviews have the potential to jeopardize ongoing negotiations and relationships with institutional actors, as well as other movement actors. In sum, all of these aspects can be highly useful to uncover, but a balance needs to be found in order for activists – and movement organizations as a whole – to not suffer repercussions due to their willingness to discuss openly with a researcher.

As for meetings with elected officials' and key informants, some interviewees did directly ask to remain anonymous, precisely to not suffer negative consequences or compromise their political relationships and their work situation. In itself, this element already prompted the ethical need to harmonize the entire categories, respectively, of institutional interviewees and key informants. However, the choice to anonymize all interviews also stemmed from an encompassing analytical rationale, which particularly applies to the more numerous elected officials' interviews. For the most part, elected officials tend to presume (and, at times, explicitly declare, as it happened throughout this study) that the statements they make during interviews on a given matter, are the same that they would make (or have made) publicly. Surely, this can be the case, either if elected officials have little interest for the object of the interview – and are thus unable or simply unwilling to go into further detail about it –, or, conversely, they are particularly interested in imposing a specific narrative on the matter – and therefore care about repeatedly conveying a certain message. However, as a level of trust is established through the offering of anonymity, and proper time is allotted to explore a given question, most elected officials are induced to go beyond the surface level that often characterizes brief public statements. Anonymity provides interviewees with the opportunity to speak more freely, which likely results in the sharing of more information than would have been shared in a non-anonymized interview. Of course, interviewees still select what they say and can operate strategically. Savvier career politicians, especially, may likely seize this opportunity to influence the researcher's viewpoint on a given matter – and thereby, the researcher's later account of that same matter – in a subtle yet direct way, by leveraging a context of informality. However, the more familiar the researcher is with the questions that are being discussed, and with the specific public stances of that interviewee, the more this approach allows to dig deeper into the issues and collect an array of insightful metadata. From there, new and more complex questions can arise for the researcher to reflect upon, as to how and why the interviewee is choosing to influence the narrative a certain way.

One challenging aspect throughout the process, which called for serious reflection, had to do with my own positionality as a researcher. As I delved into my PhD and engaged, first, with the scholarly work on social movements, and later with social movements themselves during fieldwork, I was confronted with an array of concepts and research angles that were largely new to my experience. For most of my higher education, I had dealt with political parties, and with economic and public policy literature. My interest for what goes on inside institutions, and for how different forms of political activism and actors can work to produce change, naturally translated into how I wished to tackle social movements in my research.

In this sense, I have found a most stimulating combination in the crossroads that is the literature on collective action outcomes, particularly in the investigation of the dimensions of movement impact over political institutions. Not only because this is where my interest tends to naturally fall, but also because, very soon into my path within the social movement domain, I have encountered widespread reticence in addressing State-movement interactions. Overall, a stigma exists in social movement scholarship around certain aspects that, in actuality, attest to a significant influence of collective actors over representative politics. Cooperation with institutional actors is one of these elements. Surely, it is addressed by literature: in some cases, in very innovative and critical ways, but in many other cases through a rigid view of contention, accompanied by the underlying idea that getting closer to institutions and governmental power threatens, per se, the survival of movements. In this work, I do not attribute a normative connotation to different degrees or dimensions of political influence, but I do argue that some elements are indicative of collective actors' influence and potential for change, and that research should engage further with the black box of movements' institutional influence. This posture, I reckon, is very much influenced by my academic background.

Moreover, my personal experience of political activism is deeply entrenched in party militancy. For the sake of the dissertation, this aspect was especially relevant with respect to the Bologna case, and overall, to my positioning as a researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study. I was born and have lived most of my life in the city of Bologna – therefore, it is an environment that I know extremely well, but about which I also hold very rooted and defined views, which inevitably pour into my research. A second element, then, concern my own activism journey. I have been a member of the Democratic Party from a young age, and held positions within the local party branch for several years. During my most intense years of political engagement, I worked full-time in the local party's press office. I was thus working with the party's higher management, and privy to relevant information, when the question of social centers and occupations became pivotal in the local debate, not only with respect to the city political landscape, but even more so, as a fracture line between internal party factions. As a consequence, while conducting research a few years later, I was able to bring in first-hand knowledge on the issues and actors under study. Back in the day, I was struck by the amplitude and potential of the social centers' question in the local political debate. However, translating this interest into research, has entailed dismantling the conception – predominant at the time, especially in some party factions – of social centers as merely instrumental assets of political rhetoric. My aim has been not so much to discard political cynicism altogether, nor to embrace a romantic view of collective action, but rather to investigate the concrete impact of these actors and their agency, and shed light on the actual effects of such highly contested interactions between collective actors and institutional politics. Still, I had to question how to address my background when approaching different actors, as well as engage in self-reflective work to unpack the different elements of my own posture.

One issue relates to transparency and access. As a general rule, in both Bologna and Naples I have disclosed and openly discussed my political background with interviewees whenever some kind of link was established, or more in-depth and lengthier conversation occurred. Aside from interviewees I already knew, my political orientation was often inferred or hypothesized based on the contact persons that reached out to potential interviewees on my behalf. In Bologna, for right-wing interviewees that I did not know directly, I relied on contact persons who could implicitly suggest my political affiliation without explicitly disclosing it, in order to preserve the quality and contents of the perspective interview. With

members of the Democratic Party, my role as a researcher was at times viewed ambivalently, as, to some, investigating social centers implied a positive political stance towards those collective actors, and therefore a specific positioning within the landscape of internal party factions. However, this did not create any particular challenges overall. A second issue, then, concerns reflexivity, and how I epistemologically approach the questions and actors in the research. Undeniably, my education and political background have both played a role in shaping the focus selections of this dissertation, and, likely, the ways in which phenomena have been made sense of. Especially in an interpretive analytical study such as this one, there is no way around the fact that the social reality is filtered through the lens of the researcher's experience. This awareness has further nurtured the imperative to place the scope of this dissertation into a wider perspective, acknowledging that the movement impact is investigated here does not equate the full picture of collective action outcomes. Methodologically, the strong focus of the dissertation on the triangulation of perspectives and accounts to support analytical claims, is also purposefully aimed at tackling this aspect[28]. At the same time, it is precisely through these education and political experiences, that I have come to appreciate the timeliness and relevance of this thesis' topic. Active militancy and a study background centered on governmental institutions, provide some useful tools to reckon the interest of addressing the political influence of urban collective actors and the relevance of innovative practices, at times of economic, social and political crisis.

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[28] Throughout the research, I have also devoted significant effort to the engaging of a dialogue with activists and other informed parties, combining and contrasting their inputs with academic theory and feedbacks, so as to shape a perspective of the phenomena under scrutiny as rich and nuanced as possible.

Chapter 4. The crisis, Italy and the need for change

The interest for this research stems from a reasoning on the multiple meanings of the 2008 global crisis. On the one hand, the critical manifestation of the contradictions inherent to the economic system driven by neoliberal capitalism and the financialization of the economy. On the other hand, an accelerating and amplifying determinant for long-standing trends in the social and political arena: phenomena such as the progressive decline of political organizations (van Biezen and Poguntke 2014), the crisis of trust in representative democracy and institutions (della Porta 2013; Tormey 2014), the deepening of social disintegration, but also the dissemination of alternative, non-mediated forms of political engagement. In other words, a crisis that is undeniably economic, pervasively social, but also deeply political.

Much academic attention has been devoted to the Great Recession as the trigger of changes in both political systems and societies at large (Kriesi 2012). Indeed, scholarship has acknowledged the crisis as a key factor of change and closely inquired the forms of engagement that have developed as a consequence of it. Several of these practices result from the combination of long-established trends (such as the declining trust in governmental institutions) with political demands centered around increasing disintermediation, and the need for a higher sense of self-efficacy and impact potential in political involvement.

With the crisis, issues of inequality, poverty and social exclusion have notably climbed the political agenda, as a response to both increasing socio-economic distress and strong pressures from the public opinion. Meanwhile, local solidarity-based, resilience-driven initiatives have developed rapidly and across the political spectrum, especially in the Southern European countries suffering the recession's greater economic and social impact. In that, the crisis has contributed to the enrichment of the repertoire of political action (Zamponi and Bosi 2018b)[29], and thus the grassroots mobilizations and practices that have developed in Southern Europe in its aftermath crisis have been substantially investigated. Among these are particularly solidarity-based initiatives (Karakioulafis & Kanellopoulos 2018) and plentiful forms of collective engagement centered on the idea of economic resilience (Kousis and Paschou 2017). Alternative action organizations (or AAOs), for one, have provided individuals with alternative ways of addressing their everyday needs in hard economic times, when dominant practices are either ineffective or inaccessible (Loukakis 2018; Uba and Kousis 2018). However, while their grounding aims and their forms have been insightfully discussed by scholarship, a systematic reflection is still lacking on how these practices translate into collective outcomes.

Another element that has been pervasive – though with varying intensities across countries – throughout the long wave of anti-austerity mobilizations sparked by the burst of the Great Recession (della Porta 2017; Flesher Fominaya & Hayes 2018), across the world but especially in Southern Europe, is its relationship to democracy. In a general framework of declining trust in conventional politics and growing demands for renewed forms of participation and representation, the crisis made the long-term trend of vertical transformation of democratic structures much more visible to the general public (see Lavenex 2013), as the responsibility for the ravaging effects of the crisis fell, at best in part, on already highly de-legitimized political institutions. Anti-austerity mobilizations radically

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[29]   In turn, the explicit acknowledgment of the crisis in a collective narrative appears inextricably linked to the choice of practices (Bosi & Zamponi 2019).

criticized the mechanisms of representative democracy, and experimented innovative forms of organization in the streets.

This emphasis of collective action on democratic institutions is particularly relevant. As they took the streets, anti-austerity protesters aimed at impacting and transforming the structures of democracy, and demanded more transparency, participation, representativeness. They reacted to a longer and diffused crisis of political organizations and the channels of democratic representation. That contestation unveiled a longer trend of deterioration in what citizens around the world perceived their politics to have become. This malaise was not started by the crisis, but exploded with it. In this respect, the crisis was a critical juncture that marked a tipping point. A new relationship to democracy and political participation was needed – collective actors have sought and explored it.

This fourth chapter contextualizes some of the key trends and actors on which the burst of the crisis has insisted. Section 4.1 begins by presenting the Great Recession and its economic and social impact on Italy. Section 4.2 delves into the longer trends of electoral politics and representation and their relationship to the crisis; notably, it focuses on electoral behavior, the evolution of governments and the party system, and the crisis of political parties. Section 4.3 addresses the role of collective action within the crisis, from the initial stage of the mobilizations against austerity, to later forms of contentious politics. This section notably discusses Direct Social Action, as defined by Bosi and Zamponi (2019), and locates it as a key object of study within the broader layout of the dissertation. Indeed, the regeneration of politics in times of crisis through the adoption of widened repertoires of action, and through a renewed role for specific social groups such as youth, has been a highly addressed question in academic research (Carini and Costa 2013; Merkel and Kneip 2018; Morlino and Piana 2014; Morlino and Raniolo 2017; della Porta & Mattoni 2014). At the same time, within the rich body of literature on the political influence of movements, some scholars have sought to understand how different forms of action may generate different effects. However, works following this line of enquiry have for the most part distinguished between radical and moderate, more and less disruptive forms of action (as extensively argued by Katrin Uba 2005), although the repertoire of actions of social movements is exceptionally rich and diverse. This has left largely unanswered the question of how specific political practices empower collective actors to bring about change. The aim of this dissertation, then, is to explore the role of Direct Social Actions in shaping political influence. Lastly, Section 4.4 is devoted to presenting the type of actors investigated in this work – that is, self-managed social centers (CSAs). The section discusses the unique history of Italian social centers, clarifying their evolutions during the years of the crisis and the interest of investigating these actors, especially in light of the broader contextualization offered by the chapter. In fact, the peculiar configuration of social centers, as entities simultaneously outside and well within their time, outside of society's conventional frameworks and simultaneously engaging in practices of social transformation, resonates deeply with an era marked by both deconstruction and propulsions towards change.

4.1 Setting the stage: the Great Recession

In a neo-institutionalist sense, a crisis is described as a shock to the institutional order – understood as the 'rules of the game' (North 1990) or as normative regimes (Mayntz 2012) – that seems unmanageable through established strategies: this also implies that a crisis can, although it doesn't have to, entail some form of institutional change. Over time, several competing theories and interpretations of this crisis have been put forth by the main economic traditions, in the attempt to determine what a crisis is and how – or whether – it

can be solved. While neo-classical explanations read the crisis as a systemic distortion and thus seek to re-establish market equilibrium, (neo-)Marxist theorists identify the crisis as an unavoidable development of the capitalist system, a failure of the economic and political relations of production embedded in capitalism, and particularly its intrinsic objective to produce surplus and profit (Heinrich 2013). In this perspective, the 2008 crisis has been read as the temporary peak in a process of crisis of late capitalism that originated in the 1970s and has not yet come to its end (Streeck 2013). Drawing upon Habermas' (1975) theorization, (neo-)Marxists see the economic, the political and the socio-cultural spheres as deeply interconnected and mutually dependent (Kiess 2014) and the crisis of 21st century capitalism is deemed to come from within society itself. Indeed, although they are far from exhausting the complex spectrum of effects prompted by this juncture, economic understandings of the Great Recession have prevailed in public discourse across the decade.

In strictly economic terms, the Great Recession sparked between 2007 and 2008 with the US subprime mortgage crisis. Commercial and investment banks that had profited from the run-up of housing prices in the first half of the decade, found themselves confronted with a virtually unprecedented decline of housing prices and the consequent drop of securities backed by mortgages. This resulted in outright failures and emergency rescues for several financial giants. The crisis quickly migrated from Wall Street to Main Street, pushing the U.S. – and soon the world – economy into a deep recession. By many measures, the financial crisis of 2007 to 2009 caused the deepest recession in more than 50 years. The propagation of this crisis to Europe began as a financial shock, entailing severe shortages of bank liquidity, and rapidly translated into a dramatic state debt crisis (Kiess 2014). The choice of the European Union and of a number of national governments to engage in austerity policies, with the aim to reduce deficit and public debt, aggravated an already severe recession for many peripheral countries (Pianta 2012).

At the same time, on the social side, the combination of economic recession, credit crunch and austerity policies significantly impacted individuals' everyday life, from material living conditions to social ties. Economic hardship thus also provided ground for acute political crises. While, on the one hand, European democracies witnessed a decline of traditional and electoral political participation, the crisis also acted as a trigger for collective action and grievances.

Italy, for its part, suffered milder financial consequences with respect to the banking system collapses occurred in countries such as Iceland and Ireland, or the burst of the housing bubble in countries like Spain (Zamponi and Bosi 2018b). Similarly, given its history of out-of-proportion public debt, and its long trail of expenditure containment policies carried out at a national level (Pavolini et al. 2015), Italy was indeed subject to significant austerity measures in response to the crisis, but did not experience the same shock effects of other European countries. However, the crisis accelerated the long-standing process of Italian industrial and productive decline (Ciocca 2010; Pianta 2012), causing a drastic decrease in production, amplifying inequalities and destroying almost a million jobs at the peak of crisis. Between 2008 and 2013, the effects of the crisis were especially tangible. The labor market was most affected, with unemployment reaching a peak of 12% among the general population (more than 3 million) and approximately 40% among Italy's youth. The significant decrease in employment rates particularly affected youth, but also workers with low education levels and workers with foreign citizenship. Measures such as the extension of *cassa integrazione guadagni* (redundancy fund), mainly limited to the Northern regions of Italy, and the reliance on unreformed unemployment benefits, leaving out many fixed term contracts and atypical workers, "have reinforced the dual nature of the Italian job market

and social protection system: young employees and workers of small firms on the one side, middle-aged and medium or big firms' workers on the other" (Baldini and Ciani 2011, p. 318). Expectedly, while fiscal constraints and lack of structural reforms depressed an already sluggish economy, the GDP fell, and individual and household final consumption expenditure decreased.

Poverty levels also rose. While the at-risk-of-poverty indicator (AROP) – for which the poverty line is set at 60% of the median of the equivalized income distribution – remained fairly constant since the bust of the crisis, the incidence of income-based absolute poverty and severe material deprivation (SMD) rose much more steeply during the 2007-2017 period (Cutillo, Raitano and Siciliani 2020).[30]

However, the facets of material deprivation experienced by Italians since the upsurge of the crisis are numerous and go beyond income poverty itself. Multidimensional approaches to the analysis of living conditions in Italy during the crisis outline further issues relating to maintenance capacity, consumption deprivation, health status, housing situation (Coromaldi and Zoli 2011).

4.2 Electoral politics and political parties

The impact of the crisis has been addressed by academic literature across a prism of angles, as its potential for change involves a wide range of dimensions. One is the realm of representative and electoral politics.

The relationship between democratic discontent and voting is, in itself, a complex one, and is at the root of long processes of political transformation. The context of the Great Recession has spurred relevant changes in party systems and governments. At the same time, as discussed throughout the section, the burst of the 2008 crisis has insisted on many pre-existing trends concerning electoral politics and parties. Often, it has brought them to their extreme consequences; overall, it has widely shaped their evolution.

A first element concerns voter turnout. Numerous studies have been put forth linking globalization with the worldwide trend of declining voter turnout (Hellwig and Samuels 2007), one that has been developing since the 1970s. Already before the Great Recession, questions were raised by scholarship on whether economic crises can prompt an increase in electoral participation, through factors such as higher polarization, or connections to party positions on salient policy issues (Blais 2000). Empirically, it has been shown that, at lower levels of globalization, the global financial crisis promoted turnout, whereas at high levels of globalization turnout was lower in elections that occurred during the crisis (see Karp and Milazzo's chapter in Vowles & Xezonakis 2016). Such evidence seems to foster the argument according to which, when individuals perceive their political choices – in this case, their vote – as able to exert an impact, they will more likely show up to the polls. Conversely, they will more likely not show up if they perceive their vote's impact potential as low – feeling that the structures of delegation place too much distance between citizens and decision-making, or that the institution whose membership is being renewed is unable to influence decision-making significantly. Anger about the crisis has been found to have exerted opposing effects on electoral participation, conditional on efficacy, during the early stages of the crisis: causing disengagement and decreased voter turnout among citizens feeling inefficacious, increased participation among citizens with perceptions of high efficacy (Magni 2017).

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[30] For an extensive and insightful discussion on the lack of a high correlation between absolute income-based poverty and SMD – as far as the capacity of these measures to identify the same households as those at risk –, see Cutillo, Raitano and Siciliani (2020).

Voter turnout, Italy (1946-2018)
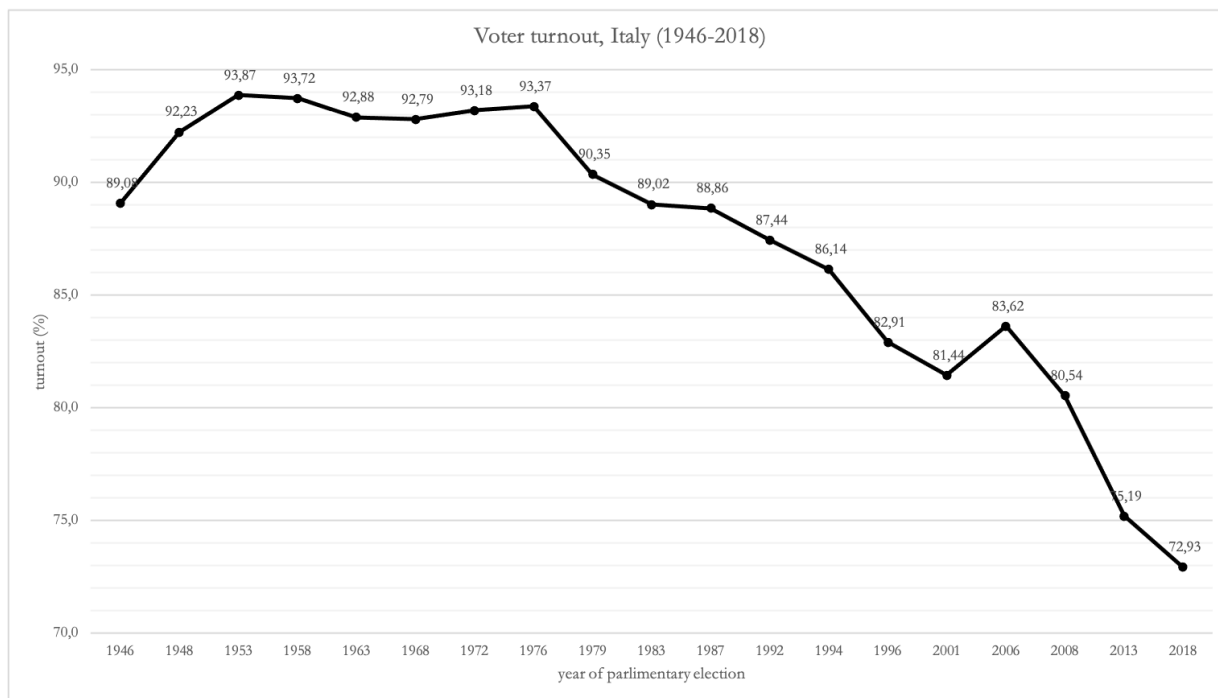
Figure 4.1 shows the pattern of voter turnout during all the parliamentary elections of Italy's republican history. The declining trend appears clearly starting in the late 1970s, proceeding with a flatter curve up until the mid 1990s, where a steeper decline began. With the sole exception of the 2006 general election, the downward trend has continued up to the very last elections held at present, those of 2018. The steepness of the turnout decrease during the crisis, and particularly during the years in which the effects of the crisis were more severe, is striking. Between the 2008 and the 2013 elections alone, turnout fell by 5,35%. The first election, in 2008, was followed by the establishment of the Berlusconi IV government. Indebtedness and budget deficit expanded dramatically – public debt, at a 103.3% level in 2007, skyrocketed to an unprecedented 132.6% in 2011, while deficit shifted from -5.25% in 2009, to -4.21% in 2010, to -3.68% in 2011 (Vittori 2018).

As European heads of state grew increasingly doubtful about Italy's ability to put its finances in order, and markets started to panic, pressures from the EU institutions prompted the national government to cut public expenditure and costs through austerity policies, and political unrest grew. In November 2011, the President of the Council of Ministers, Silvio Berlusconi, resigned from his post. A new cabinet was then formed under the lead of economist and university professor Mario Monti, in charge of restoring the country's public finances through austerity policies, relying on the public support and confidence of the European Union. In this particular turn of events, Italy managed to avoid a European bailout program. One and a half years after the appointment of Mario Monti's cabinet, in the Spring of 2013, a general election was held, which saw an electoral turnout of 73,19%, the levels of electoral volatility of 1994 (the year in which Forza Italia, the party founded by Silvio Berlusconi, erupted onto the political scene) and marked the beginning of the season of Italian tripolarism (or the repartition of consensus between three main contenders: the center-left, the center-right, and the Five Star Movement). The Monti government has been

commonly described as technocratic, both in the media debate and by academic literature[31]. In addition to its timing, the case of the Monti government is noteworthy also due to the rare occurrence of fully technocratic governments – or executives formed by a majority of technocratic ministers – across the landscape of European democracies (McDonnell & Valbruzzi 2014)[32]. Despite its controversial nature, the notion of 'technocratic' is key in understanding the categories that permeated the Italian public debate during the crisis. In 2012, in an article on the Huffington Post, editor Nathan Gardels referred to Monti as practicing a 'depoliticized democracy', which, as convincingly argued by McDonnell & Valbruzzi, reveals the widespread conflation of the a-party-political nature of technocratic governments with a not-party-political nature. Indeed, the emergence of a cabinet composed of academics, civil servants and high-ranking chief executive officers selected outside the realm of parties highlighted in the public debate the inadequacy of party politics in dealing with the critical challenges posed by the crisis. Interestingly, the crisis appears to have prompted a convergence between the trajectory of Italy and that of another Southern European democracy: Greece. The simultaneous downfall of their respective governments following EU pressures and the 'time of technocrats', with cabinets supported by 'super-majorities' (Verney & Bosco 2013), was to be followed in both countries by a round of protest elections, in 2012 for Greece and 2013 in Italy, that would shake their respective political landscapes. One could speculate, although such a question is beyond the scope of the present research, on whether this sudden convergence of two otherwise very different political contexts has played any role in the emergence of the similar forms of action and solidarity initiatives that have characterized the following decade in both countries.

A second element has to do with party systems. In fact, the Italian context during the crisis was characterized not only by financial and labor market hardship, but rather by a combination of economic turmoil with a crisis of the party system (Passarelli & Tuorto 2014). Much as for socioeconomic trends, many political phenomena that surfaced violently during the crisis were not a byproduct of the crisis per se. Rather, the Great Recession amplified and accelerated the unfolding of many ongoing processes, opening, in turn, new sets of opportunities for different political actors. For one, the dissatisfaction and decline of the confidence towards mainstream political parties has been known to be a long-standing trend in advanced Western democracies (Poguntke and Scarrow 1996; Dalton 1999; Hooghe and Marks 2018). However, with the upsurge of the crisis, the consensus for non-mainstream parties expanded dramatically and many Western European party systems knew a phase of destabilization.

One explanation for this dynamic can certainly be sought in economic hardship. Economic voting literature argues that electors decide whether to punish incumbents[33] based based on the state of the economy (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). In this sense, citizens respond to policy performances through their vote, punishing incumbents during bad economic times and rewarding them in good ones. The effect of economic voting has been

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[31] Adapting Katz's (1986) conditions for party governments, McDonnell & Valbruzzi (2014) have proposed a threefold definition for this category: in technocratic governments (1) all major governmental decisions are not made by elected party officials; (2) policy is not decided within parties which then act cohesively to enact it; (3) the highest officials (ministers, prime ministers) are not recruited through party. Technocrats, in turn, are identified as figures having never held public office under the banner of a political party, who are not formal members of any party, and who are recognized as possessing a non-party expertise directly relevant to their role within the cabinet.

[32] For Italy, this was the second experience in republican history, after the Dini government of 1995-1996.

[33] As recalled in Giugni & Lorenzini (2014), research on economic voting highlights the crucial role of blame assignment: citizens need to be able to attribute clear responsibilities in order to punish incumbents through their vote. In addition, it is not always possible to punish responsible actors in a context where economic policy is shaped both at a national and supranational level.

found to be stronger in instances of crisis (Hernández and Kriesi 2016; Singer 2011). Indeed, extensive observation and testings of this argument have corroborated its validity (Duch and Stevenson 2008). In the context of the crisis, for example, research points to a strong association between economic strain and sizable losses for incumbent parties (Hernández and Kriesi 2016), as well as a tight relationship between increases in unemployment and voting for non-mainstream parties, especially populist ones (Algan et al. 2017). Also, controlling for the pre-crisis structure of the economy, crisis-driven economic insecurity appears as a substantial determinant of populism and political distrust (*ibid.*). With respect to Italy, in particular, scholarship has hypothesized the existence of an 'economic non-voting', in that a significant portion of discontented voters chose not to show up to the polls, and a new dynamic of retrospective economic voting, by which the most engaged portion of discontented voters opted for electoral protest by casting their vote for a new radical challenger party, namely Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement, rather than the mainstream opposition (Passarelli & Tuorto 2014).

Nonetheless, empirical evidence seems to only partially support economic voting as a comprehensive explanatory framework for electoral change in times of crisis. In fact, studies on the Great Recession's impact on electoral outcomes show that, while economic predictors play a significant role, other key factors are needed to paint a full picture. Such factors can include incumbents' credibility records and strategic choices (as found by Marsh and Mikhaylov, 2012, with respect to the Irish case), but also public issues whose saliency outruns at a given point that of economic issues (Singer 2011). All in all, it is worth noting how some economic issues are not valence issues, as the valence paradigm has long claimed (Stokes 1963), but rather are interpreted as partisan ones. Evaluations of incumbents' economic performances, then, as such performances become issues of consensus, can be expected to be mediated by partisanship and ideology (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2011). Data on electoral consultations in Europe during the crisis also show that the dynamics of protest voting, rewarding challenger parties, cannot be decoupled from normative political preferences. In other words, that the electoral choice to protest is shaped by the issues that each individual perceives as priorities. Therefore, "discontented citizens are more likely to vote for a party that is aligned with the specific shortcomings that they perceive in their democracy" (Hernández 2018, p. 19). Personal issue preferences, then, play a significant role in electoral choices of protest. So do personal experiences of the crisis, as well as the emotions it generates for individuals. Indeed, in several countries, non-mainstream and challenger parties have been found to have grown especially popular, in the years following the burst of the Great Recession, among individuals negatively affected by the crisis (Hobolt and Tilley 2016; Hobolt and de Vries 2016). Anger about the crisis and political efficacy (defined, following Campbell et al. (1954) and Finkel (1985), as the self-perception of one's ability to influence politics) have also been linked to support for populist parties.

It is worth noting that the crisis did not simply spur a competition between established incumbents and challengers, but also coincided with the emergence of new electoral challengers. These include 'anti-establishment' (Abedi 2004; Hartleb 2015; Schelder 1996), 'populist' (van Kessel 2015; Kriesi & Pappas 2015; Lisi et al. 2019; Stavrakakis 2014), or 'challenger' parties (for a discussion on this category, see Bélanger 2017), contesting political systems and their main actors. The crisis provided a fertile ground for the affirmation of forces such as Podemos in Spain, SYRIZA in Greece, and the Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*, or M5S) in Italy. The latter, which over the years has made the object of a rich landscape of research (Biorcio e Natale 2013; Mosca & Quaranta 2017; della Porta, Fernández et al. 2017; Tronconi 2018), first affirmed its relevance as a player in the Italian

political system with the general election of 2013. Following its earlier attempts to participate in local governments – running in civic lists under the name of its founder Beppe Grillo – the Movimento had gained progressively encouraging results in regional elections. In 2010, it had reached 3.67%, in Piedmont and 6% in Emilia-Romagna; in 2012, the M5S has been the most voted party (with 18.17% of votes) in the Sicilian regional elections. However, the 2013 national election was a true earthquake in the Italian political system (Vittori 2018). The Movimento emerged as the most voted party, reaching an unexpected 25.56% in the Chamber of Deputies, and started leveraging its high blackmail potential within institutional politics. As of 2021, the Five Star Movement's trajectory as the third pole of the Italian political system has been declining for a couple of years. The fortunes of the party have fluctuated across consultations and territories; the M5S has participated in three governments, one with the right, one with the center-left, and one with both. Its consensus, after the 32.68% that delivered to the Movimento a relative majority in Parliament in 2018, has been declining, while a significant portion of its electorate appears to progressively turn either to the center-left and center-right, or to abstentionism.

Extensive research has been devoted to the analysis of 'populists in government' (Aslanidis and Kaltwasser 2016; Kaltwasser and Taggart 2015) and particularly to the role of new challenger parties in institutional politics after the crisis (on the Italian case and the Five Star Movement, see Garzia 2018; Lanzone and Morini 2017). Some of these new challengers have risen to power and stayed, and all of them have shaken, at one point, their respective party systems. However, even recent literature seems to suggest that new challengers have not been able to make up for the legitimacy crisis caused by long-term the shortcomings of mainstream parties. While often providing for alternative, more accessible means of participation and mobilization (mostly thanks to the web), new challengers have not yet managed to revert the trend of discontent and distrust towards parties, nor to offer a recovery avenue for the role of parties (Ignazi 2020a). On the contrary, evidence points to the persistence of a negative trend: in Italy, in particular, party approval remains around 10% (Ipsos 2018).

In this regard, a third aspect of change has to do with the crisis of party organizations and conventional participation. Aggregate data on the first decade of the 21st century offer a picture of the 27 EU countries where the average membership ratio is 4.7 per cent (van Biezen, Mair & Poguntke 2011). In other words, already prior to the crisis evidence pointed to a decrease with respect to the 20-country mean of 5.0 reported for the late 1990s (Mair & van Biezen 2001), and to a steep decline compared to the levels recorded in the 1980s (Katz et al. 1992). Such data show that the large majority of European democracies have experienced a significant decline in their membership levels in the decades that have preceded the Great Recession. This is true both in absolute numbers and when considering the ratio of party members to the electorate – with the exceptions of Greece and Spain, whose re-democratization processes date back to the 1970s. As compellingly argued by van Biezen *et al.* (2011, p. 38), "there is scarcely any other indicator relating to mass politics in Europe that reveals such a strong and consistent trend".

Major worldwide phenomena contributed to altering the framework of crystallized group loyalties and partisanships – described by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and by Bartolini and Mair (1990) – that characterized many Western European democracies during the 20th century. On the one hand, on the economic side, the globalization of the economy, the spread of technological innovations and the dominance of neo-liberal paradigms. On the other hand, transformations took place on the societal and cultural side, with the increased 'liquidity' of values and attitudes and the pervasiveness of individualization coming to be 'the

social structure of the modern society' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). As argued by Ignazi (2020c, p. 10) recalling the works of Berger and Dobbelaere, "[i]ndividualization made inroads into European societies under the species of secularization", and in the waning of collective belongings created a political dealignment that has yet to be filled. To put this differently, as a new setting emerged for socio-economic relations to unfold, a political process of 'disembedding' started (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). The progressive disgregation of existing social norms, the dismantling of social identities traditionally based on class, family and partisan adherence, the opening of new opportunities for individuals' life trajectories, were matched during the late 20th century and the early 21st by an increasing biographical uncertainty, and by a growing perception – and representation – of social crises as individual crises, having individualized causes and similarly individualized solutions. As a consequence, the linkages between political parties and social constituencies eroded at a growing rate, to the point – some scholars find – of disjoining collective identification and voting behavior (Ignazi 2020c). Party-level theories of membership development, as the one put forth by Kölln (2014) analyzing six western European countries between 1960 and 2010, suggest that a party's age, a proxy for party institutionalization, is also a determinant of membership decline. Indeed, mainstream, incumbent and more established parties have been confronted more than anyone with the shortcomings of political institutions to prevent and address the economic recession.

With respect to the Italian case, it has been argued that the early post-WWII decades have realized the perfect match between society and state, even better than the beginning of the 20th century (Ignazi 2020c), in other words that the brokering function of parties (Katz and Mair 1995) worked at its best up until the 1980s. In fact, for a long time, Italy represented a peculiar object of study for research on political parties. After WWII, the Italian political system was dominated by the mass party model, particularly relevant to the left of the political spectrum (for the Italian Communist Party, the PCI, the largest communist party in Europe), but also amongst conservative forces (namely the Christian Democracy, or DC). High membership rates, ancillary organizations and a solid base of activists, were considered as parties' key resources to foster organizations and increase their legitimacy and power. Between 1980 and 1998, party members in Italy declined from about four million to less than two (Mair and van Biezen 2001). For most of the post-war period, Italy's party members to electorate ratio (M/E) was in line with international levels (Katz et al. 1992), and up to the late 1980s the M/E slightly decreased. Membership dropped dramatically following the *Tangentopoli* corruption scandals of the early 1990s and has continued to decrease since then.

However, quantifying the decrease of party membership in Italy after the early 2000s is hardly a straightforward task. For one, parties have become progressively less willing to divulge their membership data. Secondly, research has started to shift its focus away from this question[34] and recent literature on parties tends to focus mainly on leadership, discourse, electoral dynamics and digital tools. Studies specifically centered around membership focus for the most part on the motives and meanings of partisanship at the individual level. The third and final reason resides in the rapidly evolving nature of the Italian party landscape. This extremely fragmented system knows a constant transformation of symbols, acronyms and alliances, which makes the compiling of any time series on membership rather difficult and limits any possible recollection to the accounting of the members of the main mainstream parties.

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[34] Also, research institutions have shifter their preference to other data. The ESS, for one, has removed the questions on party membership from its questionnaire after 2010 (which, for Italy, means that the only evidence available dates back to 2002). The Istituto Cattaneo's time series only cover the subject until the early 2000s.

In this framework, measures of the levels of trust in parties across time can provide for an alternative support to inquiry. Evidence suggests that the perception of a gap in the fitness of parties to address the challenges of their time has, indeed, expanded, as the devastating consequences of the 2008 crisis unfolded on Italian economy and society. Trust in politicians and political parties has further decreased, and dramatically so, with the onset of the crisis. According to ESS data, in Italy the trust in politicians shifted from 21,1% in 2004 to 6,9% in 2012, slowly recovering in the second half of the 2010s. The level of trust in political parties has followed a similar pattern, decreasing from the 20,6% of 2001 and the 23,9% of 2006, to the 18,4% of 2008 (right at the beginning of the crisis), to the 10,3% of 2013. The comparison of ESS data with the data collected by the Italian National Election Studies institute, confirms that a steep decline of the trust in political parties occurred with the burst of the Great Recession (ITANES finds 6,4% of respondents in 2012 whose trust level is higher than 5 on a scale from 0 to 10), countered by a slow, progressive increase since the second half of the 2010s (9,2% in 2016 and 14,2% in 2018).

These dynamics have entailed numerous consequences. On the one hand, party membership decline has triggered a series of effects on party organizations, their structure, their identity-building with respect to the electorate, their reliance on professional staff, and has increasingly posed the question of party financing sources. On the other hand, in an attempt to make up for their decaying reputation and to sustain their organizational structures and ties with society, parties have envisaged different strategies. On the one hand, they have looked for increasing financial resources – often times from the state; on the other hand, they introduced direct democracy practices within their organizations (Ignazi 2020c). The former was especially complicated for Italian parties. A decades-long debate on the corruption of the political and ruling class and the transparency of party funding – fueled in the early 1990s by a major scandal of judicial inquiries that revealed a system of endemic illegal financing, involving most of the key political parties of the time – found its culmination in the grievances put forth by the Five Star Movement, revolving around the corruption and costs of the political elite, spotlighted as an outright 'caste' draining resources from citizens in order to feed its privileges. In addition to an already compromised picture, in 2012 an investigation was exposed involving the radical-right party *Lega* (the Northern League, whose narrative relied heavily on the public condemnation of the corruption and inefficiency of the 'Roman' political class), revealing extensive fraud and misappropriation of public money by the party. The Lega's federal secretary, Umberto Bossi, was forced to resign. Faced with major pressures from the challenger that had affirmed itself in the latest election – the M5S – and a large portion of the public opinion, to address the issue of party financing, in 2013 the Democratic Party-led Letta government abolished public funding for political parties. The same provision also established fiscal incentives for private donations to parties, thus encouraging the emergence of a diversified, mostly private interests-reliant model of financing politics. Ignazi (2020b) makes the argument that the persistence of a widespread dissatisfaction vis-à-vis parties comes from a mismatch between public expectations and parties' performances. His explanation for the lack of trust in parties points, beyond their mere failings in terms of representation or the fulfilment of policy promises, to a more subtle process, by which political organizations and their representatives project an image of themselves that is heavily removed from the public opinion's expectations. Particularly, a retrotopia (Bauman 2017) or nostalgia, by which the public opinion often expects, notwithstanding the profound transformations that democratic societies have undergone over the last decades, that parties should behave like they used to at the time of the mass party. This suggestion appears especially fitting to the Italian case.

After the end of the mass party's golden age, little to no reflection was carried out within the Italian political system and public debate on what the role of parties should fulfill. Even the largest mainstream left-wing party, the Democratic Party (henceforth, PD) – which to this day has maintained a diffused network of party branches[35] and struggled to keep promoting high membership involvement and the organizational level –, failed to provide a clear-cut answer to the question of what a party should be and do, and for whom. Sporadic propositions over the years have come from the internal PD strands less linked to the mass party tradition, calling for an ever more 'liquid' party (that is, with a less heavy organizational structure, and leaner functioning mechanisms). The one, isolated systematic intellectual effort on the questions of party model, organizational dynamics and function of the party, the one carried out by PD economist and politician Fabrizio Barca between 2013 and 2015[36], ended in a substantial stalemate. The question of organizational forms and structures emerged against the background of the more complex challenge of identity and representation. In this respect, the notion of 'liquidity' has been used to describe not only an organizational approch[37] a fluid nature of party identity, as opposed to the 'solid' identity of the mass party (Palano 2015). Indeed, among the foundational ideas underlying the establishment of the PD in 2007[38] were the merger of different reformist political cultures (post-communist, socialist, catholic-solidaristic) and an 'open party' structure, similar to the American Democratic Party and in purposeful discontinuity with 20th century party traditions. While the former has remained a largely incomplete and little addressed process, the latter has entailed a blurring of both organizational and ideational boundaries and incentives for party members[39] (as opposed to non-member electors). The PD has also been affected by the wider trends of leadership personalization and increasing centrality of the *party in office* dimension[40]. At the same time, the imagery and at times nostalgia around mass parties, of which the PD itself is often deemed the main heir, create a mismatch between expectations and reality. Interestingly enough, it is not only the left-wing political subculture or former mass party activists who expect the PD to behave like its communist and post-communist ancestors; often times, its critics on the right side of the political spectrum also point out the Democrats' failings to adhere to features pertaining to the imagery of the mass party of several decades ago.

Even more than a crisis of membership, the phenomena of the last decades and their acceleration since the burst of the Great Recession seem to hint at a general crisis of identification. Party identification is construed by scholarship as a long-term, affective, psychological identification with one's preferred political party. Indeed, this concept is not immune from methodological and measurement issues, including the bias of self-reports, the rarity of information about persistence of party identification, and the lack of long-term panel studies, which all contribute to controversial conclusions on its impact. However, literature

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[35] On the importance of territory and space in recent years, specifically on the Lega's efforts to take root through increasing territorial new offices and militancy, see Barbieri (2012).

[36] F. Barca (2013). "Per un partito che sappia governare. Strumenti di lavoro, persone e relazioni, visione e metodo." Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20180330192443/http://www.fabriziobarca.it/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Per-un-partito-che-sappia-governare-Fabrizio-Barca.pdf.

[37] See F. Anderlini (2009) "Il partito liquido e la durezza del territorio", *Il Mulino*, 2/2009.

[38] On the history of the PD, see notably G. Pasquino (2009) *Il partito democratico. Elezione del segretario, organizzazione e potere*, Bononia University Press, and P. Natale e L.M. Fasano (2017) *L'ultimo partito. 10 anni di Partito Democratico*, Giappichelli.

[39] This is especially true in light of a tool such as primaries, established by the party's statute as the system for the choice of the party's national secretary, and mobilized as a core identity feature of the PD. These elements have been notably underscored by scholarship as constitutive of the cartel party model (Katz and Mair 1995, 2009).

[40] On these and other aspects, a recent critical review can be found in Floridia, A. (2018) "Un partito sbagliato", *Il Mulino*, 4/2018.

on political behavior still relies heavily on party identification, as the latter seems to influence a number of political expressions, ranging from electoral choice and voter turnout to individual engagement, partisan reasoning and modes and degree of activism. This notion does not imply formal membership to an organization or activity in its support, but rather an individual sense of personal attachment to a party label, beyond the terms of formal status. Social identity theory argues that these partisan ties are similar to identifications with a social class, religious denomination, or other social group (Dalton 2016). In this line of comparison, it follows that, as for the disgregation of class and religious identities, the waning of partisan identification contributes to the fragmentation of social identities and is likely to entail a number of relevant consequences on political organizations and socio-political environments at large.

Table 4.1 *"Do you feel closer to a particular party than all other parties?"* Author's elaboration based on available data from ESS rounds.

	2002	2012	2016
Yes	44,5%	38,9%	37,4%
No	55,5%	61,1%	62,6%

The phenomenon of erosion in the connection between citizens and parties is also illustrated by *Table 4.1*. At an even looser level, beside formal membership and party identification, the feeling of closeness to a particular party with respect to the others has also been declining significantly. Data from three ESS rounds conducted in Italy, which included the question "Do you feel closer to a particular party than all other parties?", show that the percentage of respondents who felt a particular connection to a specific party has decreased from 44,5% in 2002 to 38,9% in 2012, and 37,4% in 2016. Indeed, among respondents that feel close to a specific party are, likely, numerous party members and individuals with some degree of party identification. Therefore, these percentages have certainly been influenced by the fluctuation of membership rates and partisanship. However, this change is interesting to note in that it captures a dimension of crisis of political organizations that is not only limited to membership levels or trust per se: rather, it has to do with parties' capacity to represent an identity that, over time, individuals can clearly perceive as part of (or close to) their own.

Given these trends and phenomena, a brief overview needs to be devoted here to the specific evolutions and crisis of the Italian radical left. Following 1989 and the fall of the Eastern bloc, the experience of the Italian Communist Party came to an end. The Partito Democratico della Sinistra (Democratic Party of the Left, PDS) was founded in its place: a new party of social-democratic orientation (Chiocchetti 2017) that would be among the key political actors of the 1990s. Not all former PCI leaders and militants, however, identified with this choice: as a result, from the dissolution of the PCI were also born smaller radical left formations that wished to uphold the communist orientation. Notably, various leftist sensibilities converged in 1991 in the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (Party of the Communist Refoundation, or PRC) (De Nardis 2009). The PRC was a relevant political player, able to gather significant consensus (typically around 5-6% of votes, from 1992 to 2006) and to determine the standing and fall of center-left parliamentary majorities. However, as argued by Chiocchetti (2017), the dilemma of the PRC – on whether to join the emerging center-left pole within Italy's bipolar competition, or attempt to build an alternative

anti-neoliberal third pole – resulted in an uneven course of action (oscillating between dialoguing and intransigent positions towards the center-left) and a series of debilitating splits[41]. Between 2007 and 2010, the party's decline reached a culmination point, leaving the PRC a small extra-parliamentary organization.

Since 2008, the Italian radical left has known a phase of unprecedented weakness and fragmentation (Chiocchetti 2017).

In electoral terms, radical left parties accounted for around 7-8% of votes in the early 2000s. At its peak, in the national election of 2006, where it ran in a large center-left coalition, the radical left obtained more than 10% of votes. In the following national election, in 2008, the Democratic Party (founded the year before, in 2007) and radical left parties ran separately. The latter joined forces and formed an electoral cartel called La Sinistra – l'Arcobaleno[42] (The Left – The Rainbow), which obtained 3,1%, leaving the radical left without a parliamentary representation[43] for the first time in Italian republican history. After 2008, the overall electoral weight of radical left parties and electoral coalitions or lists has remained around 3-4% in national elections. Still, radical left forces have participated in several national governments, in addition to countless regional and municipal cabinets. Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (Left Ecology Freedom, or SEL), born in 2009 from the convergence of different splinter organizations (Bordandini 2013), gradually emerged as a key radical left player. In 2013, having formed an alliance with the PD, SEL regained parliamentary representation for the radical left, while also splitting from the PRC that endorsed a more confrontational approach (Tarditi and Vittori 2019). In 2015, another party, Possibile (Possible), was founded by a group of dissenting PD members[44]. Later, in 2017, a new formation was founded following the dissolution of SEL: Sinistra Italiana, an enlarged project also joined by former PD members and a network of associations and collective organizations, which is still currently active and holds an institutional presence both in the national and the European Parliament.

In line with the broader trends described above, radical left parties have experienced a decline in their electoral and organizational mobilization capacity, as well as difficulties in innovating their ideological perspective and allowing the identification of wide segments of the population (Chiocchetti 2017). Most of all, the Italian radical left has suffered from significant internal divisions. Brought closer by the moderate turn of the PD under Matteo Renzi's leadership, which also spurred new splinter groups to join the ranks of the institutional radical left, since 2014 radical left forces have made some attempts at reunification[45]. However, internal conflicts have left this an incomplete process. The radical left has split several times during the crisis and, overall, has not been able to recover electorally since 2008 (Tarditi and Vittori 2019). At the same time, the governing experiences of radical left parties in coalition with the center-left have weakened their privileged relationship with social movements (Castellani and Queirolo Palmas 2017; De Nardis 2011).

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[41] In 1998, for one, the Partito dei Comunisti Italiani (Party of the Italian Communists, or PdCI) was formed (see Bordandini and Di Virgilio 2007); this party also underwent a course of splits and decline around 2008-09 (Chiocchetti 2017), and in 2014 was rebranded as the Partito Comunista d'Italia (Communist Party of Italy or PCd'I).

[42] The alliance included Rifondazione Comunista, the Partito dei Comunisti Italiani, the Greens and Sinistra Democratica (a grouping of former members of Democratici di Sinistra who had not joined the Democratic Party).

[43] The electoral threshold for the Chamber of Deputies being set at 4% by the electoral law in place at the time.

[44] At present, Possibile holds a small parliamentary representation in a grouping that is shares with Sinistra Italiana.

[45] These have taken the form of large alliances and the composition of united electoral fronts. In this respect, it is worth recalling the coalition L'Altra Europa con Tsipras (The Other Europe with Tsipras) that ran in the European election of 2014 and several regional elections in the following years, whose platform focused particularly on the opposition against austerity and neoliberal policies.

4.3 Collective action in times of crisis: from protest to DSA

Inasmuch as they have shaped changes in electoral and representative politics, normative political preferences and personal experiences of the crisis, together with changing attitudes towards engagement and participation, have also poured out into collective action. Similarly, the rich spectrum of evolutions undergone by movement actors since the crisis has unfolded against the severely de-structured political background recalled earlier.

The Spanish movement of the 15M/*Indignados* was the poster child for the European mobilization wave, gaining worldwide attention for its strength and longevity. The movement brought in the streets its protest against austerity, but also a call for democratic renewal. The squares experimented with horizontalism and innovative practices, while expressing grievances related to political representation. Political actors from the institutional left were not allowed to represent the movement or to participate in it in any visible capacity, and protestors adopted the use of deliberative democratic practices as a central organizing principle (Flesher Fominaya 2014). The movement's language was somewhat new, in that it was rich in concrete and iconographic references – to the point of echoing some of the 'populist' narratives of the time – and spread widely through social media campaigns. Although continuities with previous forms of collective action were significantly present[46], spontaneity was indeed a key element of the mobilization's narrative: the 'absence of strategy' being strategically deployed, the Spanish squares were depicted as filled with individuals, ordinary citizens, brought together by a common struggle, rather than structured organizations and collective identities. Indeed, between 2007 and 2015, the peak of protests persisted for a considerably longer time than elsewhere. Portos (2016) suggests two reasons why radicalization was contained, institutionalization delayed and divisions in the movement prevented: the issue specialization[47] of the anti-austerity struggle, and the formation of strategic alliances between new civil society organizations and unions. Some of those *Indignados* took part in the birth and development of a new party, Podemos, which has grown to become a key player in the Spanish political chessboard.

Greece, on the other hand, experienced the hardest austerity measures out of all European countries and the direct intervention of the Troika. This extraordinarily severe socioeconomic situation, combined with the country's complex political system and a long-standing issue of public corruption, contributed considerably to shaping the features of the Greek mobilization between 2010 and 2014. The financial crisis spread into a social crisis as Greece's creditors demanded internal devaluation policies to be applied in exchange for a new round of loans, which in turn provoked a political crisis. Claims on democracy articulated along the contestation of European obtrusion and harshness with respect to economic and social issues, as well as of democratic unaccountability and the crisis of representation both at a national and a European level. The latter emerged as much more widely radical in its repertoire of actions, intervening in a highly polarized debate around austerity. The presence of formal organizations, namely party actors (SYRIZA, the communist party KKE, and extra-parliamentary party ANTARSYA) and unions, was also significant. Indeed, even after the end of the mobilization and the imposition of even harsher austerity measures on Greece, the movement's impact is reflected in many of the transformations that have occurred in the country throughout the crisis. These invest both

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[46] For a critical discussion on the myth of spontaneity and newness in the 15M, see Flesher Fominaya (2014).
[47] This argument draws upon Tarrow's (1989) description of "shifting bases of social conflict" during the 1965-1975 Italian mobilizations. The 15M mobilization spread, from an initial core of actors, to new sectors, as the movement embraced issue-specific conflicts, often widely supported in society, and thus setting concrete, clear, more attainable goals for itself. This, in turn, made alliances formation easier.

the realm of representative politics, with the rise to power of SYRIZA and the consolidation of new equilibria in the party system, and the establishment of numerous new social solidarity structures, widening the repertoire of movement actions and promoting forms of diffused grassroots welfare.

In Portugal, the cycle of anti-austerity contention lasted between 2010 and 2013. Much as in other European mobilizations, collective action against the crisis was significantly shaped by the long-standing features of the country's political environment. The repertoires of action deployed were more traditional than those found, for instance, in the Spanish movement. The political and institutional context was favorable to protest, in terms of providing recognition, allies and support (Fernandes 2016). Consistently with the Portuguese political tradition of coalition-building, the anti-austerity movement formed alliances with labor unions and left-wing political parties, who facilitated and sustained the mobilization of new forms of activism, while also seeking to gain access to new constituencies through them. (Accornero & Ramos Pinto 2015).

All in all, despite their relevant specificities, movements against austerity in Southern Europe shared a set of strong underlying traits. In terms of narrative, these include the rhetoric of newness and a discourse promoting the idea of popular unity, of a transversal mobilization. In terms of grievances, these mobilizations put forth a radical critique of institutional politics, of parties and the shortcomings of the structures of representation. Frequently, contestation also took prefigurative forms, especially with respect to democratic deliberation and participatory practices.

The Italian anti-austerity movement, while sharing these same traits, stands out as a peculiar object of study. Despite being the birthplace of the first mobilization against crisis-related austerity measures (Zamponi 2012), Italy saw significant mobilizations between 2008 and 2011, but did not know a united anti-austerity movement similar to the ones that were active in other Southern European countries around the same time (Andretta 2017). The Italian protest cycle consisted of three main phases: a first phase prompted by the *Onda Anomala* student mobilization in 2008; an expansion phase, between 2010 and 2011, dominated by the contestation against Silvio Berlusconi; and a third phase, between and 2012 and 2016, characterized by a scattered mobilization, with frequent episodes of protest, but a fading and fragmented contestation (Bosi and Zamponi 2019). In the Italian anti-austerity movement, the presence of structured political organizations was strong, although largely underplayed in the public narrative. Yet, it is often claimed – by activists and scholars alike – that the mobilization suffered from the leading role of 'old' political actors and the endemic fragmentation of the Italian collective action logic. In fact, scholarship has argued that the Italian movement was relatively weak in terms of political outcomes (Andretta 2017). The initial success of the Italian branch of the Global Justice Movement against neoliberalism was favored by the fact that all the potential allies of the movement were in a strong opposition position against the incumbent Berlusconi government (Andretta et al. 2002; della Porta et al. 2006). In that instance, the civil society, historically structured through party links, was relatively free to mobilize with their social bases and participate in the protest field (Andretta 2017). However, the situation was much different when the anti-austerity movement emerged.

In the early 2000s, the radical left, and notably the PRC, had played a prominent role in the alter-globalist and pacifist movements. After the historic, violently repressed mobilization against the G8 in Genoa in 2001, in which the PRC's youth organization had participated alongside Disobedient activists, the experience of the Social Forums, spread across Italian cities brought together different cultural and political traditions. A 'movement of

movements' took the streets, contesting both the right and the traditional left, and little represented by institutional politics (Piazza 2011b). Simultaneously, the radical left supported and joined several LULU mobilizations and pivotal struggles, such as the No-TAV protests (against the high-speed train infrastructure project in Val di Susa), the mobilization against the bridge on the Stretto di Messina and that against expansion of the US military base in Vicenza. However, the second half of the 2000s marked a partial de-structuring of the bond between movement actors and the PRC in particular (De Nardis 2011), but also radical left parties overall (Piazza 2011b). While supporting movement struggles, the radical left, as part of the 2006-2008 center-left executive, voted in favor of government measures, against protesters' claims. In that, the alliance with radical left parties produced few favorable policy outcomes for grassroots mobilizations. In 2008, Berlusconi won the national election again and, as recalled, the radical left lost its parliamentary force. When the Monti cabinet was formed with the support of a large cross-party coalition, then, there was virtually no left-wing opposition in Parliament, nor a political interlocutor capable of unifying the protests.

Thus, the network of actors supporting anti-austerity struggles started to progressively deteriorate. The failure of the forces on the left to maximize the political capital of the protest cycle, and their overall defeat in electoral terms – with the affirmation of the Five Star Movement, after the years of the Monti government, and the substantial adaptation of the political agenda to the M5S's priorities – led to the substantial discarding of the anti-austerity mobilization's claims, both on an institutional level and in the public and media debate.

However, following the exhaustion of the 2008-2011 protest cycle, different forms of political action have (re-)emerged. A particular emphasis was placed on unmediated forms of action, as if the engagement capital built during the 2008-2011 protest cycle had been poured into other, latent forms of political participation, in a Meluccian sense (as suggested by Bosi & Zamponi 2019).

Among these are Direct Social Actions, or DSAs (as conceptualized in Bosi and Zamponi 2015, 2019, 2020). This notion has the merit of bringing together an extremely rich set of literature strands. At the intersection between studies on grassroots activism and social innovation[48], it encompasses under a shared definition lines of research ranging from mutualism[49] (De Luigi et al. 2018), to prefigurative politics (Breines 1989; Dinerstein 2015; Holloway 2012), solidarity economy (Fonte 2013), alternative action organizations, struggles for commons (see Pellizzoni 2018).

The array of practices ascribable to this form of action are characterized by two main features:

   i)   a direct nature, in that political practices are not mediated;
   ii) a social character, in that they target society (or parts of society) rather than directly targeting State institutions or other power holders.

While direct social actions as such are neither new, nor strictly limited to the specific contingency of the crisis though they often resurface as a form of contentious politics (Bosi and Zamponi 2015), the magnitude of their diffusion in the aftermath of the Great

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[48] Bosi & Zamponi's work on DSAs extends beyond movement arenas, and encompasses a wider set of actors employing this form of action, including civil society organizations and political parties.

[49] A vast majority of the practices explored in this dissertation fall under the label of mutualism. Mutualism is intended as an updated version of a type of collective action carried out by the nineteenth century cooperative and workers' movements (Ferraris 2011), aiming to responding to an increasing amount of material and immaterial needs, while simultaneously conveying a political vision and challenging the current socio-economic system. Contemporary solidarity networks have developed mutualistic experiences characterized by self-management, the provision of emancipation opportunities for participants, the centrality of beneficiaries and an interpretation of solidarity centered around the claiming of lost rights (De Luigi et al. 2018).

Recession, within a framework of deep crisis of conventional politics and growing demand for political disintermediation (Biancalana 2018), provides ground for renewed research interest and prompts new questions on the consequences of such forms of collective action.

This is especially the case as Direct Social Actions contain three dynamics deeply intertwined with the key elements of the crisis.

First, the re-materialization of collective action: in directly addressing the deterioration of people's material living conditions, this form of action provides answers to a need for urgency and concreteness within political engagement, countering perceptions of detachment and excessive mediation of political involvement. One key aspect of this sort of practices is in fact their direct nature – that is, political practices are not mediated. Hence, DSAs provide a rather straightforward answer to the growing demand of individuals for disintermediated political participation. In the development of networks of solidarity in times of crisis, mutualistic experiences in particular "aim to respond to increasing demand for material and immaterial needs" (De Luigi, Martelli & Pitti 2018, p. 257), such as food, housing, education, health. They do so through concrete, direct and self-managed activities, infusing updated versions of the mutualism undertaken by cooperative and workers' movements in the nineteenth century with new political meanings. In affirming an interpretation of solidarity centered around claiming rights, rather than implementing charitable or paternalistic models of assistance, the focus is placed on building of a real alternative for participants, relying on their concrete skills and experiences (De Luigi, Martelli & Pitti 2018).

The second element is re-territorialization. DSAs allow for the production of territory, by means of the construction of local communities and social and solidarity ties in a spatial setting. Activists engage to transform the urban space, aim to make it welcoming and diverse, cherish and value the territory by embracing its cultural, historical and social morphology and by producing diffused urban quality (Maggio 2020). They oppose the profit-oriented paradigms of urban planning typical of neoliberal capitalism, and reclaim the territory by responding to people's needs and desires. This dynamic is embedded in a wider demand of many, particularly active citizens, who ask to have a say in the choices regarding the territory that they inhabit, and thus call for transformations in the decision-making processes in order to safeguard public spaces and common goods.

Third, these practices respond to the waning of collective belongings and identities by developing spaces of social aggregation and political socialization, providing individuals with the opportunity to re-position themselves in a collective realm. Data on the effects of the crisis confirm the existence of a direct relationship between the exposure of individuals to impoverishment and the deterioration of their social ties, in a sort of "civic recession" of civic and political orientations (Colloca 2016). In this respect, as argued by Bosi and Zamponi (2019), DSAs provide the opportunity of building and entertaining social ties, and establishing networks of solidarity that act as a buffer for the material repercussions of the crisis on individuals' lives.

Although the present dissertation draws significantly upon Bosi and Zamponi's work (2015, 2019, 2020), it departs from it in two relevant ways.

First, Bosi and Zamponi have explored in much depth the ways in which pathways of engagement in DSA are structured – that is, the dynamics by which actors adopt DSAs in the context of the crisis. However, this theorization can be brought a step further: in this dissertation, I propose to focus on the *outcomes* produced by actors' engagement in DSA. The investigation of the outcomes dimension, which is missing in Bosi and Zamponi's work, is consistent with the nature of DSA as shown by the authors: notably, with the unmediated

and social character of this form of action, and more generally with the strong element of prefigurative politics that is inherent to DSAs. These features make especially relevant the question of how these forms of engagement relate to the influence of the collective actors practicing them, in the context of the crisis. My dissertation seeks to explore this question. Granted, it does so to the limited extent of political influence, construed as the impact on municipal institutions – however, the potential spectrum of research on the outcomes of DSAs is much wider.

Why focus on institutional political outcomes, then? A second element of distinction between Bosi and Zamponi's work and the present dissertation lies in the lenses through which the crisis is fathomed. In Bosi and Zamponi's work, the crisis is predominantly – though not exclusively – observed in its social component. Conversely, throughout this dissertation, I adopt an understanding of the crisis that emphasizes its political and democratic nature, in the questioning of traditional forms and spaces of political engagement and of democratic institutions. Although DSAs, by nature, target society, they also inevitably cross paths with power holders. Through welfare production, solidarity, occupations for housing purposes, the creation of alternative economic arenas, actors practicing DSAs engage, on the one hand, in highly consensus-sensitive and polarizing initiatives, while on the other hand they invest (either complementing or disrupting) the prerogatives of governmental action. This is especially relevant in times of crisis, as the inadequacies of established institutions – in providing welfare, economic well-being, effective territorial and space planning – are made more visible. Thus, on the one hand, the adoption of DSAs is tightly linked to the political and democratic dimension of the crisis. On the other hand, holders of political power may respond in different ways: but how do collective practices affect institutional decision-making throughout that interaction? Bridging the literature on the consequences of social movements and the research on political practices, this thesis aims to investigate the relationship between direct social actions (DSAs) and movement outcomes. In this respect, I propose to look at DSAs not only a means of enriching the landscape of political practices, but as an alternative channel of local democracy within the context of crisis. Specifically, DSAs are explored as a means of exerting influence over municipal politics, addressing the question of how forms of action that by nature do not target institutions, but rather society, can affect the capacity of collective actors to influence representative politics.

4.4 Social centers, riders on the storm
4.4.1 History and features of Italian *centri sociali*

This dissertation looks at how collective practices affect political influence through the trajectories of a specific kind of actor: urban self-managed spaces, or social centers. The interest of focusing this research on the *centri sociali autogestiti* (self-managed social centers – hereafter, CSAs), as actors of political influence, stems from the distinct history and nature of these spaces. Two elements are particularly relevant and worth underscoring: the first, is the relationship between these collective actors and the arena of institutional politics; the second relates to social centers' repertoires of action. What is more, both of these elements have evolved significantly with the crisis.

Although occupations have long been a significant part of protest cycles (Fantasia 1988), the practice of urban squats and the transformation of abandoned spaces for public and social use, present in Europe since the 1970s, is particularly interesting in the light of the crisis-surrounding phenomena introduced above. Squatted social centers have historically been born out of the combination of a material situation with the subjective willingness of a

large group of people to meet housing, social, political and cultural necessities, while putting in place non-hierarchical modes of organization and participation (Piazza 2012). In this respect, they also have taken part in the larger struggle against neoliberal paradigms and the commodification of urban spaces (Montagna 2006), occupying a position of prominence thanks to their ability to take the streets by mobilizing thousands of people (Mudu 2004). Despite its relative continuity across time, the phenomenon of urban squats only resurfaces sporadically in the public debate – especially in the occurrence of riots – and is generally considered marginal (Piazza 2012). There have been instances, however, in which the niche of salience of these experiences appears to have widened remarkably. This has especially been the case with the burst of the contradictions of previous socio-economic paradigms that came into being with the beginning of the Great Recession. On a policy level, for one, the dynamics of squatter movements are directly connected to strategies of urban renewal, in that movement conjunctures tend to occur in contexts of transition, in which regimes of urban politics face times of crisis (Holm and Kuhn 2011) – in instances such as housing shortage, owners' speculation, de-legitimation of the local governments' response policies. As increasing conflicts arose across Europe concerning urban resources and space management (Harvey 2012), at the local level urban grassroots activism has often become a viaticum to innovative spatial planning, but also to enhanced mechanisms of participation in the policy process and of democracy from below (Badach, Stasiak, and Baranowski 2018), also producing political outcomes in their own right.

Although all of these experiences are intrinsically political, while urban squats in Central and Northern Europe have seen the light first and foremost in response to the material need for housing, the development of occupied social centers in Southern Europe has been more often spurred by a stronger focus on political objectives (Piazza 2012). For the latter, common activities in the squat are thus not limited to the management and maintenance of the facility, but they entail the self-organization of political, social and counter-cultural initiatives, open to the public, which constitute the core of the spaces' life. Southern European social centers stand out from other squatting experiences for their more clear-cut character of political actors.

The history of Italian CSAs, in particular, has its roots in the mid-1970s, when groups of young people in urban areas, namely the *Circoli del proletariato giovanile* (proletarian youth clubs) began to 'claim the city' through the widespread squatting of public spaces and the occupation of empty buildings (Ruggiero 2000). CSAs as such were born at the encounter of the political tradition of *operaismo* (workerism) and Autonomy[50] with the urban youth

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[50] The radical experience of workerism, as a current of Italian Marxism, has its theoretical and political core in the 1960s. Its onset is often associated with the publication of the first issue of *Quaderni rossi* (1961-1966), a journal directed by former socialist leader Raniero Panzieri and managed by a diverse group of dissident youth from the socialist and communist left. Autonomous from political parties, the group engaged in a novel research effort on the conditions of workers, articulating Marxism as a critical and partisan political sociology of the working class (Wright 2002), in contrast with the perspectives of the institutional left and of the Italian Communist Party. Following the large uprising of the FIAT metalworkers in Piazza Statuto in Turin, in 1962, the debate within *Quaderni rossi* evolved into a division around the necessity of a more direct political engagement in workers' struggles. A significant group of the journal's contributors (referring to intellectuals like Mario Tronti, Alberto Asor Rosa, Toni Negri, Romano Alquati and Massimo Cacciari) left *Quaderni rossi* and established the monthly journal *Classe operaia* (1964-1967). Workerist thought developed a perspective on political struggle that, questioning traditional organizations of the workers' movement (parties and unions), claimed the autonomy of the working class and highlighted its power within the evolution of capitalism. Workerism shaped the formation of extra-parliamentary organizations such as Potere Operaio and, later, Autonomia Operaia, and crossed paths with the transformative mobilizations of the late 1960s and 1970s; caught between the armed struggle of the Red Brigades and a wave of heavy political repression, the experience of workerism substantially ceased with the early 1980s, within a broader decline of left-wing forces.

In this framework, Autonomy represents the political-ideological area of workerist Marxism, grouping numerous movement and extra-parliamentary organizations of the radical and revolutionary left, notably during the 1970s. The term itself also refers, more specifically, to the political area Autonomia Operaia, active between 1973 and 1979. On the history of Autonomy,

countercultures of the 1970s and 1980s (De Sario 2012; Bosi and Zamponi 2019) and anarchism. Pierpaolo Mudu (2004) has notably contextualized the origin of self-managed social centers within the process that, starting from the 1970s, has marked the transition to post-Fordism and the economy of information. Amongst the implications of the transformations occurring in the relations of production is the disappearance of the traditional public space until then embodied by squares, working places, party clubs and extra-parliamentary organizations. It was in this framework that, already in the '80s and '90s, the radical left sought to recreate social and political spaces through occupied self-managed social centers. Notwithstanding the heterogeneity of their experiences, these actors shared a common paradigm based on Autonomy (Balestrini and Moroni 1988; Wright 2002) and the idea of independence both from the capitalistic organization of society and from the existing structures of delegation and formal representation (i.e. unions, political parties…).

The first wave of social centers' squatting can, in this respect, be ascribed to a larger and more widespread anti-institution movement (Mudu 2004; Piazza 2011a). Some of these social centers survived the turmoil and the disgregation experienced by the radical left at the end of the 1970s, following the escalation of violent and armed political action, and gave birth to a second generation of social centers with the support of other groups, such as the Punk movement (Mudu 2004). Between the late 1980s and the early 1990s, CSAs spread all over Italy, growing to a number of 100 squats in several urban areas (Piazza 2011a), also thanks to the mobilization of the "Panther" university movement. The beginning of the 1990s, which coincided with the apogee of CSAs especially in the North-East (Mudu 2004), marked the existence of what scholars have identified as a whole social movement (Piazza 2011a), characterized by the direct illegal occupation of disused buildings, by horizontal self-management as their internal organization principle, by a policy of self-financing, and by the intent to create an inclusive space of social aggregation, destined for squatters but also for the neighborhood and the city. However, CSAs could differ greatly from one another, especially in terms of ideological orientation (anarchist, autonomous, communist, non-ideological) and of practices (Diani & Bison 2004; Piazza 2011a), whether more political (focused on struggles and campaigns) or countercultural (centered around cultural innovation at large)[51]. From a contemporary perspective, four main branches of social antagonism can be identified, whose ideological lenses and approaches have shaped different social center experiences: these are Marxism-Leninism, post-Autonomy, radical autonomy and anarchism. Marxism-Leninism encompasses the social centers that, in his typology, Montagna (2007) describes as anti-imperialist; these actors focus on the realization of communism and hold proletarian internationalism among their core principles. The ideological branch of post-Autonomy identifies the evolutions and heirs of the CSAs that once constituted the *Disobbedienti* movement[52]. Radical autonomy, then, refers to the political

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see further Balestrini and Moroni (1988), *Gli autonomi* edited by Sergio Bianchi and Lanfranco Caminiti (2007), Katsiaficas (1997), and Marcello Tarì's essay *Il ghiaccio era sottile. Per una storia dell'autonomia* (2012).

[51] Montagna (2007), for example, has proposed a categorization of social centers networks, based on types of action (conflictual or consensual), types of campaigns, and political or cultural aims. Based on these features, Montagna distinguished between networks of *Disobbedienti*, Antagonist (encompassing the Autonomous and the Anti-imperialists), Non-Aligned, and Anarchist-Libertarian CSAs.

[52] The *Disobbedienti* (Disobedient) movement emerged as a network of collective experiences and activists, especially from the mobilization of the *White Overalls* (or the *Invisibles*, as in an earlier denomination) – strongly influenced by the Autonomist thought and political experience in the North of Italy –, the youth organization of political party Rifondazione Comunista (the Giovani Comunisti), several social centers and activists' networks from the Centre and South of Italy. Formed after the 2001 mobilization against the G8 summit in Genoa, the Disobedient network was at the forefront of the anti-globalization movement of the Social Forum (Becucci 2003). After the dissolution of the *Disobbedienti* in the early 2000s, a significant network of post-Autonomous social centers across Italy has remained active. Until the early 2010s, most of these CSAs were linked to the independent information platform Global Project (globalproject.info).

area of Autonomia Contropotere, the hardline branch of antagonism linked to the network of counter-information portal InfoAut. Finally, the anarchist branch, though minoritarian in the recent empirical landscape of social centers, has also played a relevant role from an ideological standpoint (Mudu 2012a).

Overall, after the mobilizations of the early 2000s and the encounter with the Global Justice Movement, social centers entered a phase of relative decline, which for many also coincided with legalization and institutionalization (Pecorelli 2015). However, the question of how CSAs should interact with state institutions was never an easy one; on the contrary, it still accompanies the internal debate to this day. A critical point in internal dialectic around this matter was reached in the early 1990s: while some spaces adopted a more pragmatic approach to political negotiation, others maintained opposition to mediation as a pillar of their political identity (Piazza 2011a). By 1998, about 50% of CSAs had entered into agreements with the owners of the properties they were once squatting (Mudu 2004), which were often public spaces. The following years saw the rise of the *White Overalls* movement, in which some of the largest and most historical Italian social centers took part. This marked the opening of a real dialogue with institutions. Political representation was now being pursued through strategic alliances with parties from the radical left (especially with Rifondazione Comunista and the Greens), whose lists for local elections often included candidates from the CSAs. Self-managed spaces also interacted with center-left municipal administrations in various institutional projects, related to the provision of welfare services (Piazza 2011a), to the point that some of the voluntary works provided by activists are professionalized and turned, through the constitution of cooperatives and associations, into formalized publicly funded services (Montagna 2006). This element of relative openness to dialogue in the relationship to institutions has remained distinctive of the post-Autonomous tradition. At the same time, the engagement of social centers towards alternative lifestyles and more sustainable ways of production for goods prompted the beginning of small-scale independent economies (Ruggiero 2000), which in many cases have then grown during the years of the crisis.

Today, many of these experiences, and more so the recent ones born around the crisis, do not call themselves social centers, as they care to acknowledge a more complex and novel identity than the one evoked by this label, typically associated with the 1990s and early 2000s. Some have adopted the denomination of People's Houses[53], while most of them refer to their experiences as "self-managed spaces" or simply "social spaces". However, the collective actors that in this dissertation are grouped, for clarity of discussion, under the label of social centers, have maintained some distinct features. Among them, are their nature of informal communities, their practice of self-management, and their engagement in a broad range of struggles, both at a local and a national and international level. From the standpoint of CSAs' relationship to institutions, scenarios are heterogeneous. Concerning the occupation of public properties, local administrations have increasingly sought ways to establish legality, either by repressing occupations, or by bringing self-managed experiences under formalized frameworks. Institutional strategies for the management of urban spaces have remained fairly diversified and scattered. However, some innovations have also been experimented across Italian municipalities since the mid-2000s. Among these tools are temporary uses and forms of civic collaboration (Berruti and Palestino 2011; Galdini 2020), which locate the

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[53] In Italy, the "Houses of the People" originated with the workers' movement at the turn of the 20th century, and were particularly linked to the cooperative culture and the socialist and communist party traditions (although some Houses across the country were also held by Catholics and Republicans). During the 20th century, People's Houses embodied the core of the social and political life of many local communities, and were particularly active and numerous in the red subculture of Central and Northern part of Italy.

phenomenon of the reappropriation of urban space from below within a broader the processes of urban regeneration.

Social centers are read by scholars – and often the public opinion, too – as social movement organizations in their own right (della Porta & Piazza 2008), actors of urban protest with rich repertoires of action (Piazza 2012), denouncing the subservience of city spaces to logics of speculation and private interests. Italian social centers have been situated by scholarship both within a general European movement of urban occupations (Pruijt 2004a)[54], but also within international, national, and local collective mobilizations. As for wider movement frameworks, social centers have been studied as part of the libertarian left movements (della Porta e Rucht 1995), New Social Movements (Koopmans 1995), Autonomous movements (Katsiaficas 1997), urban movements (Mayer 2003), the Global Justice Movements (della Porta et al. 2006), and LULU struggles (della Porta e Piazza 2008a; 2008b). Across the 2000s, Italian social centers have played a crucial role in a number of national mobilizations. Among these are demonstrations against war and neoliberal globalization, including the 27th G8 summit in Genoa, in 2001, remembered as the peak of the international movement against globalization and one of the most violent repression episodes in European movements' recent history. During the crisis, social centers took significant part in student mobilizations, such as the Onda Anomala, and protests against austerity. Over the years they have mobilized to bring forth environmental causes, such as in the protests and campaigns against the privatization of water, during the referendum of 2011. Today, they are part of mobilizations ranging from solidarity with liberation struggles worldwide, to food sovereignty initiatives, from feminist, LGBTQ+ and migrant struggles, to environmental activism. But social centers have also been key in many local struggles, opposing the realization of major works (joining, for one, the No TAV movement), and contributing to numerous territorial conflicts (della Porta e Piazza 2008) at the city or even neighborhood level.

In this respect, scholarship has highlighted the role of social movement organizations in the preservation of collective struggles. SMOs have traditionally helped movements become more enduring: on the one hand, by consolidating organizing structures into durable forms; on the other hand, by providing havens for movement actors during unfavorable times[55].

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[54] Pruijt (2014a) discusses five typically addressed configurations of occupations. Among these are deprivation-based squatting, squatting as an alternative housing strategy, and political squatting. He outlines the problematic nature of some of these defining labels, including the use of the term 'political' to only qualify occupations carried out by Autonomous or anarchist activists, therein depriving other configurations of squatting of their political nature, despite their intrinsic political motivations and practices, and their interaction with urban policy processes. As a consequence, Pruijt identifies two wider types instead: "squat" for the configurations adopted in Central and Northern Europe, "social centers" for those adopted in Southern Europe.

[55] Several elements outlined by scholarship have to do with durability and viability, as literature reasoning on SMOs has for the most part been related to resource mobilization theories. With respect to their overarching movement, SMOs have a variety of possible roles. They may help to elaborate strategy and provide a vehicle for leadership (Earl 2015), while also serving as pivotal organizational support for protest actions. It has also been pointed out how, while movement entrepreneurs (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977) and the emergence of grievances play a pivotal role in the emergence of social movements, the transition to structured – and formalized – organizations allows to secure further resources and the long-term viability of the struggle (McCarthy & Wolfson 1996; Staggenborg 1988, 1991). In fact, some scholars have worried that SMOs might be so good at preserving themselves that they might deradicalize movements over time (Piven & Cloward 1977; Zald & Ash 1966). In this capacity of collectors and repositories of material and immaterial resources, SMOs serve as abeyance structures (Taylor and Rupp 1987), in that they help the movement to maintain its capacity during lean times (Earl 2015). This abeyance role offers an effective picture of what self-managed social centers represent with respect to their overarching struggles. Numerous organizations throughout history have helped to raise the profile of entire movements, by serving as spokespeople or media evangelists for their cause (Earl 2015). Indeed, it is more practically viable for a structured organization to pay attention to news routines and cultivate stable relationships with the media – including local media of a given territorial setting, as the empirical evidence from this thesis' case studies shows. This, in turn, allows to increase the media coverage of the

SMOs play a significant part when movements need to be enduring in order to achieve long-term success (Earl 2015). This is especially the case when movements set goals for themselves that are not time-bound, but rather entail a wide outlook on societal change. As a consequence, it is particularly true for self-managed social centers, among whose foundational features is the retention of a multi-level focus of political action. In fact, their overarching struggles and movements embrace a wide array of issues, variously articulated in terms of both their spatial and their temporal scope (from social inclusion and equality to food sovereignty and anticapitalism, from environmental activism and local campaigns to the support of freedom and independence struggles around the world, from housing rights to alter-globalization).

4.4.2 Social centers in times of crisis

For quite some time, the phenomenon of social centers was relatively neglected by scholarship. Only in the early 2000s did literature begin to devote significant attention to the phenomenon of CSAs, which resulted in a good decade of rich academic production on Italian occupied social centers (Membretti 2003, 2007; Montagna 2006, 2007; Mudu 2004; Ruggiero 2000). Deeply intertwined with social movement theory, literature on Italian CSAs has studied how these experiences challenge established frames and discourse, redefining the norms of citizenship by removing obstacles to political participation – that is, by practicing forms of belonging based on inclusive and often unmediated participatory practices, through projects and activities investing both the local (protests on circumscribed city issues, contingent initiatives and farmers' markets) and the transnational and global level.

However, the post-crisis decade has seen a significant shrinking of the portion of academic research dedicated to social centers as collective actors. With the noteworthy exception of few scholars, such as Gianni Piazza, who have continued to observe the developments and trajectories of social centers as full-fledged actors – including, and particularly, in reference to emerging experiences, also investigated individually by some research works[56] –, literature has for the most part engaged tangentially with social centers, within broader studies (especially on the forms of youth political participation), while scholarship has increasingly focused its interest on more single-issue contemporary mobilizations and actors. Conversely, the significance of social centers and their contemporary evolutions – both on a political level and for academic research – has to do precisely with their complexity, and with the multiplicity of levels and subjects touched by their struggles. Moreover, among the pivotal features of these actors, is their focus on shaping change through society. Grounded in their Autonomous roots is the intuition that change can be brought about by working within society, and that power relations can be transformed through the collective construction of alternative political arenas. From this understanding stems the suggestion that the process of influencing what happens at the institutional level also goes through this channel of engagement. As collective belongings

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broader movement (Andrews & Caren 2010; Rohlinger 2002, 2006), which literature has often suggested is a critical component of social movement success (Amenta, Caren, Olasky, & Stobaugh 2009).

Finally, SMOs may help their overarching movement by supporting collective identity, as well as fostering the stability of networks and coalitions and facilitating the retaining of participants. All of these elements are crucial in ensuring active protest mobilization.

[56] See for example Giannini and Pirone's (2018, 2019) research on Làbas in Bologna, or Piazza's work (2018) on the relationship between party representation, as structured by the creation of *Potere al Popolo* by the Ex Opg social center in Naples, and Sicilian social centers.

fade, and the role of traditional institutions such as family, religion and party wanes[57], it can be especially insightful to focus on a kind of actor inherently aiming at transforming ("de-colonizing", Katsiaficas 1997) everyday life, reappropriating it and in replenishing it of meanings (Melucci 1989). Having always engaged outside the perimeter of pre-constituted references and interpretive categories, CSAs are endowed with the resources to provide innovative answers to an historical phase characterized by deconstruction.

The crisis has transformed much of these actors' outlooks and pathways. On the one hand, it has modified the forms of social centers' interaction with institutional politics and electoral participation. On the other hand, the crisis has significantly informed the action, and often the identity, of these spaces, both in ideational terms and on the level of practices. Many social centers, in the years of the crisis, have introduced or expanded their engagement in Direct Social Actions.

Although social centers have not been immune to the pervasive crisis of engagement and democratic legitimation that has invested the spectrum of political organizations – quite the opposite –, over the last decade a number of social spaces have become, in different ways, shareholders of city politics, acquiring a political visibility and legitimacy that would have been unthinkable only a few decades ago. In some cases, this has also coincided with gains of substantial political power and institutional leverage. The question is certainly a complex and nuanced one. First, not all spaces have acquired visibility and leverage, and not all of those who have, have acquired them to the same extent. Secondly, a considerable debate exists, particularly within the movement realm, on whether influence over city politics – by nature dominated by political parties and formalized structures – necessarily comes hand in hand with institutionalization and, it is often assumed, with a neutralization of collective actors. Finally, in the diverse landscape of self-managed spaces, practices, aims and action targets can differ greatly – therefore, the acquisition of political power or institutional leverage might be considered a success (or even a goal) by some, while it might not be at all coveted by others. This speaks to the value of retracing the trajectories of different social centers by city case, and not limiting the scope of research to single experiences. Bearing in mind this premise, some developments that have directly concerned social centers since the Great Recession are especially worth highlighting. On the side of representation, two main changes appear to have occurred. In the past, CSAs often supported and gathered votes for radical left parties, at times running within their lists; with the decline of the radical left, these spaces have been significantly reduced. Also for this reason, collective actors that have chosen to engage in representative politics, have acquired a progressive gain of autonomy, running for office in electoral lists of their own (instead of running in the lists of political parties) and de facto replacing waning small left-wing parties, especially at a local level. Secondly, in a context of generalized crisis of political organizations, institutional actors have found themselves confronted with collective actors who, notwithstanding a series of difficulties, are still able to mobilize substantial numbers of protesters, to interact with their neighborhoods and to respond to the material and social needs of large groups of people, even to intervene in the public debate and propose alternative urban planning strategies. Several spaces have provided grassroots responses to the economic grievances and social exclusion mechanisms triggered by the crisis, reinventing their repertoire of action to include disintermediated social practices and aggregating new forms of participation, also attempting to provide alternative spaces of political identification and representation in a deeply

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[57] See Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), Giddens (1991) and Sennett (1998) on the long trends of individualization and fragmentation of social identities. Among more recent scholarship, see Colloca (2016) on the relationship between the crisis and the deterioration of social ties.

deconstructed system. Whilst promoting mutualistic forms of grassroots engagement, directly tackling socioeconomic grievance and integrating it into political struggle, even complementing and often replaced local institutions as welfare providers, these spaces have maintained a highly political nature, channeling a specific kind of citizen participation into the construction of increasing mobilizing and electoral capacities.

In fact, with the burst of the crisis and the growth of socioeconomic grievances, the activity of CSAs has been strongly permeated by both the political and cultural countering of the causes of the recession (financial speculation, the culture of austerity) and by a material mobilization against its repercussions. New social centers have seen the light in specific response to the present contingency, while many preexisting CSAs have refined their action focus and repertoires. Traditionally, social centers have more typically engaged in DSAs than other social movement organizations, for instance through counter-cultural artistic and musical productions, housing squats (either through the participation to squatting initiatives, or by serving themselves as housing squats), or by practicing solidarity and carrying out emergency relief actions. While throughout the 1980s and 1990s, CSAs' repertoires of action revolved largely around protest, between the 1990s and early 2000s, social centers linked to the *Disobbedienti* area, in the North-East of Italy in particular, were the first to innovate their repertoires, experimenting new forms of self-organization through the creation associations and cooperatives providing direct services to the public, in a logic of welfare from below (Montagna 2007). However, many social centers, either in the years leading up to the crisis after the end of the Global Justice Movement mobilization, or precisely in light of the burst of the crisis (Bosi and Zamponi 2019), have engaged in Direct Social Actions on a much more regular basis and to a significantly larger extent. The repertoires of action have been considerably enriched, and the engagement in DSA has spread to a highly diverse network of self-managed spaces. Several experiences born with the crisis, then, have integrated DSAs at the core of their action and identity. In the context of the crisis, direct social actions enhance the individual emancipatory dimension through a pragmatic participation that allows for the construction of new collective aggregations, in turn made possible by the presence of the alternative, dynamic, physical and political spaces embodied by social centers.

This dissertation aims to retrace the mechanisms through which self-managed social centers, in their engagement 'outside' the perimeter of socio-political conventions but acting in the social realm, can influence local institutional politics. Particularly, the research intends to explore the role of direct social action in shaping the political influence of CSAs along this interaction.

In this respect, one distinction is in order concerning alternative cultural initiatives. Countercultural experimentation, cultural promotion, concerts, have been part of Italian social centers' activity all throughout their history. Alternative cultural practices have remained crucial, both as a chance of aggregation and a mean of self-financing, for most social centers (Bosi and Zamponi 2019; Mudu 2012a). The same cannot be argued for any of the other categories of DSAs as they are conceptualized by Bosi & Zamponi (2018, 2019). Therefore, while the inclusion of this category enriches academic works aimed at exploring the unfolding of DSAs across different types of actors, it would bring little value to a study focused on a single kind of actor – social centers –, for which this element is virtually always present[58]. For the purposes of this thesis, the category of alternative cultural initiatives is

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[58] As recalled, squatting for housing purposes has also been traditionally present in the repertoires of social centers. However, the same distinction that is applied here to counter-cultural initiatives, is not applied to this particular squatting practice. In fact, during the crisis decade, CSAs have more so selectively engaged in it. Only some spaces have promoted housing squatting actions directly; while this practice is significant in some CSAs' repertoires, it is not transversally present across social centers,

therefore excluded from the set of DSAs practices considered, in order to allow for a more fruitful distinction between the different pathways followed by different CSAs in terms of practices, strategies and identities. The DSAs course is thus estimated to be adopted by those collective actors who, within their core actions, include (and contribute to) practices pertaining to solidarity and emergency relief initiatives, welfare, free legal advice and medical services, education, sports, alternative finance and consumer-producer networks, and housing squats.

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as are counter-cultural and artistic practices. In that, it does not impede the comparison of DSA adoption across actors (as, conversely, is the case for cultural activities).

Chapter 5. Pathways of Political Influence in Bologna

This first empirical chapter examines the trajectories of social centers in the city of Bologna. Section 5.1 starts by contextualizing the sociopolitical and economic characteristics of the local environment, embedded in a history of territorial subculture and marked by a relative political continuity. This first section illustrates the evolution of CSAs in Bologna leading up to the crisis, and their role as alternative political and social spaces to the dominant institutional left.

The chapter then moves to analyzing the pathways of political influence during the crisis decade. Sections 5.2 to 5.6 are devoted to retracing the trajectories of five urban collective actors: respectively, Làbas, the TPO, Xm24, Vag61, and Laboratorio Crash. Each section discusses the sequences of mechanisms and sub-mechanisms that have shaped a specific actor's pathway, as well as the forms and extents of its political influence.

The relationship between collective actors, the broader city, and institutional politics has evolved significantly in Bologna throughout the crisis decade. Once a classically repressive environment, over the last decade Bologna has become a hybrid model, where the repression of occupations and institutional pushes towards the formalization of self-managed experiences are balanced by new channels and room for political influence. Bolognese social centers have been able to influence different stages of policy-making (particularly in reference to the management of public spaces and urban planning); they have obtained new formal and informal channels of access to decision-making; some of them have gained the recognition of elected officials, shaping their institutional attitudes highly affected by political culture.

Lastly, Section 5.7 summarizes the findings from the case of Bologna and engages in a brief discussion on how this case relates to the research questions of the dissertation. The pathways retraced in the chapter offer a diverse overview of social centers' degree of political influence across the decade. In that, the extent of engagement in DSA during the decade appears aligned with the degree of political influence for social centers that have mobilized DSAs within a bridging of their social environment, and that have managed to intervene in the competition for power. Institutionalization also emerges as a double-edged, yet crucial mechanism for political influence.

5.1 The urban environment of Bologna
5.1.1 The Emilian model: economy, society and politics

Bologna is a medium-sized, historically prosperous city, with a strong university connotation. Of the almost 400.000 people living in Bologna, the student population alone amounts to 80.000 residents, an element that largely contributes to explaining the political vibrancy of the city, and specifically of its movement actors. Bologna's population has been increasing significantly over the last two decades, however while the 2000-2010 decade was marked by a rather steep demographic growth, the latter has slowed down after 2010. Between 2001 and 2016, the incidence of elderly (over 80 years old) and child population (under the age of 14) has climbed substantially, a phenomenon that directly impacts the provision of care and social services. While the rise in the number of senior citizens is the result of a longer life expectancy and a general improvement of living conditions, the

expansion of the child population is mainly due to immigration. Around 60% of individuals immigrating to Bologna are Italian, while foreigners make up for around 15% of Bologna's residing population and are much more likely to move to Bologna and settle permanently. Disaggregating fluxes by education and working status, data show that over the years Bologna has remained fairly attractive for highly educated individuals and qualified workers.

As the third richest province in Italy, Bologna produces around 35,5 thousand euros of value added per capita, and holds as a city the second highest average per capita income in the country (19.025€ in 2016). Nonetheless, in Bologna too, the crisis has impacted the distribution of wealth, to the advantage of the most well-off segments of the population – with the concentration of income increasing by 7% between 2007 and 2015. During the crisis, the number of businesses remained almost unaltered in the city (despite decreasing in the surrounding metropolitan area), whereas employment data show a critical impact of the economic hardship. While occupation had risen for all age cohorts up until 2008, it thereafter decreased significantly for some, to then slowly recuperate between 2015 and 2016. Between 2004 and 2016, the occupation rate increased in Bologna, testifying to an overall positive economic trend, however the only age cohorts for which it did not decrease are the ones comprised between 45 and 64 years of age. The drop of employment especially concerned youth, with peaks between 2010 and 2015 and a slow recovery to pre-crisis levels only in 2017. At its highest, in 2014, the unemployment rate in Bologna had increased by 138% compared to the end of 2008 (CISL). In a general situation of widespread job precariousness and scarce turnover, at the end of 2014 the people in search of occupation had increased by 178% with respect to 2011. Municipal data show that, between 2005 and 2012, the number of individuals and families benefitting from the city services normally dedicated to the poor increased by 30%, and over the crisis years the definition of poverty has come to include many new poor (Ardeni and Leone 2017). Research by Istituto Cattaneo reported that in Bologna almost 40% of the taxpayers of 2015 – that is, almost 30% of the city's residents – lived in a situation of economic distress on the verge of poverty. Overall, however, the city has managed to recover from the crisis and to restore the track of its economic development, as attested by the GDP of the city, which has steadily grown since 2012.

What appears to have climbed during the crisis, more than anything, are the factors that can cause individuals to fall into poverty (Ardeni and Leone 2017): work no longer guaranteeing income continuity, overall increasing precariousness, decreasing purchasing power of incomes. In addition, the number of migrants and nomadic people in conditions of poverty entering Italy has risen as well.

The explosion of economic hardship, in turn, has unfolded within a general crisis of the urban regime. On the one hand, urbanization fees (*oneri di urbanizzazione*) have shifted from around 22 million in 2007, to slightly more than 12.5 million in 2011, with many waiving their issued building permits, and a negative impact on the city's economy estimated around 6 million euros. Meanwhile, construction permits decreased significantly between 2012 and 2016 (Città Metropolitana di Bologna). On the other hand, the number of evictions, that had decreased between 2005 and 2008, climbed after 2009 (from 128 to 760). From 2012 to 2014, evictions augmented by 30% (from 1.130 to 1.449), to then diminish by 19% in 2015. Evidence shows that, already since 2004, the percentage of evictions due to defaults in paying the rent has largely exceeded that of evictions due to the end of the lease. Over the years, Bologna has experienced a drop in the number of residents in the historical city center, with a rise of housing demands in peripheral neighborhoods and the suburban area (Ardeni and Leone 2017). Registrations to municipal lists for the allocation of social housing shifted from 5.465 in 2007 to 9.967 in 2012 (increasing by 82%). Since 2007, the construction crisis beat

any precedent record of intensity and persistence: between 2006 and 2011, the market shrank to two thirds of sales, investments dropped by 21% and housing prices fell by 22%. 2012 was also an extremely negative year for the housing market, which slowly recovered afterwards and has now reached a market saturation point (Gentili, Tassinari, and Zoboli 2018). With the crisis, the drop in housing sales jeopardized the construction market, in both the residential and non-residential sectors. The debt crisis, in turn, imposed strong constraints on the expenditure for public works. The financial crisis and the default risk of the banking system reduced credit availability, while the economic crisis reduced families' spending power, weakening the growth potential of businesses as well as their capacity to maintain balanced budgets. This phenomenon has become pervasive to the point that research has suggested that a 'crisis within the crisis' occurred in Bologna's urban regime (Gabellini 2014), shining a new light on the outdatedness of its configuration and its instruments, based on the growth expectations of previous, highly expansive phases.

In terms of institutional response to the crisis, the Emilia-Romagna Region has undertaken a number of poverty reduction initiatives. Among them are food recovery projects, provisions aimed at enhancing social cohesion, and also, since 2016-2017, the solidarity income (*RES*), a measure of financial support for struggling individuals and their households, provided within a project of social activation and integration into employment. On a city level, social expenditure has remained high. In 2016, the Municipality's expenditure for health and social services amounted to 96 million euros, and banking foundations contributed for 8 million euros. In addition, the local social tissue of cooperatives, associations and civil society organizations remain a key reference point for social interventions.

The presence of high social capital and civicness tightly relates to the political history of Bologna and is embedded in the political subculture of the Emilia-Romagna region, part of what was long defined as the Italian 'Red Belt', along with the regions of Toscana, Umbria and the northern part of the Marche. In fact, although the city has not been immune to the diffused declining trends of mainstream politics, Bologna remains to this day a cornerstone in the heritage of the so-called "Emilian model", characterized by diffused economic development, a political continuity of left-wing governments led by a strong dominant party, and a vital territorial fabric of associations and volunteer organizations. With an established tradition of left-wing administrations, the Region was long dominated by one-party governments led by the strongest and largest federation of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in the country. During the years of the transition from the Communist Party to the PDS (*Partito Democratico della Sinistra*) and subsequently to the DS (*Democratici di Sinistra*) the region saw a first, progressive re-balancing of the political equilibria in its political system. Although there was still no competition room open for centrist and right-wing forces aspiring to the regional government, the two opposite poles of the political spectrum started to get closer. The 2000, 2005 and 2010 regional elections saw the progressive enlargement of electoral coalitions and the affirmation of Vasco Errani as President of Emilia-Romagna, with consistently high voter turnouts, largely exceeding the national average. Following Errani's resignation as he made the object of a judicial investigation (which would result, in 2016, in his full acquittal), new elections had to be held in November 2014, marking the lowest voter turnout in Emilia-Romagna's history (37%) and the first leftist candidate to the presidency that, although elected, did not reach 50% of the votes. Instead, Stefano Bonaccini became President with an unexpected 49% – that is, 615.723 votes, compared to the almost three and a half million electors of the region. Only in the strongest and historically more left-wing federations of the then Democratic Party (the heir of DS), such as Bologna, Modena and

Ravenna, did he exceed 50%. This eroding trend, with the historical subculture holding in the largest province capitals and showing increasing cracks elsewhere, has come to encompass local electoral consultations – with many municipalities being governed by right-wing administrations – and to transcend merely electoral dynamics. Probably one of the strongest elements of discontinuity with the past is to be found in the fact that, although an electorally dominating party does still exist (though in some areas its force and electoral penetration are eroding more rapidly and consistently than in others), it has lost its pivotal role as the axis around which social fabric articulated. Yet, the region maintains one of the strongest, most pervasive associational and voluntary sectors in the country. Such sector is no longer a branch or a collateral entity of the dominant party; instead, the landscape of volunteer participation and social actors has become progressively more autonomous and the balance of power, once heavily in favor of the party, has shifted.

Since 1946, the city of Bologna was always administered by the left – first by the PCI, then by its heirs, the PDS (since 1995), the DS (since 2004) and the PD (since 2009) –, with the only exception of the 1999-2004 legislature, where the election of Giorgio Guazzaloca as mayor marked the only electoral victory of the center-right in Bologna. Within this picture of general stability, candidates from (or close to) some of the CSAs of the city traditionally ran in the electoral lists of the Greens or Rifondazione Comunista, in coalition with the rest of the center-left. However, the first municipal elections since the burst of the crisis, in 2009, after the end of the mandate of Sergio Cofferati – who had been strongly criticized by social centers and the radical left for his securitarian policies – saw the independent run of Valerio Monteventi, among the most prominent historical figures of the CSAs world in the city. Despite the meagre electoral result of Monteventi's *Bologna Città Libera* list (roughly 3.000 votes), this marked a first attempt at a new relationship between CSAs and institutional representation. In 2011, candidates close to CSAs were elected in the lists of the center-left coalition for the City Council. During the 2016 election, a leftist civic list named *Coalizione Civica* ran autonomously – outside the coalition in support of incumbent mayor Virginio Merola, that would win the election –, bringing together civil society actors, political forces from the radical left and numerous figures either very close to, or directly part of, Bolognese social centers. The list obtained almost 7% of the votes (that is, roughly 12.000) and elected two city councilors, along with several neighborhood councilors.

5.1.2 The cleavage between movement and party: social centers as alternative spaces of struggle

In what is probably the only autobiographic account of Bologna's social centers (D'Onofrio and Monteventi 2011), 'fraternity' is used as the key defining term of the experience of CSAs in the city, from its early start and all the way to the crisis. Workshops of politics and culture, struggles and recreation, aggregating individuals adhering to a shared set of values, these spaces were conceived similarly to the 'Houses of the People' (*Case del Popolo*) of the 20th century, but embodied a radical alternative to the established mass party model of the PCI.

The antagonist left of Bologna "has always distinguished itself from the institutional one, not so much on ideological questions (reform or revolution, elections or abstentionism, union or autonomous grassroots organization, and so on), but rather by the valorization of the existential moment as support for everything else" (*ibid.*, p. 10). Its history started with the occupations of the 1970s and 1980s, deeply intertwined with the protest waves of '68 and '77, which have had a long-lasting impact on the local political landscape, marking the emergence of a fracture between movement politics and the dominant party left. At the very

beginning, in July 1971, the extra-parliamentary organization Lotta Continua occupied some empty houses of the IACP (the Autonomous Institute of Popular Houses) in via Frati, in the peripheral Pilastro neighborhood. "Houses are taken, the rent is not paid. This is our housing reform" was the slogan. Between the 'bourgeois' indignation of the local *Resto del Carlino* newspaper, and the communist *L'Unità* siding with the PCI and the Municipality (D'Onofrio and Monteventi 2011), one week later the police cleared the premises, and occupying families were forced to leave. The question of space uses and the mobilizing weight of the radical left were, nonetheless, being brought to the light. Still in 1971, a group of anarchists presented a project to the Municipality to renovate the Cassero structure (a medieval dungeon) at Porta Santo Stefano, formerly used as public restroom. In 1972, they were granted the concession of the space and, thanks to the self-recovery of 50 libertarians coordinated by Libero Fantazzini, established there the site of their 'Camillo Berneri' club. Several years later, in 1997, a second empty *cassero*, in front of the anarchist club would be occupied and a space would be born from the encounter of post-workerism, punk and queer groups and collectives, named Atlantide, as the place for 'underwater, invisible territories and subjectivities' (D'Onofrio and Monteventi 2011). Atlantide, then evicted in 2016, was also the place where the White Overalls first made their appearance in Bologna, already proposing the provision of a universal income to counter structural unemployment and new forms of poverty. At the end of April 1976, the running-in phase of the '77 movement[59] began, with the occupation of an abandoned municipal recreational center, in a large lawn in front of the city cemetery. The 'workers' proletarian center Berretta Rossa' went on to occupy an institutional building close by, in viale Vicini, on 31 August, which would then be cleared at the end of December that same year. Meanwhile, at the university, the COSC was born, a No-home organization center, forming lists of occupants around the city, particularly among students. During this time, collectives practiced auto-reductions more and more regularly; riots were so frequent that the "Bolognese molotov" technique became internationally known (D'Onofrio and Monteventi 2011).

Only a few months later, the Movement of '77 in Bologna was at the root of a political cleavage between the institutional and non-institutional left[60] that is still present to this day. Conflict escalated when, on 11 March 1977, Francesco Lorusso – a student and sympathizer of extra-parliamentary group Lotta Continua – was killed by the police during riots (Hajek 2012). For several days, the city was in a state of chaos. The highly violent military repression, and the siding of the Communist Party with law enforcement against protesters (on this occasion among others), caused a deep fracture in the relationship between the Communist

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[59] Following the post-1968 decade of mobilizations and the progressive fading of workerist struggles, the 'Movement of '77' (Balestrini and Moroni 1997) emerged as a radical and diffused anti-systemic protest, led particularly by students and youth. Revolts lasted months in several large cities in Italy, especially in Rome, Bologna and Milan (Hajek 2012), spreading across workplaces and educational institutions.

In revamping the protest season of the 1970s, the 1977 movement contested the postwar Fordist order and expressed a desire to break free from the bourgeois lifestyle, from repressive social institutions and labor constraints (Mudu 2012a). Experiencing the changes determined by the shift to the post-industrial society, the Movement claimed a reappropriation of the time of living and personal satisfaction beyond the productive needs of capital. At the same time, the contestation of institutional power and institutional left-wing organizations, such as parties and unions, was stronger than in previous mobilizations. Within the economic crisis determined by the oil shock of 1973-1974, unions sought to contain and halt workers' struggles, which produced a growing rift with the working class. Furthermore, the fear of an authoritarian right-wing *coup d'état* (as the one that had occurred in Chile in 1973) had brought the Italian Communist Party to seek a dialogue with the conservative Christian Democracy (it was the 'historic compromise' proposed by Enrico Berlinguer).

The Movement of '77 unfolded within a time of Italian history marked by high political violence – notably, on the left, by the action of the Red Brigades, whose complex link to the '77 Movement, in addition to latter's proximity with 1968, has often compressed the historiographic representation of this protest phase (Bellassai 2009).

[60] An effective review of the protests of '77 in Bologna is found in Bellassai (2009).

Party and young generations of left-wing activists, and more broadly, between party and movement.

1977 was a turning point in the local history of Bologna. On the one hand, a sentiment of injustice and lack of acknowledgment for the traumatic events of that year has remained. Many activists were arrested and detained; the police officer who shot Francesco Lorusso was absolved. On the other hand, no shared memory of '77 has emerged; conversely, Hajek (2012) talks about a 'divided memory'. For decades, the counter-memory of parts of the local community and the institutional memory of '77 have clashed. In recent years, this divergence has taken the form, in a sense, of an implicit pact of mutual tolerance, but political reconciliation of this history has yet to be realized. In that cleavage plays out the rift between institutional left and movements.

At the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, with occupations being an almost ordinary occurrence, numerous self-managed spaces took form. Among these were experiences such as the «Traumfabrik» in via Clavature, an experience of artistic punk-no wave experimentation, at the core of the city and a hundred meters away from the City Hall, occupied in the spring of 1976 during a demonstration, an "open house" up until 1983. Youth started to emerge as a social and political category, raising issues and questions to the so-called 'party-city' (an expression used to refer to the dominance of the governing party), and calling for new spaces of aggregation and cultural production. In this framework took shape occupations such as that of the 'ex-Dazio' (literally, a former custom house) of San Ruffillo in 1978, with the contribution of a neighborhood collective, an experiment of self-management, aggregation and creativity. While the press and 'the Party' defined the occupants as 'extremists' and 'Autonomous', the youth of the ex-Dazio found that their social center equated a critical, open politics, focused around relations. During that time, occupied spaces proliferated around the university, particularly through the action of groups such as the CPT, the Territorial Political Collectives that had detached themselves from the organized Autonomy, and stressed the importance of conquering social spaces (D'Onofrio and Monteventi 2011) and the construction of counter-powers outside the places of work. Social centers such as the 'Crack 1' in via San Carlo and 'Crack 2' in via Riva Reno were born, organizing auto-reductions for the university canteen and new occupations.

Some of most significant social centers of the city were born, however, between the end of the 1980s and the 1990s. At the end of the summer 1988, a building in the piazzetta San Giuseppe, in the city center, was occupied. Revolving mainly around the autonomous production of youth and punk counterculture, contesting mainstream art and rejecting the rigidity of the movements of its time, the 'Island in the konstruction site' ('Isola nel Kantiere') was cleared by the police on August 18, 1991. Meanwhile, the 'Fabbrika', an abandoned factory in via Serlio, behind Bologna's large train station, had been occupied in March 1989. Six months after the occupation, inside the space were active several artistic collectives, a group from the 'Isola' working on concerts and videomaking, a Multimedia Attack group, a painting and sculpture lab created by the students of the Academy of Fine Arts, a self-managed theater group, an atelier and a craft market. A concert, the "Rock against Felicori", was organized against a municipal official in charge of the local Youth Plan. A collective was born inside the space to support migrants' struggles against the housing shortage, and room was made in the 'Fabbrika' to shelter homeless migrants. Activists from the space took part in many demonstrations and protests for the right to housing and against racism. When the 'Fabbrika' was cleared out on December 28, 1990, migrants from the collective moved to via Stalingrado, where they occupied two IACP buildings. After three months of self-management, the Municipality transformed the occupied space into a publicly managed

reception center. The issues related to immigration, long ignored, had emerged in all of their relevance. Many occupations were carried out by migrants since then, and all throughout the 1990s, in response to the housing emergency. This series of occupations culminated in 1997 in a sit-in in front of the City Hall: when no one from the Municipality would talk to the demonstrators, the latter occupied the San Petronio Basilica, in the main square of the city. On October 23, 1993, an abandoned former slaughterhouse was occupied by students from the Panther movement, activists of the former 'Pellerossa' space, editors from the movement radio Radio K Centrale and the independent publishing house Grafton9. The 'Livello 57' was mostly engaged in musical production and in battles for the liberation of knowledge and for antiprohibition. After its eviction and a number of protests and demonstrations, an agreement was reached for the concession until July 2000 of a space in via Muggia, that the Municipality rented from Ferrovie dello Stato, the State Railway. Music, electronic arts, a skate ramp, visual arts: despite its proactivity, the Livello 57 closed between the end of '98 and October '99 due to internal conflicts, aggravated by issues with the local microcriminality (D'Onofrio and Monteventi 2011). Interestingly, while the Vitali legislature was willing to interrupt the convention in advance, with the election of Giorgio Guazzaloca a new convention was signed in 2000, providing for two different venues, respectively for low and high sound impact events of the space. On 1 July, 1999, Guazzaloca had received, for the first time in the history of the city, a large delegation of CSAs in the City Hall, and a few days later a rave party had taken place in the city center, one that the papers would define as 'the rave party of compromise' (D'Onofrio and Monteventi 2011). The two spaces were seized by authorities in 2006, as part of an investigation on drugs consumption and distribution. The trial ended in 2009 with the conviction of three activists, in the meantime Ferrovie dello Stato had teared down the building of via Muggia. 1995 saw among others the birth of the 'MATTOIDS', a social center occupied by homeless men and women who organized concerts, installations, rave parties. But it was also the year in which the TPO (Occupied Polyvalent Theatre) saw the light. Conceived in the seat of Radio K Centrale, the TPO brought together actors and directors from young theater companies, students of the Academy, activists from the Panther movement and other city struggles. The space was born with the occupation of a small Academy theater in via Irnerio, abandoned for almost 30 years: between its walls, cultural initiatives, photography and costume-making, rehearsal rooms, video and theater productions took form. The TPO, engaged in many local struggles, and served as the organizational setting for numerous demonstrations, including the No-Ocse mobilizazion of 2000. In 1998, its stage hosted over 100 migrants from the occupation of the San Petronio Basilica, and the TPO became the pivotal setting of the discussions on how to solve the issue with respect to the Municipality's position. A rave demonstration was also organized in November 1998 by all of the social centers adhering to the "Catch the space" platform, confronting the Municipality on the question of spaces. After its eviction in August 2000 under the pretext of mandatory renovations, a new TPO was occupied on 9 September, 2000, after a large demonstration. Guazzaloca, who was the mayor at the time, offered the TPO a warehouse space in viale Lenin. After the G8 in Genova, the TPO would also grow closer to the *Disobbedienti* movement. The TPO 2 would become the headquarter of antagonist groups such as the White Overalls and host the crowded assemblies of Bologna's Social Forum. In 2007, the space moved to via Casarini, in a venue agreed upon with the Municipality.

In 2000, the No-Ocse Movement occupied a venue in via Ranzani, which became a public space used among other things for self-financing. Later, an 'agreed relocation' was carried out in which different collectives and social groups moved into the former market of

via Fioravanti 24. It was the birth of XM24, to this day among the most controversial CSAs in the city, evicted from via Fioravanti in the summer of 2019. In 2003, around 150 students, researchers and knowledge workers occupied the building that would become the 'Spazio Chourmo', holding a variety of iniatives, from music and culture to seminars, cleared out a month after its occupation. Chourmo's activists in the following years attempted several occupations under the signature of 'Metrolab', to finally land with a temporary occupation in via Ranzani, with a workshop of participatory urban planning on the social and cultural use of a closeby area, and the end of which they left the place.

The Occupied Workshop of Metropolitan Precarity "Crash" carried out a first occupation of a private space in 2003, to then occupy a space in via Avesella in 2005. After a decade of occupations and evictions, in 2019 Crash found a temporary place to stay in the 'Caserme Rosse', in the peripheral Corticella neighborhood.

Vag61 was also born in 2003, with the occupation of a former afterwork of the State Monopoly in via Azzo Gardino 61. Its main purpose was to be a media center, a space of aggregation, mental and physical freedom, encounter. Vag was evicted on 29 December, exacerbating the conflict of the ongoing institutional negotiations for the safeguard of the space's activities. Many protests and occupations took place, with numerous public figures and intellectuals expressing their support for the space and its cultural and media archival patrimony of press, radio, video and web materials produced by the movement experiences of the city. In July 2004, the Municipality handed over to Vag61 the venue in via Paolo Fabbri where it remains to this day. Another CSA, the Lazzaretto, lived in the ex-Dazio of via Mattei, as a TAZ (temporary autonomous zone), during the 2000s. In March 2009, a group of university students occupied, in via Capo di Lucca 30, a space that they called 'Bartleby'. The space meant to represent, through its subjectivities, the need to claim a new welfare and for youth and the most vulnerable parts of society to not be the ones paying for the crisis. After two evictions and a third occupation, Bartleby left via Capo di Lucca after a complex dialogue with the university, which, in the recollection of D'Onofrio and Monteventi (2011), compelled the rectorate to address the students' grievances on a conflictual, self-organized, illegal terrain. In March 2010, a 180 square meters former Red Cross depot was assigned to Bartleby in via San Petronio Vecchio. As the convention expired, negotiations with the university for a new space failed and Bartleby was cleared out by the police in 2013.

The articulate and vibrant history of Bolognese social centers is worth recalling, on the one hand, to account for the dynamic nature of these actors across the urban space and in the concatenations and transformations of collective subjectivities over time. On the other hand, this brief recollection allows to highlight the evolutions of the interplay between movement actors and institutional politics. Looking at the overall trajectory of social centers in Bologna, Calafati (2015) has identified three main phases, based on the evolving configuration of the social environment and development of the local squatting movement. The first phase, from 1976 to the mid 1980s, was characterized by a regime of very high repression, matched by a set of strong autonomous actors, willing to squat all the same, particularly in the city center. A second phase, from 1987 to 2004, was marked by more moderate repression and by an increasing vitality and proliferation of social centers, as squatting also expanded spatially to the more peripheral neighborhoods. Throughout this period, and particularly from 2000 to 2004, during the mandate of right-wing mayor Giorgio Guazzaloca, almost all large social centers were legalized through different temporary agreements with the Municipality. Borrowing from the typology proposed by Martinez (2013), Calafati argues that the majority of those legalizations resulted from 'survival negotiations' – that is, negotiations aimed at preventing or delaying a forthcoming eviction –

, but that there were, nonetheless, significant cases of high-level negotiations, explicitly aimed at the legal recognition of the occupations. For the most part, subsequent administrations prolonged or renewed such agreements once these expired. Since 2004, however, repression increased again, under new left-wing mayor Sergio Cofferati, whose time in office was heavily informed by a political narrative of legality and security. The third and final phase analyzed by Calafati covers the timespan from 2004 to 2014-2015, and is described as a phase of stability, combining positive and negative incentives for social centers against occupations (the increased availability of institutionalized solutions, combined with high repression of illegal squats). Indeed, while established social centers were almost entirely safe from the threat of eviction, new experiences had increasing difficulties in consolidating, as squatting attempts rarely resulted in the establishment of a new social centers. At the same time, new institutional channels have been created for the legal temporary use of public buildings, through a series of experimentations over the years. A significant first turn in this area was marked by the approval in 2014 of the municipal *Regulation on the Collaboration between Citizen and Administration for the Care and Regeneration of Urban Commons*. The regulation provides for the use of public property buildings, conditional upon the validation, on the part of the Municipality, of a regeneration project. From an academic perspective, it has been argued that the Bologna Regulation expresses a de-politicized concept of commons (Bianchi 2018). At the same time, this provision has opened the way to a broader and progressively evolving framework for the regeneration of urban spaces, reckoning the role of citizen groups and cultural and social initiatives.

The CSAs landscape in Bologna has significantly evolved over the past few years. Several evictions have occurred: particularly, 2016 marked the eviction of Atlantide, 2017 those of Crash and Làbas, 2019 that of Xm24. No irregular occupations exist in the city at present. What is more, the debate on social centers has gained unusual momentum, and has been increasingly intertwined with the realm of institutional and electoral politics, also with the entry into municipal institutions of Coalizione Civica since 2016. Finally, in terms of location within urban context, currently active spaces are distributed across different areas, from the historical city center (such as Làbas), to semi-central and semi-peripheral, and peripheral quadrants.

5.2 Làbas

In 2012, the youth political collective Làbas gave birth to a social space in the city center of Bologna. As a CSA, Làbas was first located in the occupied former barracks of via Orfeo; then, following its eviction of 2017 and the formalization of an agreement with the Municipality, Làbas moved into a building in Vicolo Bolognetti, always in the city's historical center. As a political subject, Làbas can be ascribed to the post-Autonomous area of social antagonism, and has focused its action on the reappropriation of urban space and the cooperative construction of solidaristic and sustainability projects from below. The CSA has a managing assembly and a group of core activists, but also a broad population of dwellers who participate in Làbas' initiatives and open assemblies.

Sparked well within the context of the crisis, the trajectory of Làbas began with a wide bridging effort, opening the space to the wider city by means of social action, and intertwining with the city's different social formations. From there, the strong consolidation and diffusion of the spaces' identity, and the possibility for its supporters to leverage its social and solidarity component, allowed for a progressive legitimization of the experience. In turn, the local competition for power was disrupted by Làbas' seizure of a political space and

representation capacity, entailing an intense institutional negotiation, and the transformation of the experience in the most relevant, yet contested model within the city debate. The institutionalization of Làbas has been characterized by a double-edged nature: on the one hand, conflictual and cooperative action have coexisted in the interaction between the CSA and institutions; on the other hand, the individuation of a legalized setting for the experience has coincided with the establishment of a relationship of reciprocity between Làbas and a sector of institutional politics, entailing both advantages and challenges for both parties.

Its impact on institutional politics throughout the decade was strong. Làbas' action has affected different stages of policy-making, especially on questions of urban planning, the management of public spaces, and environmental struggles. The experience has gained continuous access and leverage within the political process, and recognition on the part of institutional actors, despite being a highly contested model.

Table 5.1 Pathway of Làbas: mechanisms, sub-mechanisms and dimensions of political influence.

Collective Actor	Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms				Political Influence
Làbas	**Bridging** Perimeter unlocking; Territorialization; Network.	**Legitimization** Contentious branding; Brokerage; Certification through Itemizing.	**Disruption of power competition** Seizure of political space; Representation; Contested tokening.	**Double-edged institutionaliza-tion** Double-tracking; Reciprocity.	Attitudes, Procedural, Policy

The experience of Làbas was born from, and alongside, the political pathway of the historical social center TPO.

On 13 November 2012, a young generation of activists from the 'Làbas' collective, linked to the TPO, occupied the former 'Caserma Masini' barracks, an abandoned 9000 sq. meters space in the historical city center. To the local press covering the story, activists explained that the occupation's aim was to rework the locales and to make them available to the city again, particularly for that 'No Future' generation, to whom so much had been taken away by austerity measures and short-sighted politics. The framework of Làbas' action, then, was always very different than that of older-generation CSAs, aiming at reappropriating a space to build an 'island' within the city where alternative ways of life, creativity and socialization could be practiced. Rather, its aim appeared, from the very beginning, far from creating an enclave, to open up a space that was previously denied to the city and carry out a community experiment. Twenty years earlier, the Caserma Masini used to host military athletes. The lot was among those that the Ministry of Defense ceded to the State Property Agency (Agenzia del Demanio) and after two unsuccessful auctions, upon agreement with the Municipality had been put to the disposal of small businesses and activities of social nature, while the property waited for the market and selling conditions to improve. At the time of the occupation, the space had long been abandoned. After a first eviction, the Caserma was occupied a second time within a couple of months.

Three elements are worth noticing, which set Làbas apart from other experiences in the city since the beginning. First, while the background and the grievances of Làbas were largely

the same as those of the TPO, Làbas was born well within the socioeconomic crisis – in fact, its birth and the ways in which its action has articulated over time were pervasively permeated by and embedded in the context of the crisis. Second, is a generational element, as the space was initially taken up by a group of youth and has maintained a core of young activists over the years. Third, in its course of action from 2012 onwards, Làbas has invested the majority of its political effort in Direct Social Actions.

Bridging

The first mechanism in the pathway of the space (*Table 5.1*), investing the arena of interaction between the space and the local public environment at large, and chronologically present since Làbas' early start, is *Bridging*.

The space's progressive bridging with the environment surrounding the Caserma Masini was made possible first and foremost by a dynamic of *perimeter unlocking*, opening Làbas' activities and participation opportunities to the neighborhood and the city at large. As in the case of other experiences discussed in this work, the sub-mechanism of perimeter unlocking echoes what Malamidis (2021) has called an enlargement of boundaries, by which collective actors move past their delimited cognitive and structural perimeter – a shift that relates to tactical and repertoire choices as much as to the perceived accessibility of the experience. In the perspective of furthering struggles, a space's action and cognitive perimeter are reconfigured, making the experience accessible to, and involving, larger publics. In the trajectory of Làbas, the integration into the social fabric of an area such as Santo Stefano, a wealthy neighborhood and the only one in Bologna traditionally administered by right-wing forces, was a slow process. Community activities were offered to the local public since the beginning of the occupation, such as projections of pirated movies and a community vegetable garden. Self-production and craftsmanship activities, such as the brewing of craft beer, a pizzeria, a wood workshop, were then paired with social practices. Among those that allowed the space to open itself to the neighborhood the most, were the activities held for children. This turn

> made Làbas become a unique place in the history of the city, with literally thousands of people of all kinds coming in every week.
> (#I3SC2 activist, Làbas)

By breaching the traditional access barriers of social centers and moving beyond the perimeter of a political collective, the space allowed for new and wider relationships to be weaved through its presence. Làbas was conceived as a workshop against the crisis: in this perspective, it mixed protest and symbolic actions with direct actions, contesting precarity and austerity also by means of reappropriating indirect income through physical and political spaces, where social ties and mobilization could be formed. In this respect,

> the political and social reality made it so that the space of the Caserma became a place of community, rather than the seat of a collective.
> (#I3SC2 activist, Làbas)

In other words, a *territorialization* took place of the collective responses to the crisis, in its economic and social consequences, shaping ties of reciprocal knowledge and solidarity among the people passing through the space. This sub-mechanism fully resonates with a key feature outlined by research on direct social actions (Bosi & Zamponi 2019): the revitalization of the territorial dimension of collective action, through the development of ties of vicinity

and reciprocity within a local community, building collective belongings in a determined spatial and relational context. In the words of an activist, this element significantly informed the social center's relationship with the Municipality.

> I don't believe that XM24 is less rooted in a part of Bolognese society than we are. Granted, we are different, and I say luckily, we are not all the same. But each space has built its political and social rootedness differently. It's not that we are better perceived by the institutions per se, rather we have built a different relationship with the territory: the relationship with the institutions is simply a reflection of what you have built in the city.
> (#I3SC2 activist, Làbas)

A third component of this bridging mechanism is what I define as a *network* sub-mechanism. This sub-mechanism captures the building or expansion of an actor's network of social and political ties. That of network is a polysemic concept, which has been variously addressed social movement research, from the idea of 'networks of challengers' (Gamson 1990) in which movement actors' weave alliances to advance their agenda, to more recent and complex accounts of networked configurations. Urban movements, in particular, are often associated with loose networks of activists. Some scholars have argued that such networks are actually more insightful to consider than organized movement structures, in order to understand collective action trajectories (among them was Alberto Melucci[61], who suggested to talk about movement networks or movement areas, in order to better comprehend the transitory nature of contemporary mobilizations). Although diverse networking patterns reflect different approaches to collective action – and thus, this cannot be assumed for every collective experience –, network formation can allow for the circulation of resources both within and outside the movement environment (Diani and McAdam 2003). What networks do, is bringing together different actors along a same cleavage or cause, and/or shared sets of practices. In this respect, discussing the formation of networks around social centers in Barcelona, Yates (2015) has argued that the performance of practices is a key determinant in the emergence of loose networks of mutual support, comprised of both activists and non-activists. Movement networking has also been found to impact individual contributions to collective action (Passy 2003). As for networks' impact on movement outcomes, Mario Diani has notably suggested that changes in the structural location of collective actors in broader social networks affects their social influence (1997), and that, in a view of social movements as networks, the newness of a movement lies in its capacity to develop systems of relationships which cut across established social and political cleavages (2000: 388). In the pathway of Làbas, this dynamic entailed the structuring of a wide network of actors with whom the CSA cooperated and interacted, first on single specific projects and then on a more regular basis, progressively building a set of political and civil society partners. For one, the establishment of the community garden sparked the idea of organizing a market inside the space. This inaugurated the years-long relationship between Làbas and Campi Aperti, a producers and citizens group practicing biologic peasant agriculture and local, self-organized direct sales, calling for food sovereignty and a fair, more sustainable and relational economy, with weekly markets within other self-managed spaces such as Vag61 and XM24 (until its eviction) and other parts of the city. Alongside this alliance, many other partnerships were established with various civil society actors, volunteer associations, solidarity and faith-based initiatives, cultural and arts-related groups, shops and consumer initiatives from the neighborhood, as well as labor unions. This effort, encompassing the activation of

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[61] See notably *Altri codici. Aree di movimento nella metropoli* (1984), "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements" (1985, pp. 798-799) and *Nomads of the present* (1989).

partnerships with well-established and legitimized actors of the political and social environment, and an entertainment of these relationships centered around the concrete display of the Làbas' social engagement, set the stage for the following mechanism.

Legitimization

The second mechanism that characterizes Làbas' pathway of influence was in fact *Legitimization*. The legitimization of the space occurred across multiple levels, and invested both the arena of interaction between the space and the local public, and the arena of interaction between the space and local political institutions.

Through the opening of room for a larger collective belonging, accessible to militants and activists just as well as simple attenders and sympathizers of the space, the threads of a community were weaved and processes of mutual transformation were shaped. If by re-territorializing collective action Làbas started to provide responses to a demand of identification, purpose and social ties, those needs and longings – and the courses of action that they fostered – played a key role in defining and consolidating the identity of Làbas' as a self-managed experience. The social center negotiated a composite collective identity with its community, and went through a dynamic of *contentious branding*. Some specifications are in order on this sub-mechanism. The identity work carried out by some of the self-managed experiences born within the crisis discussed in this dissertation, is not construed as a static, or once-and-for-all kind of dynamic. Rather, it embodies the dynamic coming together of a composite identity picture, shaped by means of political action, and the structuring of the conditions for its recognizability. Branding dynamics are not established once and for all – as aren't identities –, but reoccur during instances of change, however slow, and give birth to new foundational phases in an actor's trajectory. In the cases discussed in this thesis, contentious branding processes have taken place in a specific historical phase, within the broader dynamics of societal consolidation and legitimization of new urban collective actors. What I argue here, is not that social centers have developed some empty signifiers to make their image more appealing or acceptable to the larger society. Rather, I contend that contentious branding has provided the structures of identification and recognizability for the emerging collective identities of these new actors, in turn formed through political practice. In this sense, contentious branding is the dynamic of abstraction that has qualified these actors' identity work.

Collective identity can be defined as "an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. […] a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly" (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 285). The importance of identities and of identity formation for collective actors has been extensively highlighted by scholarship. Still, the vastity of the concept and the myriad of complex dynamics associated with it, have made collective identity a delicate object in social movement research. Research's efforts to make sense of the identity-movement nexus have faced several challenges, including the problematic disentangling of collective and personal or individual identities (Snow and McAdam 2000). The identity of collective actors bears significant linkages with aspects such as organizational configurations; networking dynamics; claims-making, framing and identification processes. Political actors can engage in different types of identity work, from politicization and de-politicization, to radicalization and de-radicalization, and can do so in more or less intended ways. These dynamics are complex and influenced by a variety of interplays. Looking at identity from an outcomes perspective, some scholars have suggested that the creation of new collective identities may be in itself a cultural consequence of movement action, be it purposeful or

unintended (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Indeed, collective identity, in itself, should be understood as the processual outcome of continuous – and, at times, conflictual – negotiation (Melucci 1996). At the same time, two elements that collective identity is strongly associated with, are recognition and the creation of connectedness (Pizzorno 1996). Then, contentious branding, as employed in the present work, entails translating a collective identity into "definite (proper) names, recognizable logos, standardized slogans and common imaginaries" (Beraldo 2020, p. 11). In labeling this mechanism as contentious branding, I draw upon the definition put forth by Beraldo's work (2020) on the branding of contentious action. Beraldo defines contentious branding as "the process by which the ontological multiplicity of a social movement is differentiated into one recognizable entity, by means of a standardized semiotic repertoire" (p. 3). Addressing the evident oxymoron of a term borrowed from the neoliberal realm of marketing, but used to describe social movement actors contesting neoliberalism, Beraldo's work offers a compelling analytical reappropriation of the concept of branding in the context of contentious action. Beraldo stresses that branding processes represent an overlooked aspect in theories of social movements, yet one that has been increasing with the affirmation of digital media.

I add to these theorizations, by offering the argument that, for the actors born within the crisis, identity work within activists' communities and branding have gone hand in hand. Contentious branding must not be understood as a mere process of 'packaging', solely intended to define and polish the image of a collective actor, in order to appeal to wider publics. Rather, the negotiation and structuring of collective identities and their symbolic configurations on the part of these actors, has been, in itself, a byproduct of, and a response to, the crisis, and its effects both on collective action, and on the wider socio-political environment. By consolidating their identities, deeply informed by the socioeconomic context of the crisis – translating into specific grievances, engagement practices, and social groups of reference – and the structures for the recognizability of those identities, these self-managed experiences have, simultaneously, offered a response to the crisis of political identification. Contentious branding, in these examples, has undoubtedly been shaped by a young generation of activists, brought up in the culture of digital media and aware of the needs for immediacy of political communication and signaling, and willing to purposefully make their collective identity recognizable, even appealing[62]. However, at the same time, contentious branding has emerged as a form of individual and collective identification, providing and pinpointing references in a context of fading collective belongings and fragmented personal identities. The specific contentious branding mechanisms identified in the present work, both for Làbas in Bologna and the Ex Opg in Naples, have in common two crucial elements. The first, is their strong relationship to practices: they revolve around politicized social activism as a form of social and political identity. The second, is their linkage to legitimacy: by structuring their narrations of self into repertoires of recognizability, these actors have consolidated and disseminated a distinct collective identity, which – finding favorable ground in the local civil society – has fostered a mechanism of legitimization of these experiences in their respective societal environments.

As for the pathway of Làbas, on the one hand, the experience carried the heritage of the Autonomous tradition, the antagonism of the *Disobbedienti*, the struggles against the consequences of globalization and the student mobilizations against austerity. At the same time, it brought forth the grievances of a younger generation, whose life had been profoundly

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[62] Research should not fall into the temptation of dichotomically attributing political processes of branding, alternatively, to spontaneity or strategy. Rather, contentious branding should be understood as unfolding on a spectrum of conditions, and resulting from varying degrees of conscious strategies and of spontaneous processes.

shaped by the crisis. A generation whose collective belongings and social identities were more fluid and complex. In this respect, it is telling to consider that many of Làbas' core activists over the years have come from the area of intersection between the radical left and progressive catholic activism. While the presence of personal affiliations to non-movement organizations has certainly favored the construction of Làbas' network and therein its Bridging, these pre-existing ties have also added new layers to the construction of its collective identity. On the other hand, Làbas defined its identity, struggles, practices, by means of action, and of the weaving of a community.

> Làbas did not locate its contestation on a traditional political and ideological level. Rather, on the idea: we are an experience rooted in this territory, we do grassroots welfare, people in the neighborhood (the wealthy neighborhood of the city) are with us – and it demonstrated it by bringing them to the square. At that point, it was difficult not to go in that direction. The administration, with the mayor's approval, took the step, even placed them in the house of the Neighborhood President, among those always criticizing the ones closer to social centers. It was possible to impose this because they placed their claims on a different level, not ideology, autonomy, occupations and so on, but a new practice of grassroots welfare. Because they are a different generation, not just in their age, but in their politics.
> (#KI2, key informant, municipal bureaucracy)

> The social action component in these places has been predominant, especially over the last decade. Until the 2000s social centers were something else, mainly artistic and cultural places, to experiment beyond mainstream circles, and I guess they were less of an inconvenience in this respect. Now, in a disaggregating society, that leaves behind those in need, where foreigners are enemies, the public sector retrenches, these experiences play the opposite keys. They talk about solidarity, recognition of the 'other' as a richness, they point out culprits such as globalization, neoliberalism, using maybe some obsolete terms. They do and organize things that are not found elsewhere […]. I think that they insist on this because they reckon that it is a political terrain that elsewhere is delegated or unaddressed, so they build their identity on this. And then they claim a role, describe themselves as essential to the city, because they say – this is not done elsewhere.
> (#KI1, key informant, local journalist)

Through its provision of solidarity and participation opportunities, largely through DSAs, the space formed a community of activists that extended to average, regular citizens, the same who would then broker to the Municipality and join mobilizations in support of the experience. Làbas and its community developed a distinct language, informed by their focus on DSAs, as well as a highly recognizable logo, specific slogans and imageries. Overall, the image of the space became well-rounded, and could spread thanks to definite semiotic structures. The social center gained progressive legitimacy in the eyes of the public opinion, as individuals from diverse backgrounds, ranging from political activists to families to well-known civil society figures, gradually came to know and appreciate the space, and to progressively identify with it, and what it represented in the urban environment. Consequently, different actors started affirming their validation of that experience and what it offered to the city, in terms of social aggregation, alternative participation opportunities, and services.

This prompted a *brokerage* dynamic (McAdam, Tilly & Tarrow 2004), by which public opinion and established actors worked as mediators to institutional politics, on behalf of Làbas. Brokerage was enhanced by the affirmation of a progressively 'branded', recognizable collective identity, which made more effective the public support of established figures, groups and associations, endowed with high brokerage capability vis-à-vis city institutions. Solidarity on the part of a large and diverse share of public opinion, reflecting heterogeneous interests and political sensibilities, was especially evident in instances where eviction was threatened for Làbas during 2016, as well as later in 2017, after the space was cleared out by the police, in the weeks leading up to the large demonstration in favor of Làbas re-opening.

In this framework, the response of the public opinion was significant: citizens addressed letters to the papers and the Municipality, prominent local figures (from the political environment, but also the intellectual and the professional world, as in the case of the president of the Order of Architects) publicly expressed their support for the safeguard of the experience.

> Over three hundred people have taken part, yesterday, in the assembly at the former Caserma Masini, in via Orfeo, the social space under threat of eviction and upon which hangs the request for seizure of the public prosecutor's office. Amongst the participants were Stefano Bonaga, former *assessore* Alberto Ronchi (« let the Poc[63] be revised to defend this place »), Mirco Pieralisi and cogressman Giovanni Paglia (Sel). The assembly has voted to ask a negotiation to the Municipality. […] Attempts at a dialogue in defense of the space for which, in the neighborhood, over a thousand signatures have been collected, and that has gathered the support of mothers, the farmers of Campi Aperti, residents and volunteers from the shelter. (I. Venturi., *Repubblica Bologna*, In trecento col collettivo Làbas "E ora moratoria sugli sgomberi". 7 January 2016)

Despite this being only one example amongst several instances of public support, in order to account for the extent of Làbas' coalition-building, it is worth noticing how after the eviction, in September 2017, an open letter to mayor Virginio Merola was signed by eleven associations (UISP, Legambiente, Libera, Orlando, ANPI, ARCI and Arcigay) and unions (CGIL, with its Secretary Maurizio Lunghi, and FIOM) as well as other socially engaged actors such as the local Piazza Grande (among the largest associations against social exclusion in the city), and the Casa delle donne per non subire violenza (Centre for women against violence), asking to find a new home for the social center.

The increasing brokerage of a variety of recognized subjects in the city in favor of an institutional recognition of the space, concurred to a progressive public *certification through itemizing* of the experience, attributing further credit worthiness to Làbas. That is, certification – the validation of actors, and their performances and claims, by external parties (McAdam, Tilly & Tarrow 2004, p. 145) – occurred through the distinction and leveraging of specific items in the social center's repertoire of action. The public certification of Làbas on the part of the public opinion, organizations and prominent figures, leveraged in particular the DSA component of the social center's action, partially based on the novelty or peculiarity of its practices, and overall, through a lens of itemizing, in other words of highlighting those actions deemed of social value for the city – and hence, that dame the experience worth safeguarding. Initially, most incumbent elected officials were not really aware of what was going on inside the Caserma Masini, apart from the fact that it was being squatted. However, the cooperation of the space with established and historically relevant social and political actors helped bridge this gap of knowledge and contributed to a 'normalized' framing of the CSA's action, bringing new media and institutional attention to Làbas. The space progressively started to be covered by local (though not exclusively) media, with newspaper articles being published on the practices and the regeneration that were taking place within the CSA. The social engagement of the space thus started to be more widely acknowledged. Afterwards, politicians from the majority – according to activists' accounts – started to be seen at Làbas, grocery shopping, enjoying a beer or in the audience of an evening event. Others, within the City Council, remained critical of the illegality of the experience and the lack of traceability of the economic transactions taking place within the space. The situation became particularly tense between 2015 and 2016, as the issue of the occupation was being

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[63] The municipal operative plan (*Piano Operativo Comunale*) is the tool through which municipal administrations manage the interventions of safeguard, development and planning of the urban territory.

discussed off the records at the institutional level, and the awareness of the difficulties of a potential eviction of Làbas grew among elected officials. Given this framework, with the spark of the public debate on the perspectives of the space, changes occurred in the discourse of local elected officials. The display of the social value of the space, and especially of its direct social practices specifically targeting social exclusion and welfare needs, as well as the opportunities provided to 'average', non-affiliated citizens (such as the farmers market) started to be acknowledged. Indeed, frames such as legality and the fair treatment due to all collective subjects (including associations) kept being employed, particularly by critics of Làbas: both within and outside the majority, the need was claimed for every social actor to be subject to the same rules of the game and formal framework for the concession of spaces. However, different items of Làbas' action started to be specified and distinguished. The two previous mechanisms, and the forms in which support was being expressed towards the space, provided ground for an itemizing dynamic to take place also within the institutional debate, compelling elected officials to discuss the role and perspectives of Làbas through a new discursive category, that of the 'usefulness' to the community of some of its practices. In the Spring of 2016, approaching the administrative elections of June, the president of the Santo Stefano Neighborhood, Ilaria Giorgetti (the only center-right president in the city), on the day of the inauguration of her rerunning campaign, acknowledged the citizen support towards the experience and the need to safeguard its activities within a legalized framework, purposefully setting Làbas apart from other occupied experiences.

« […] the 1.600 signatures collected in support of this experience are hardly few. I believe that some experiences need to be safeguarded and thus, if I am reelected, I will work to find a legal solution for Làbas' activities […]. This is a much different matter than the one of Atlantide ».
(A. Zanchi, *Il Resto del Carlino*, "Giorgetti, apertura a Làbas". 30 april 2016)

As the threat of eviction for Làbas grew concrete, in July 2017 the annual Pride demonstration of was called, with a public statement of intent in which activists claimed, along with the rights more traditionally demanded by the LGBTQ movement, the right to spaces in the city and the safeguard of social experiences. Mayor Virginio Merola, questioned by the local press, commented by assuring the administration's intention of focusing on safeguarding activities deemed 'useful to the city', affirming a discourse focused on practical actions, rather than physical spaces.

In the city there are « spaces for everyone », says Merola: « Xm24 has a decaying space that needs refurbishing, Làbas is a highly original experience that deserves a space. The issue is to not fixate on places, but rather on the activities that are conducted. And those activities are useful to the city: having a mayor that says such things should compel everyone to embark on a concrete and constructive road to save these experiences ».
(A. Zanchi, *Il Resto del Carlino*, "Bologna, il gay pride sfila per la città". 1 July 2017)

Disruption of power competition

Having built a solid, wide network of allies and supporters, and having gained (both in cognitive and in relational terms) increased rootedness and legitimation in the city, Làbas was endowed with the relevant resources to disrupt the dynamics of competition for power within the local political system. This *Disruption of power competition* unfolded through three interlocking sub-mechanisms.

The municipal election of 2016, less than four years after the occupation of the Caserma Masini, marked the appearance on the local political scene of the Coalizione Civica, a civic conglomerate of left-wing experiences and individuals proposing, for the first time, a radical

left platform alternative to the PD's coalition political proposal, autonomous from the political parties' lists. The TPO, Làbas, and Vag61 contributed significantly to the construction of the political platform, and the list itself included many figures either openly close to, or part of, those CSAs.

> From the Autonomy of the 1970s from which we come, we have learned precisely this: heresy, the breakdown of patterns. This was the case for our choice to run for office. It short-circuited the administration. If you are the confined experience, stay inside your barracks… no, instead, here you pose a problem inside their house, on votes, you challenge them. What are they going to do, violently evict an electoral competitor? It's problematic. In the end, they evicted us in 2017 [and not in 2016]. We did not tell ourselves: "Let's become a political force", we always live it heretically.
> (#I3SC2 activist, Làbas)

While the influence of radical left parties, such as Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL, merged since 2017 into Sinistra Italiana) and Possibile, was not eradicated entirely – on the contrary, some of the apical members of the Coalizione Civica belong to those parties and counted on their electoral support during the campaign – for the first time in the administrative history of Bologna, radical left parties were being replaced by a network of civic actors (including CSAs), and social centers' candidates were manifestly and autonomously running for office. This *seizure of political space*, with the occupation of the leeway left empty by the crisis of the radical left, marked a turning point for the local party system. Even in the less 'dimensional' theorizations, political space is typically portrayed, in its rare scholarly conceptualizations, as a zero-sum game, where one party gains at the expense of another. This concept has at times been conflated with political opportunity, through the depiction of a space that closes and opens as a result of exogenous factors. Most importantly, discussions of political space in academic literature have often revolved around the idea of subtracting room to the dominance of State actors over a given political or policy debate (see Beswick 2010 for an extensive discussion). This sub-mechanism captures the dynamics by which such space is occupied by an actor, discursively and cognitively but also in terms of political positioning and role, within the broader political debate of the city. In the case of Làbas, this shift needs to be contextualized within a broader trend of local elections taking up a progressively more 'civic' and less party-related outlooks and narratives. Between 2011 and 2016, radical left parties disappeared from the competition, and, as a consequence, so did the communication references to radical left parties (as in the case of the civic list 'Città comune con Amelia', where the reference to Nichi Vendola, leader of the former Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà party, also disappeared). This went to the advantage of formations with a city and civic connotation, rather than a national and party one. It is possible that Coalizione Civica's political space of autonomy has closed up by now. For the 2021 municipal elections Coalizione Civica has struck a deal with the Democratic Party, entering the once impenetrable administrative majority in a protagonist capacity. What remains to be highlighted, while comparing this experience to previous ones, is that the political platform of the Coalizione Civica has been an autonomous expression of the radical left, but was visibly informed by the struggles and practices of its CSA proponents[64].

What set off next was a dynamic of *representation*. In spite of the dense collection of meanings associated with this term, the choice of the wording employed for this sub-mechanism is a careful one. Representation constitutes yet another example of a dynamic

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[64] The list's claims included the right to housing, urban regeneration, a different use of spaces, the countering of social exclusion, the encouragement of welfare from below experimentations and integration initiatives, and a new overarching paradigm of sustainability.

that, occurring outside the arena of institutional interactions – in that social space that, in a Meluccian sense, lies between the level of political power and everyday life –, structures the unfolding of a crucial mechanism in the institutional arena. Representation does not exclusively stand for the decision of a collective actor to pursue institutional politics and run for office – thereby integrating the intermediation between State and movement, through democratic delegation, and joining the political representation system. Rather, this sub-mechanism captures a wider dynamic of construction and expression of collective representation, beyond the perimeter of governmental institutions. The effect of this dynamic is produced as an actor mobilizes its collective identity, acting on behalf of a clearly identified group and bringing that group's claims onto the political debate. The emergence of a community, bound by a shared identity formed through action, fostered a dynamic of political identification with Làbas, and the growing threats to the permanence of experience contributed to this building of partisanship, beyond the sum of support to the space's single initiatives or claims. In this framework, Làbas mobilized its community and made a consensus-sensitive display of representation. Indeed, this occurred through the choice of representative politics, and Coalizione Civica's electoral results (7% in the city and 14% in the Santo Stefano neighborhood, where the space is located). But it also took the form of public support form a large share of local society and by institutional allies. Finally, one critical instance was the massive participation to the demonstration for the reopening of Làbas held on 9 September 2017, where 10.000 people took the streets. Protesters came from diverse backgrounds, and ranged from regular citizens, to politicians, to movement activists from all over Italy.

> Antagonistic and dialoguing, the people of Làbas peacefully conquers the city. Ten thousand – twenty, according to them – parade in the city center. Anyways, many. A flood of faces, from children to old militants with grey hair, who wins the challenge of numbers. And cashes out with an agreement, sealed on the eve of the demonstration, for a temporary space […]. Teresa and Silvio walk hand in hand, « we have our 20-year-old son here, it's right that they should have a space to meet up and talk about politics, rather than places for drinking and get in trouble ». Generations that intertwine, transversal presences not only in political terms. « Handovers », calls them father Benito Fusco, walking arm in arm with Roberto Morgantini. « Happy to be here », both. The farmers from Campi Aperti, evicted with Làbas from the Wednesday market, proceed with wheelbarrows full of pumpkins and baskets of onions and sunflowers. « We are planting resistances ». Irony and dreams. « Freedom does not fall from the sky », says a sign. There is much rank-and-file union and Cgil, the school and blue-collar workers. […] Some ladies at a bar smile, under the Towers activists stop and shout: « Hands off of Làbas ». Gianmarco De Pieri, who conducted the negotiation with the police about the itinerary, and Federico Martelloni, the two souls of Coalizione Civica, gloat.
> « Everything that brings life to the city must be valued, it's right to be here », comments the secretary general of Sinistra Italiana, Nicola Fratoianni.
> (A. Cori & I. Venturi, "Migliaia in marcia con Làbas 'Il nostro popolo in festa cambierà volto a questa città'". *Repubblica Bologna*, 10 September 2017)

In this article, *Repubblica* stresses the heterogenous, creative and at the same time 'normalized' outlook of Làbas' mobilization. Such a strong support from the local mainstream press, and the labeling of the experience as simultaneously "antagonistic and dialoguing" and most of all victorious, are in themselves worth noticing, as they point to a widespread perception within a large portion of public opinion (particularly the mainstream center-left one targeted by *La Repubblica*). Thousands of t-shirts were worn carrying the slogan "RiapriAMO Làbas" (literally, "let's re-open Làbas", but with a pun on the word "amo", or "love"), many are still seen walking around the city to this day. By showcasing its capacity for mobilization, coalition-building and identity (branding) grip, Làbas' displayed

not only its media or branding potential, but its ability to spur the identification and mobilization of a large constituency of partisans. What is more, the alignment of a significant share of its electorate and civil society allies on the side of Làbas, posed a very consensus-sensitive question to the Partito Democratico-led city administration. Indeed, the motives for the mobilization of 9 September, and its underlying claims, went beyond the contingent eviction of one social center. More than anything, the demonstration was about the right to the city, and to space in the city. It is with this premise that most self-managed spaces, a myriad of associations, and civil society actors of the city, joined the demonstration. While this display of force and consensus proved crucial in the path of Làbas toward the obtainment of a new physical space, and certainly revived the image of Bolognese movements and their mobilization weight, Làbas was the only actor for which a new space was found in the following months, after which claims on spaces for other city actors significantly decreased.

Even so, the peculiarities of Làbas, its conflictual vibrancy and at the same time its capacity to appeal to public opinion and to fit into the social fabric of its neighborhood, its contestation of the shortcomings of institutional welfare and the establishment of an autonomous course of social practices, its claims around a different strategy for the use and valorization of city spaces, all poured into its path of becoming a model, albeit a contested one. The management of the bargaining phase and the solution that was subsequently found (moving the CSA to Vicolo Bolognetti under the umbrella of a tender for the concession of the venue), became a reference for the debate on self-managed spaces within the institutional setting. This amounted to a *contested tokening* dynamic. I define the tokening sub-mechanism as the use of a given case or example – interpreted as representing, symbolizing or signifying something else – as a proof or model, to support a political point or argument relating to a broader category of situations or actors. In gender studies and political representation research, the term "token" has been used to refer to members of small minorities located in an overwhelming majority organizational cultures (typically, in spaces of institutional representation), from which they are set apart by racial or gender differences (Crowley 2004). Significant literature, particularly "critical mass" theory and its later critiques, has highlighted the risks of tokenism, or the practice of making perfunctory and symbolic efforts towards the inclusion of underrepresented groups, for purposes of appearance and to avoid accusations of discrimination. Overall, scholarship tends to agree that tokenism can entail serious negative consequences for minority groups, but that at the same time the presence of unheard actors in spaces of representation has the potential of generating positive policy change (Bratton 2005; Crowley 2004). What is particularly interesting about tokens in political representation, and also relevant for the sake of this work, is that tokens make a specific collective actor or group unusually visible – and, as a result, actors in the environment in which they have entered, tend to attach specific identifying characteristics, expectations and attitudes to tokens (Crowley 2004). In terms of political dialectic and competition for power, this translates into the discursive modeling of a specific token as valid and representative evidence for an actor (or group) and its identity. What I contend throughout this work, is that the sub-mechanism of tokening – that is, the act of transforming an actor into a political token, as a model to which to refer a broader category of similar situations or actors –, can be carried out in both neutral (with overall positive attitudes) and in contested terms. The 'case' of Làbas, in particular, became a model to refer to, both positively and in an adversarial perspective. Cognitively, the question of CSAs could not be addressed, thereon, without referring to the experience of Làbas, both in the political debate and in the media and general public discussion.

> For an experience in which many have identified, it seems that the Municipality wishes to bring it to the model of Làbas. The framework of conceding public spaces on the basis of projects through calls for tender is, I believe, the best way. […] A competitive picture helps to demonstrate the value of your project. It can create synergies, contaminations, and respond better to the needs of the city. […] Of course, there could be direct allocations of spaces, but it is a choice that exposes to a lot of critiques both those who make it and those who benefit from it.
>
> (#IE3 elected official, opposition)

That the case of Làbas has become a benchmark for the management of CSA-Municipality interactions, is almost a given in the Bolognese political debate. While I had first-hand knowledge of this fact, it was further confirmed to me by several activists from other spaces, some of whom relate to Làbas as a successful case, and some of whom live with a certain unease the Municipality's pressure on other experiences to conform to its model. The path of Làbas has become a contested reference point for the management of the CSAs question. A positive solution for some (such as the administration), preserving a valuable experience for the city while ensuring its lawfulness and a framework of rules; for others, a benchmark to criticize either the lack of courage, or the electoral motives and laxity (if not the misconduct) of the municipal administration.

> The administration decided to take Làbas and tailor-make a call for tender for the concession of a public space for them, Vicolo Bolognetti. The tender was obviously won by their association, 'Nata per sciogliersi'[65], which already by its name was a mockery. I believe that the entire operation was directed by the *assessore*, including providing some help to write the proposal. After which, the concession was unilaterally renewed by the Municipality, then a new call was published and they won a second time. […] Concessions to spaces like these usually happen for one of two reasons: social peace or votes. […] I believe that the administration is overestimating the electoral capacity of these subjects [Làbas and TPO], but I believe that this was the reasoning behind it.
>
> (#IE1 elected official, opposition)

In a number of critical phases in the city's political debate, Làbas has been used as a tool to distinguish factions and attack opponents. The internal congress of the Bolognese Democratic Party, in 2017, was among such instances: as different party factions opposed each other, critics of social centers mobilized categories such as legality and security, frequently citing the case of Làbas to mark the difference between them and their internal opponents. What is more, the experience of Làbas has persisted as a pivotal element in the debate around the local election of 2021 and the succession to mayor Virginio Merola.

Double-edged institutionalization

Finally, the fourth mechanism in the evolution of Làbas was a *Double-Edged Institutionalization*.

For the case of Bologna, Calafati (2015) has talked about a 'flexible institutionalization', recalling Prujit's (2003) definition of cases in which a collective actor consolidates – becoming steadily integrated into a given social formation –, but does not undergo de-radicalization. This interpretive framework, despite dating back to 2015, appears still largely relevant in describing the experience of Làbas (and the TPO). Much as in the case of the housing squats in Madrid studied by Martinez (2013), legalized experiences such as Làbas and TPO have preserved a high degree of autonomy, their inherent element of self-management, as well as ties to radical social movements. In its 'flexible' institutionalization, Làbas has experienced a dynamic of *double tracking*, or of coexistence between conflictual and

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[65] Literally translated, "Born to be dissolved".

cooperative action in the interplay between the CSA and institutions. This analytical label draws upon Piazza and Genovese (2016), in the depiction of movement actors' strategic dilemmas. Specifically, Piazza and Genovese argue that movement actors are often faced with the choice of presenting themselves as either threatening or unthreatening (the so-called 'Naughty or nice?' dilemma). Confronted with this and other strategic choices, some collective actors may try to keep both of the seemingly alternative options open, adopting a strategy of double track instead of making a clear-cut strategic choice towards one or the other. Piazza and Genovese write critically about this strategy, indicating it as risky for the achievement of movement outcomes in contexts where political opportunities are limited. Conversely, the empirical cases presented in this dissertation, show that the choice of collective actors to engage in both disruptive contentious actions and in cooperative ones, is a dynamic that often characterizes the relationship between institutional actors and SMO. In this respect, it can be found as a constitutive sub-mechanism in both double-edged institutionalization and partitioning mechanisms. As for Làbas, with growing pressure on the part of institutional politics and a progressive encirclement of self-managed experiences, and of Làbas itself in particular, the double tracking dynamic of the space – namely, its combination of protest actions and DSAs, much similar to the double tracking mechanism of the TPO discussed in the following section –, shifted from the realm of practices to the bargaining process with institutions. For one, in 2013, following rumors of a possible eviction of the space, Làbas occupied the room of the Neighborhood Council in session, in which the question was to be discussed, with activists but also families and strollers. The different phases of the negotiation – a cold war at first, and then an explicit dialectic as the debate on the eviction of Làbas emerged publicly – therefore entailed a dynamic of swinging strategies, on both sides of the barricade, in which mild and harsh confrontation tactics were alternatively put into place by each party.[66] As the Municipality adopted a 'good cop, bad cop' approach by proxy of its different institutional figures, for the CSA:

> You cannot defend a place only with good projects. You also defend it through relationships of strength. The administration, law enforcement, they need to see that you are numerous, that you are organized. Unfortunately, there's this too. And thus, we have built our relationship of strength.
> (#I3SC2 activist, Làbas)

The following phases, with the reaching of the agreement between Làbas and the Municipality and the subsequent resuming of Làbas' activity in a new institutionalized setting, were also deeply permeated by this dynamic.

> Now, you know, if you're in a public space, you have signed a convention, the relationship is different. But our heretic and conflictual approach does not change. Other collectives have a different approach – for us, on some things we heavily contest the Municipality, at the same time we can cooperate, build projects together on other things. We riot, the mayor makes declarations against us. Another day we invite the commander of the Kurdish Ypg, and we arrange an institutional meeting with Merola. We use the association for projects on the afterschool for children. It really depends on each thing.
> (#I3SC2 activist, Làbas)

This is how the same activist, already highly involved in Làbas core action at the time, described what happened in 2017, after the riots occurred during the eviction.

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[66] As shown later in the discussion about the TPO, double-tracking does not necessarily imply a direct confrontation between Municipality and movement actor. In the case of Làbas, however, around 2017 this dynamic involved the strategies of both the Municipality and the social center and their direct interaction. This is due to the fact that the process of negotiation and position consolidation of the space was under way at the time.

> What happened after that moment of harsh disruption? A great, public, popular, inclusive campaign, a demonstration with kids, families and so on. Because it is no contradiction, it is no instrumentalization, we truly are both things. People defend us because they recognize our role in society, even if not all of them agree with your putting on a helmet in front of a cop.
> (#I3SC2 activist, Làbas)

After a number of back-and-forths in the negotiation, in sum, an agreement was reached for the space in Vicolo Bolognetti, and hostilities ceased. As it happens, not everyone found this closure to be coherent with Làbas' previous claims, be it on the side of movement actors in the city or within institutional politics. At the same time, it was this double tracking dynamic, which some viewed as a contradiction, which allowed for the individuation of a solution that would accommodate both parties.

> At a certain point you need to seal the deal, end the game. Where the institution says: we need to solve this. That is the time. I think that other spaces had a harder time doing that. But you cannot think that it can go on as a mathematic escalation of forces. You close to then relaunch a new course.
> (#I3SC2 activist, Làbas)

As an elected official from the opposition, strongly critical of Làbas and of the administration, put it in an interview:

> Maybe they sacrificed a part of political coherence, but this resulted in substantial benefits, in a space which in turn can be used to build new political action. So, in this respect, I think that it was a smart move.
> (#IE1 elected official, opposition)

Surely, in turn, this development sealed the double-edged institutionalization of the experience by establishing a relationship of *reciprocity*. The reason why I contend that Làbas' institutionalization was a double-edged one, is precisely because, through this sub-mechanism of reciprocity, the door was opened to risks and advantages for both parties. This was instantly evident as Làbas entered the new space of Vicolo Bolognetti. On the one hand, the administration could claim a twofold victory: the safeguarding of a valuable social reality in the city, and a successful process of legalization of a self-managed path. On the other hand, it was subject to the critiques of both those who would have wished the eviction and the call for tenders had never taken place, and those according to whom the agreement on Vicolo Bolognetti was the expression of a subordination of the Municipality to the space. Similarly, Làbas had earned public support for its action and a space from the Municipality. At the same time, in a smaller space, and less frequented that it used to be, the CSA had to give up parts of its core political action and be subject to a number of restrictions on its activity. Among the projects that most strongly connotated Làbas' direct social engagement at the Caserma Masini was for example 'Accoglienza Degna' ('dignified reception'), a self-managed shelter for people in need, which had to be abandoned in the new space of Vicolo Bolognetti, as the norms on the use of public spaces do not allow for it.

What is particularly relevant, is that this relationship of reciprocity persists to this day, over four years later. While there is no way to know what new developments in the future could threaten or sever it, the fact that the large majority of Virginio Merola's second legislature has been characterized by this reciprocity cannot be ignored. It is a relationship of reciprocity that does not invest the Municipality as a whole, but mostly the current administration (and, therein, part of the Democratic Party, and specific elected officials who have supported the process of institutionalization of Làbas).

The political influence of Làbas: rethinking the urban space, winning a seat at the table

Overall, throughout the timespan considered, Làbas stands out as one the most influential spaces in the Bolognese case (*Table 5.2*).

Attitudes
-   Recognition
-   Contested tokening
Procedural access
-   Continuous dialogue with bureaucracy (particularly after legalization)
-   Continuous access to elected officials (especially since 2016)
-   Participatory deliberation opportunities
Policy
-   Agenda-setting (especially on spaces)
-   Evolving regulations on urban spaces; call for tender Vicolo Bolognetti
-   "Quadrilatero Verde" project within the frame of the Participatory Budget (2018)
-   Change in the Administration's project on Prati di Caprara (environmental struggle).

Table 5.2 The political influence of Làbas: dimensions and outcomes.

In terms of *institutional attitudes*, the progressive acknowledgment of the experience by institutional actors has enabled the opening of new channels of access to decision-making settings and a recognition of Làbas. In the institutional perception of Làbas, despite the instrumental use of contested tokening, the case of this social center remains as a reference for the institutional debate. Progressively, Làbas has come to be considered as a full interlocutor of municipal politics, in light certainly of its legalization, of the presence of clear institutional allies, but also, in the accounts of many elected officials, of its capacity to mobilize the active support of such a large and heterogeneous constituency. It follows that the space is perceived by elected officials as the single most influential self-managed experience in the city.

> Surely, TPO and Làbas are recognized as legitimate and representative interlocutors. For Làbas, part of the Administration has understood that it is untouchable, because they would lose a big chunk of votes.
> (#IE4, elected official, opposition)

Interestingly, many elected officials, especially the more critical ones, attribute the influence of Làbas to its contentious element.

> Undoubtedly, Làbas is the most relevant one. Because it has the strongest antagonistic nature. […] And thus, they have the most visibility. If I had to make a ranking, Làbas is the one, in my view, that would be in the first place.
> (#IE2, elected official, opposition)

In terms of *procedural access*, activists from the space have long been in contact with elected officials from the Municipality, but were also able to enter the institutional realm since 2016 with the election of two city councilors and one neighborhood councilor from Coalizione Civica. They have also entertained a continuous contact with the city bureaucracy, mostly – though not exclusively – since their transfer to Vicolo Bolognetti, where among their DSAs activists hold support desks for migrants and employment search. With respect to these areas

of welfare from below, in particular, they have been in frequent contact with the municipal bureaucracy. One activist, on this note, made it a point to explain what it means for the Municipality to address Làbas' activists.

> Me, I often get called by the Municipality's technicians, even though in theory, for what concerns the activities in here, you are supposed to go through the president of 'Nata per sciogliersi'. Instead, if it has to do with Làbas as a struggling community, meaning external projects etc, there are other channels, like meetings with elected officials... Although I do not like it, I am aware that we live in a world that rests on representation – in strong crisis, for sure, and I hope we can reach a turning point –, I know that we need to go along with it. But if they talk to Detjon [*Làbas' councilor in the Santo Stefano Neighborhood*], they talk to him not as a Coalizione Civica councilor, but as Detjon from Làbas, because they know he is a comrade of the assembly. The opposite would be detrimental.
> (#I2SC2 activist, Làbas)

Finally, as mentioned, Làbas took advantage of several participatory opportunities provided by the municipality to the general public, in order to gain access to the decision-making process and bring about change. Among these are Neighborhood and Spaces Labs and Participatory Budgeting. Furthermore, Làbas specifically was invited to take part in several council committees and institutional summits.

For what concerns the *policy* dimension, multiple levels are to be acknowledged. The space appears, first and foremost, as having had a high capacity to impact the agenda-setting stage. All activists accounts, gathered during interviews, pointed out the space's impact to raise issues on different scales, from non-discrimination to extremely local environmental struggles, and bring them to the administration's table. One activist recounted how years of collective action contributed to increasing institutional awareness on the subject of migrations and reception facilities. Another, long involved in the 'Accoglienza Degna' shelter project in the former Caserma Masini, held that a similar effect was produced on homelessness and marginality. Although these subjects have indeed been increasingly treated within municipal politics, it is difficult to grasp the actual proportion of Làbas' impact in bringing them forth. For one, they were embedded in a wider expansion of social grievances, in years where the public debate was dominated by the economic crisis and later the migration 'emergency' – as it upsurged in the national media and political discussion. Secondly, the Municipality as a governmental level does not have the administrative authority to decide on issues such as migrant reception centers, which fall under the prerogative of the Interior Ministry, and that for years collective actors in the city asked be closed. Certainly, growing administrative attention and public statements on these subjects have been registered over the years, but to what extent that was the result of Làbas' action rather than of heightened material need combined with the general socio-political climate, is hard to say. However, it is worth noting how the perception of Làbas as an impactful space for agenda-setting was acknowledged by several elected officials, and directly linked by some to the question of the crisis, to a setting of welfare retrenchment in which collective action has worked, through DSAs, as a denouncing agent for socioeconomic hardship.

> Here too, nonetheless, inequalities and vulnerabilities have spiked with the crisis. The city holds, because Bologna has a strong social fabric of volunteer work and associations, also catholic. Otherwise, the response provided by the Municipality would not have sufficed. Even 'Accoglienza Degna' in itself was not a solution, although you are helping some people it is not enough, but still, you create awareness, you raise an issue.
> (#IE4 elected official, opposition)

One topic that was put on the agenda as a clear result of the (evolving) experience of Làbas, since its early years, is the question of spaces and self-managed experiences. This claim is confirmed by the crossing of Làbas' activists' accounts, interviews with activists from other Bolognese spaces, several interviews to elected officials and key informants, and the media portrayals of the issue. What is more, it is complemented by the actual policy follow-up that took place on the subject. As one elected official from the opposition recalled, the question of spaces in the city can hardly be considered as 'solved'. The very space that sparked the whole controversy around Làbas, the former Caserma Masini, has in fact remained abandoned since Làbas' eviction.

> A State-owned area had been squatted, Làbas had taken root there, and had integrated well within the neighborhood, offering services, and that place had been given back to the city. Then, it could not last, because it was illegal. But this has raised the issue of the abandonment of spaces on the part of institutions (in this case, of State property), in a lack of projects. That space, since the eviction, has remained unutilized. There needs to be a transition, a call for tender to attract projects for example.
> (#IE3 elected official, opposition)

Significant policy changes, nonetheless, have occurred. A recalled above, in 2014 the Municipality adopted the *Regulation on the collaboration among citizens and the city for the care and regeneration of urban commons*. The document established the city administration's engagement to approach the management and care of urban spaces according to a set of criteria, particularly focused around regenerative actions, the safeguard of urban commons, the promotion of forms of civic autonomous collaborations and partnerships. Following the passing of the Regulation, with the onset of the new legislature, the Council approved the Single Programming Document (*Documento Unico di Programmazione*) for 2017-2019[67]. Among other things, the document provided for the creation of a 'Civic Imagination' Office within the Urban Center (the latter would later become the Foundation for Urban Innovation) and the establishment of an Urban Innovation Plan, defined as "a system connecting the continuous mapping of spaces, urban areas, collaboration agreements and civic initiatives disseminated across the Neighborhoods, in order to design a new project devoted to urban civic uses and the minimum patrimony of citizenship".

In the meantime, in early August 2017, Làbas and Crash were evicted by law enforcement. At that point, the discussion on the use of spaces in the city escalated dramatically in the local media and public debate. The negotiation dialogue with the Municipality shifted to the possibility for Làbas to transfer to the venue of Vicolo Bolognetti. Combined with previous work conducted with the department in charge of municipal assets, the orientations expressed in the 2017-2019 Programming act opened the way to a general mapping of all unutilized municipal spaces, with the intention of turning them into "places of opportunities for all, able to satisfy the creativity and the needs of the local community"[68] and thereby "affirm the right and duty of every citizen to access a minimum endowment of public space, to be managed in collaboration with others, for the safeguard of the common good". A call for tender was therefore published for two spaces, one of which was Vicolo Bolognetti, for the realization of a 'Spaces Lab', a laboratory "dedicated to the issue of spaces, with the goal of redesigning policies and tools to confer and manage property belonging to the city or for temporary use, providing the city council with some ideas for new regulation and support". The guidelines provided by the Municipality for this initiative were significantly informed by the idea of promoting experiences of self-management and urban commons.

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[67] Deliberation (*O.d.G.*, or call sheet) n. 364/2016, voted on 22 December 2016.
[68] Municipality of Bologna, *Delibera di Giunta* 241/2017.

Having deemed advisable to provide for a public call for tender aimed at selecting a plurality of subjects, in charge of elaborating experimental project proposals to define management models of space, with particular attention to the involvement of new subjects and of citizens; it will be possible to experiment such models, for a duration of one year, within spaces temporarily made available (based on the programming of municipal services), drawing upon experiences already established within the neighborhoods; in particular, […] it will be possible to destine the portion of vicolo Bolognetti to experimenting the collaboration with subjects able to bring positive experiences of cohesion and community action.

(Comune di Bologna, *Delibera 241/2017*)

Even more, the call explicitly mentioned the orientation of prioritizing experimentations emerged from informal, innovative and mutualistic experiences, as well as the willingness to promote the continuity of social activities already rooted in the neighborhood.

As for the premises located in vicolo Bolognetti, prioritize the experimentation of models emerged from informal and innovative mutualistic pathways, with seat and rootedness in the Santo Stefano neighborhood, with particular reference to the transition from informal aggregating experiences to recognized and formalized institutional relationships, through the normative instruments available to the Administration, alongside the undersigning of a dedicated 'Collaboration Pact' on the activities; an experimentation of one year (with the possibility of extension for another year), at the end of which the simultaneous involvement in the 'City Lab of Civic Imagination dedicated to the question of spaces' will have to: i) verify the validity of the management model proposed; ii) produce prospective proposals of updating or adjustment of municipal norms; iii) produce potential hypotheses of definitive use of the locales of vicolo Bolognetti, in synergy with the Santo Stefano Neighborhood and the Administration; iv) produce community or administrative project hypotheses, useful to address the main social, economic, environmental and cultural challenges of our time, coherently with the idea of an inclusive city engaged in the safeguard of urban common goods.

(Comune di Bologna, *Delibera 241/2017*)

Làbas' project proposition for the space was then rewarded and the space of Vicolo Bolognetti entrusted to the collective. Indeed, in addition to the contents of the tender, these extracts also yield the impression of a lexical form of modeling, of an impact on language and on the categories deployed in devising the administration's priorities in the management of spaces. Numerous Làbas activists, among the ones I have interviewed, contend that the whole process by which the new municipal Fondazione per l'Innovazione Urbana (the former Urban Center) approached the question of spaces, and particularly the *Laboratorio Spazi* initiative, were heavily impacted by the experience of the social center. Interestingly, this claim was fully substantiated by another interview I conducted, with a key informant from the city bureaucracy.

So, through the experimentation of the Spaces' Lab, which allows informal groups to intervene, you have allowed parts of the city that used to remain outside, to enter into a more cooperative reasoning. And this happened with Làbas. In the call that assigned vicolo Bolognetti to Làbas, there was the Spaces' Lab – that is, the experimentation of vicolo Bolognetti would have to bring contributions and ideas to the construction of a city laboratory on spaces, to rethink spaces. Thus, the spark generated by Làbas was also, precisely, from an institutional point of view. It ignited a new city dynamic.

(#KI2, key informant, municipal bureaucracy)

Làbas was at the root of at least two other policy changes, both in the environmental and urban planning realm. In 2018, Làbas, along with citizen committee "Arena Orfeonica" and the school establishment of the local school district, submitted the proposition of a project to the Participatory Budget of Bologna. The "Quadrilatero Verde" project, entailing the installation of greenery and plants to create a 'green quadrant' in the area of the Santo

Stefano neighborhood surrounding Vicolo Bolognetti, was openly promoted by Làbas, who presented the project to the general public and asked citizens to cast their online vote on the Participatory Budget platform. The project resulted to be the most voted in the neighborhood and, accordingly, is in the process of realization at the time of writing of this thesis. The on-site inspections were carried out, and the definitive project finalized by the Municipality; the executive project is currently under redaction. The second policy change impacted by Làbas concerns the modification of the Municipality's planning project of the area 'Prati di Caprara', which, as discussed below, was the result of a concerted action involving Làbas, the TPO, and a citizens' committee for the preservation of the area.

5.3 The Teatro Polivalente Occupato (TPO)

Among the frontrunners of Bolognese movement during the 1990s and 2000s, the TPO is an historical social center of the city, part of the Disobedient tradition. The space, which can be described as a classical CSA, is engaged in a variety of actions around culture and art, citizenship rights, sports, antifascism and antisexism. It is managed by a group of core activists from different generations; it also frequently holds open assemblies and hosts and supports the initiatives of several local committees.

This is one of experiences for which the years around the crisis, and the exhaustion of the 2008-2011 protest cycle, have represented a deep turning point. The progressive bridging of the experience to embrace the wider city, through the resort to DSAs and the integration in the urban territory, created the conditions for an institutionalization in which, despite remaining contentious, the TPO was in a way normalized as an experience in the public debate, and progressively identified as a model of legitimate self-managed experience. As an already accepted actor, the TPO was able to contribute to the disruption of the local competition for power, by seizing a political space of institutional representation and by selecting strategically the arenas and modes to express its contention.

Across the decade, the TPO has been a highly influential experience, from its determinant contribution to collective struggles such as the one surrounding the Prati di Caprara site (resulting in policy changes), to the space's acquisition of continuous access to the political process, gained through direct social actions as well as through the choice of pursuing electoral representation. The TPO enjoys full recognition on the part of institutional actors, and carries the weight, one could say, of being perceived by much institutional politics as useful to the city and scarcely contentious.

Table 5.3 Pathway of the TPO: mechanisms, sub-mechanisms and dimensions of political influence.

Collective Actor	Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms			Political Influence
TPO	**Bridging** Perimeter unlocking; Territorialization; Network.	**Double-edged institutionalization** Double tracking; Normalization; Tokening.	**Disruption of power competition** Seizure of political space; Conflict segregation.	Attitudes, Procedural, Policy

Bridging

Given the proximity of the two experiences, the trajectory of the TPO (*Table 5*.3) needs to be apprehended in synergy with that of Làbas, although the history of the TPO started much earlier. The *Teatro Polivalente Occupato* (Polyvalent Occupied Theatre) was born with the occupation, in November 1995, of a small unfinished theatre in via Irnerio, close to the Academy of Fine Arts. Originally, the TPO was conceived as a Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), an occupation of a few days among many others on the part of young theater companies, claiming spaces from the Municipality in which to carry out their activity. After a few days, the occupation was loosened, and opened to the students of the Academy. From this contamination was born the first core of the TPO, bringing together subjectivities centered around cultural and artistic experimentation. The first experience of the TPO with social engagement occurred in 1998, with the hosting of dozens of migrants evicted from via del Pallone within the space, for two months. Evicted in 2000, the Municipality found a space for the TPO in viale Lenin. This venue was much larger and better equipped to fit the polyvalent projects of the space, and contributed to a growth and diversification of the CSA's activities, making the TPO the nerve center for the city's movements. Home to the White Overalls, the TPO of the time also saw the establishment of media activism initiatives and groups such as YaBasta!, active among others in the promotion of migrant and citizenship rights. In 2007, the TPO moved to via Casarini, in a venue conceded by the Municipality, where it remains to this day. While in many respects the TPO and Làbas could be considered as a single collective actor, the unfolding of their trajectories over time, in terms of mechanisms and of outcomes, can prove analytically insightful. In many respects, the two trajectories resemble each other.

Years before Làbas and the crisis, the TPO had started undergoing a process of legalization. Yet, one could not argue that the TPO ever actually institutionalized before the burst of the crisis and the onset of the experience of Làbas. The first mechanism that the TPO experience around the crisis, was actually *Bridging.*

Between 2000 and 2008, the TPO was the center and home of the Bolognese branches of the White Overalls, and later of the *Disobbedienti*. It was the core, in Bologna, of the mobilization against the G8 in Genova in 2001, and throughout that time period saw the emergence and consolidation of numerous initiatives, from the media activists of Indymedia and the 'Sexy Shock', to the Ya Basta! association. All in all, the TPO was probably the largest and most active social center of the time, both culturally and politically. After Genova, the space started a reflection on the way forward, on what it meant, following the experience of the G8, to be a social center. As found by Bosi and Zamponi (2019), the TPO progressively realized that it could no longer be a closed freed space, but that its struggle for freedom should go out of the spaces' perimeter. Activists reckoned that the social center was no longer self-sufficient, and it ought to open itself up to a dialogue and an encounter with new subjectivities. The 2008 to 2011-2012 phase saw the TPO engaging in harsh contentious and disruptive actions alongisde the other movement actors of the city. With the end of that protest cycle, the TPO intensified its efforts to reconcile its 'typical' 1990s-early 2000s social center history, with the opening of activities and services to the city at large, through a mechanism of *perimeter unlocking*. In this respect, from 2012 onwards, the TPO experimented and widened its repertoire of action, making the Teatro an increasingly traversable space and thereby attracting a progressively more diverse public. The experimentation of the TPO with DSAs and new forms of engagement, following the season of heigh contention of 2008-2011, was informed by the understanding of a changing context, in which new social and participation needs were emerging. The choice of DSAs relaunched through a different form the antagonist and conflictual identity of the TPO (Bosi and Zamponi 2019), and in many

respects unfolded as a consequence of the new struggles of the early 2000s. Already since viale Lenin, the TPO had focused on DSAs, particularly in the domain of popular sports activities. Having started with self-defense and boxing classes, in via Casarini, the Popular Gym was later enriched by a variety of other activities, including muay thai, soccer, volleyball, rugby, aerial silk, different dance classes.

Through DSAs, much like Làbas, the TPO also operated a *territorialization* of collective action, taking root in its neighborhood and the city. By providing services and opportunities, as well as chances of participation and aggregation, the TPO took root in the local community. Its 'popular gym', for one, has become one of the most attended in the city, attracting people in need as well as numerous people seeking a different approach to sports and aggregation. Furthermore, the TPO dedicated itself to building relationships among the heterogenous landscape of attenders of the space, and a positive coexistence with residents of the surrounding area. One example among many of this latter aspect is the insonorization of the space, which has allowed the TPO to attract thousands of people to its concerts without compromising its relationship with the neighbors. An element that is recognized even by the fervent critics of social centers among elected officials.

> […] there are no committees in the city fighting for the closing of the TPO. The TPO has its attenders, and then people who ignore the existence and activities of the TPO. That is all. So, the way in which you conduct yourself allows you to be ignored by those who would bring you nuisance, and be appreciated by attenders. I myself have been to some performances at the TPO, even though politically we couldn't be further apart.
> (#IE1 elected official, opposition)

This opening to DSAs was inevitably informed by the dynamics of marginalization engendered by the crisis.

> the evidence that at times you make up for the institutions' shortcomings is telling. Before the crisis we would not have thought this to be the case, because even if people didn't have billions, they had those 30 or 50 euros to enroll their children at the gym. Today, in our soccer school with about twenty kids from 9 to 13 years old, around 80% doesn't pay anything, because they can't afford those 20 euros. To give people the opportunity to practice a sport, goes beyond the sport itself: it creates a dynamic of aggregation, of socialization, we bring together kids from different backgrounds, from those reported by social services to those whose family can afford the 20 euros and chooses to bring them here.
> (#I1SC1 activist, TPO)

In conjunction with the spark of the first migrant struggles and demonstrations in support of the situation of Roma people in Bologna, the TPO progressively expanded its engagement initiatives for the youth and the rights and integration of foreigners, tightening its relationship with social work. Already since 2011, even the local conservative newspaper, *Il Resto del Carlino*, acknowledged the TPO as actor engaged for migrants' rights. The paper went on to increasingly describe the TPO as a multi-functional space, providing opportunities to the general public.

> […] now the Teatro Polivalente, or rather Laboratory of Art, Culture and Politics, is a complex of 1100 sq. meters, with a sports club, a radio, and a desk for work and citizen rights which will be starting in October.
> (B. Cucci, *Il Resto del Carlino*, "Il Tpo riapre le porte correndo a tutta birra", 23 September 2013)

The space has increasingly offered services complementary to institutional welfare provisions, although from a perspective that rejects the logic of subsidiarity and, rather,

focuses on providing collective responses to the crisis and countering marginalities and solitudes.

> Precisely through these militant actions, we started to encounter the lives of many migrants, and from there, ideas were born such as the migrant assistance desk, the Italian language school, but also the work assistance desk, which is not only for migrants although they are the ones who come in the most. We organize courses, very much in coordination with the cooperatives in charge of managing the SPRARs and other reception facilities. Over the last years we've organized courses to obtain the drivers' license, courses to become a pizzaiolo or a cook, and many more.
> (#I1SC1 activist, TPO)

> We also have an afterschool for youth from 10 to 13 years of age, in partnership with the services of the Porto Neighborhood, with education services, and the neighborhood schools, to provide a service to families in need, especially foreign ones. We have Italian courses with migrants and refugees, which for many of them are the first encounter with a form of 'welcoming'; we have a sports pathway connoted by our keywords (antifascism, anti-racism and anti-sexism), which counts 200 adherents to the Uisp[69] and for three years now has been developing projects with the Neighborhood and social services; we have theater classes with disabled people. Even though, and I wish to stress this, ours isn't a subsidiarity service, like "the Municipality can't make it, so we do it". True in a way, but only to a certain extent, because we prefer mutualism and real cooperation to assistentialism. In sum, if tomorrow we were evicted – absurdly – we would leave lots of things unfinished, and we would risk abandoning many people towards which today we feel that we are responsible. That is why it is important to be recognized.
> (S. Papa, *Zero*, 'Intervista a Flavia Tomassini'. 9 November 2015)[70]

In this respect, branching out with a new generation of activists into the experience of Làbas, appears to have play a pivotal role.

> Làbas has brought on a new generation, who has been able to establish a new dynamic with the city – it is no trivial thing that, when they were evicted, there was such a huge demonstration. Because they have brought a new mode of militancy, which has ended up influencing the very TPO, from which they come. That is, an experience much more linked to what once would have been volunteer work […]. This dynamic has produced effects in the city more generally. It has compelled the TPO to invest much more on initiatives of proximity, becoming the only presence that actually entertains neighborly relations in an area of the city where to this day there is very little, and there is a very peculiar social composition.
> (#KI2, key informant, municipal bureaucracy)

Finally, a *network* dynamic took place with the burst of the crisis, weaving relationships between the TPO and non-movement actors, particularly civil society and volunteer associations, many of which had stopped in the 2000s. On the one hand, partnerships were formed along with the development of the Làbas experience (particularly around initiatives for migrants).

> Paradoxically, although the political direction of that political area was still in the hands of the TPO, its soul was provided by Làbas. Làbas changed things – it is from there that originated the experiment of the Pizzoli sports center, from that experience was established a new relationship with ARCI (starting from a relationship that had been broken since 2001) and with Caritas – that is, with that front that had marked the alterglobalist season and in the city was completely shattered. And in fact, the national experiment of Mediterranea[71] was born here.
> (#KI2, key informant, municipal bureaucracy)

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[69] One of the main progressive sports associations in the country.
[70] S. Papa, *Zero*, 'Intervista a Flavia Tomassini'. 9 November 2015, available at: https://zero.eu/it/persone/intervista-flavia-tommasini-tpo/.
[71] A platform of different civil society initiatives, involved in monitoring and sea rescue actions in the central Mediterranean.

On the other hand, institutional actors such as Child Protection Services could easily interact with the legalized TPO branch (rather than Làbas), as the TPO engaged in mutualistic practices addressing questions of social inclusion.

Double-edged institutionalization

As a long-established reality, the TPO did not experience quite a similar mechanism to the legitimization underwent by Làbas. Its evolution into an institutionalized actor was, in this respect, smoother. Partly also in light of its legalized and relatively unproblematic situation, the TPO did not need prominent actors to broker on its behalf, or to form and convey a new collective identity. Even its de facto certification occurred, in a sense, slowly and with few public statements. Following its bridging endeavor, what directly set off during the crisis was instead a mechanism of *Double-edged institutionalization*.

This emerged, first, through *double-tracking*. Much as in the case of Làbas, the political practice of the TPO, in which conventional tactics complement disruptive ones, resonates with scholarly understandings of flexible institutionalization (Calafati 2015; Martinez 2013). Despite the long-standing formalization of its legal framework through the instrument of space concession, conflict has remained a strong element of the TPO's political identity. For this CSA, the years leading up to the crisis and those immediately afterwards marked different turning point in terms of practices and political action. On the one hand, up until 2011-2012 the space engaged on a regular basis in radical protest actions and antagonistic initiatives, particularly against financial institutions and austerity measures. The analysis of its coverage by the local press during those years shows the extraordinary frequency of the TPO's participation in demonstrations, protest occupations and riots. Despite its formalized course, the action of the TPO was thus at the time put into question by critics in the City Council, where councilors from the right went to the point of formally presenting an order of business (*Odg*), in 2012, suggesting the possibility of revoking the concession of the space due to the threat to public order posed by the social center. At the same time, cooperative and non-disruptive actions had been carried out for a few years, an element that is also reflected in the participation of the TPO to institutional debates on issues such as social exclusion and migrants. For one, the TPO took part in the public hearing on the migratory question, called by the Municipality between 2007 and 2008. In that setting, TPO and Ya Basta! denounced the discrimination against migrants generated by the Bossi-Fini law on migration, the exclusion of migrants from voting rights, the difficulty of communicating with Neighborhood administrations, and the connection of migrants' problems with the issues related to housing in the city[72]. This process, already under way, was accelerated and transformed by the crisis. For many years now, antagonism and the increasing engagement in DSAs have gone hand in hand for the TPO. This remains the case, even though its conflictual side has become less and less present in the public debate, and only resurfaces very rarely in statements by elected officials (ones more critical towards the experience). The shift occurred with the crisis goes to show that legalization, in itself, does not equate institutionalization. In turn, institutionalization, in this double-edged form, does not prevent collective actors to disrupt the competition for power.

Furthermore, the double-edged institutionalization of the TPO came about through a progressive *normalization*. This sub-mechanism describes the dynamic by which the public image of a collective actor becomes less newsworthy, and its overall visibility (in the media and the public debate) decreases significantly. This dynamic is better understood in a context of relative positions within the city political environment. The interest around the TPO

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[72] Report relating interventions during the public hearing, http://www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/relazione.pdf.

faded, both in the media and the institutional debate, which made the space less and less discussed – with the exception of a few disruptive actions. In this respect, in the local media the TPO has continued to be associated with protest events even after 2012, alongside other movement actors (and always, after 2012, with Làbas). However, it has very rarely made the single object of articles. It is worth noting that the percentage of articles mentioning the TPO as part of the cultural agenda of the city (listed among the events of the week, the weekend or during specific holidays and celebrations) has increased drastically: it used to be a little over 19% until 2012 (the remaining 80% being devoted to political events), and has since shifted to 54%[73], as *Table 5.4* illustrates.

Table 5.4 Articles mentioning the TPO in Repubblica Bologna, frequency and news sectors (2000-2020).

	January 2000 to November 2012	*December 2012 to February 2020*
results	186 (150 political)	315 (144 political)
cultural agenda	36 (19,35%)	171 (54%)

One interviewee from the local press expanded on this dynamic.

> At one point, the TPO […] institutionalizes, it becomes an interlocutor and, in a way, disappears, from this debate on antagonist experiences. Even from 'their' point of view, I think, it lost some appeal, because you see language classes, karate, sewing classes, the farmers' market… But the things that used to animate these places inevitably choose to go elsewhere. And from our point of view of journalists, too, we basically stopped talking about it.
> (#KI1, key informant, local journalist)

On the other hand, other actors, specifically Làbas (and later, though on a much different note, Xm24 as well) captured the attention of the media and the public debate, largely on account of their polarizing nature. Interestingly, when asked to map the main social centers in the city, some elected officials from the opposition listed the TPO amongst the least influential spaces in the city. To them, the lower visibility of this social center with respect to others results from a less contentious approach, and entails a narrower leeway to bring about change within institutional politics.

> The TPO offers more services and is less antagonistic [than other spaces]. It does much less antagonism than Làbas or XM24. Therefore, it is less visible.
> (#IE2 elected official, opposition)

As a consequence of its normalization, the TPO has also undergone a *tokening* on the part of institutional actors. However, two important distinctions are in order, with respect to the case of Làbas. The first relates to the lack of an element of direct visibility and capacity display, as it was the case for Làbas: despite being part of the entire process and concretely contributing to the capacity display of Làbas, the TPO was never at the center of the debate on self-managed spaces during the last decade, and did not have to resort to displaying its mobilization capacity as a means of political bargaining. The second distinction relates to the final sub-mechanism of tokening. It emerges from interviews with elected officials that the

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[73] It is worth clarifying here that the overall number of articles published per year has risen, as the paper has increased the number of articles since the late 2000s, following the expansion of its online branch and the use of social media outlets.

TPO, unlike any other space, constitutes a reference point for all City Council forces when it comes to the normalization of the relationship between institutions and self-managed experiences. Despite its continued history of conflict, today's TPO is perceived as one of the least antagonistic spaces in the city, one that has been able to integrate with the surrounding urban area and against which it is overall difficult to speak.

> This space is basically sponsored by the Municipality of Bologna. The TPO can count on dozens of thousands of euros of rent, that the Municipality pays to RFI in order for the TPO to able to remain where it is. We had a hearing inside the TPO a while ago, where they provided us very efficiently with precise information on their budgets, on their activity – granted, one can agree with those activities or not. What struck me most about the TPO was their stakeholder management: their neighbors do not complain about them.
> (#IE1, elected official, opposition)

In other words, while the experience of Làbas is used as a contested token to shape the field of power competition within the institutions (both inside and against the majority), the TPO has been used at times as a reference in the dialectic with more heterodox spaces rejecting patterns of institutionalization, but does not constitute a terrain of political conflict in itself. Instead, it remains as a virtually non-contested model for how, according to social centers' and movements' critics especially, an administration should manage its relationship with these experiences. Naturally, this widely positive perception could be interpreted as a 'failure' of the space's radical goals, as a dynamic attesting to its cooptation or assimilation to institutions. However, this is but one side of a more complex reality, and has more to do with knowledge of the CSA and credit attribution than actual de-radicalization or assimilation. In fact, the more conservative or right-wing elected officials I interviewed, who reference the TPO the poster child of social center normalization (which they obviously encourage), appear to be little aware the space's outreach and actual action. For one, despite knowing the names and political biographies of one or two prominent TPO figures, they do not acknowledge the deep connection between TPO and Làbas, or the extent of the antagonism practiced by the space. In other words, as they do not frequent or directly engage with these actors, they mostly rely on third party accounts, and particularly media ones. It follows that the media portrayal of these experiences largely informs their perception of them. As the local media have mostly drifted away from covering the TPO, the space's conflictual nature has become less manifest in the debate and in institutional perceptions, when the latter are not endowed with more direct or first-hand knowledge of the experiences, and often times the institutional links and allies are attributed to Làbas, despite the fact that the TPO is part of the same process. Yet, the institutionalization of the TPO is double-edged in that, through this opening of credit towards the experience and its integration into important parts of the institutional realm, the TPO and collective actors in general can no longer be ignored. They can, in other words, no longer be treated as outsiders, as actors operating outside the perimeter of civicness, of the polity. Instead, some of them at least (deemed legitimate interlocutors), now have to be acknowledged, their voice on issues has citizenship within the institutional realm and thus can no longer be automatically discarded.

Disruption of power competition
Since 2016, the TPO's pathway of influence has then been characterized by the *Disruption of power competition* of the local political system. In fact, the affirmation of the Coalizione Civica in the institutional arena, and the growing political debate around social centers in the city, made some collective actors shift to the center of the city stage. While Làbas and Xm24

became nodes of political competition – the former managing to disrupt and shape the competition for power, the latter enduring it –, the TPO did not, despite playing an active role in orienting the dynamics of power competition. Differently put, the disruption of the local competition for power, was in part determined by the participation of the TPO in the Coalizione Civica experiment, and coincided with a further segregation of the conflict between the TPO and institutional actors.

Much like in the trajectory of Làbas, one constitutive element in the disruption of power competition, was the *seizure of political space* through the experience of the Coalizione Civica. Before 2016, candidates close to the TPO or activists from the space blended in the lists of radical left parties, though running as 'independent' candidates. In 2015, leftist forces in the city had started to work towards the construction of a united front alternative to the Democratic Party. The process was inaugurated by the launch of a 'civic coalition for Bologna' (Coalizione Civica per Bologna), involving figures from civil society organizations, political parties, volunteer associations and actors engaged in different local struggles (around education, common goods, legality, social inclusion). Simultaneously, in the autumn of 2015, the TPO started its own political process aimed at changing the govern of the city from below, with a formation named 'Bonalè' (literally, "Enough!", in the Bolognese dialect), whose assemblies found their physical location inside Làbas. In the months leading up to the 2016 election, the impulse of the initial group of Coalizione Civica evolved into a composite front, joined by the activists of Bonalè; the militants of radical left parties Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL) and Possibile; and several other actors, both collective and individual, including former members of the Merola administration. With this new outlook, Coalizione Civica chose Federico Martelloni as mayoral candidate, and ran with its list in the 2016 municipal election. By guiding, among other actors, this path towards representative politics, and entering with Coalizione Civica into the electoral competition, the TPO contributed to disrupting previous equilibria of power competition in the realm of municipal politics.

A second dynamic took place, simultaneously, which can be defined as *conflict segregation*, or the distinction and selection of circumscribed settings where conflictual dynamics are to unfold. This dynamic captures a change in the approach of State actors to conflict and competition, investing both the side of the social center and that of elected officials. As mentioned, after 2012, episodes of contention (particularly those directly against the Municipality) involving the TPO, decreased significantly. As discussed in reference to the double-tracking of the space, while contention has remained steadily present in the TPO's action, particularly when demonstrations are called, protest and disruptive actions are carried out within the boundaries of defined occasions. This element, combined with the normalization of the relative position of the TPO in the local debate, and with its rising to a model for institutional actors, has conveyed an image of the space's conflict as confined to very specific occasions and collective struggles. In this respect, it is important to underline that the conflictual element of DSAs and mutualistic practices has been very little grasped by a relevant portion of the institutional elite. However, the relationship with institutions – mostly positive, despite the persistence of a conflict track – and the perception of conflict as a delimited part of the TPO's action, has contributed to the space's ability to entry and stay into the competition for power as a legitimized interlocutor. In turn, existing equilibria were disrupted by the concentration of power competition dynamics around actors other than the TPO, following the emergence of a new actor, Làbas, and the increasing polarization around another established actor, Xm24. Both these self-managed experiences have become terrains of political competition. Conflict on the part of local elected officials, thus, was largely directed towards other collective actors, while instances of questioning or critique

towards the TPO were reduced to rare occurrences. From its pre-2012 status, when it was contested and questioned by institutional politics, this separation has provided the TPO with the ability to maintain its conflictual nature, while not allowing it to undermine its position within the institutional debate.

The political influence of the TPO: an influential poster child for social centers

The TPO has been a highly influential actor during the crisis decade, with the respect to all three dimensions of political influence (*Table 5.5*). Along its pathway, the action of this space and its engagement in DSA have enabled an increase of procedural access and the gaining of institutional recognition. This has allowed the TPO to gain an authoritative voice in decision-making settings and fostered its influential role in struggles for policy change.

Procedural access
-   Relationship with bureaucracy (e.g. social services)
-   Direct political interlocutors
Attitudes
-   Full recognition
Policy
-   Collective struggles with other movement actors and Làbas
-   Prati di Caprara.

Table 5.5 The political influence of the TPO: dimensions and outcomes.

First, in terms of *procedural access*, the TPO has built and entertained a continuative dialogue with elected officials, the municipal bureaucracy, as well as specific institutional actors such as Child Protection and Social Services. This progressive extension of access can definitely be attributed to the space's entry into representative politics, with Coalizione Civica, as well as to its formalized and institutionalized outlook, but also, and much earlier, to its choice of engaging in direct social actions. While on the one hand this access to institutions is instrumental, to both the TPO's and the institutions' management of welfare and social inclusion services, it also concurs to the acknowledgment of the space as a credited, engaged and informed actor with respect to the social issues of the city, and allows the TPO to directly interact with institutions during decision-making.

In terms of *institutional attitudes*, then, the TPO has come to enjoy full recognition over the past decade, regardless of political affiliations and political merit judgments on the part of single elected officials. Positive elite perceptions are typically motivated by interviewees based on the social value of the experience, its good integration in the urban context, and its transparency (and legality). One noteworthy element that has emerged during interviews with elected officials, is that political and contentious element of the TPO (inherent in its social action) is not always acknowledged or understood by institutional actors.

> This is the best scenario that we have in the city.
> (#IE1, elected official, opposition)

> The TPO is a structured, institutionalized pathway, which offers much to citizenry and is well integrated into the social fabric of the city. It is very well organized and open, proactive towards the city on the cultural and sports level.
> (#IE3, elected official, opposition)

> We have been to the TPO within a commission. I have listened, seen what they do – and as a matter of fact much of what I've told you is the result of that commission, which in my view, as much as it pains me to admit it, was very interesting. Then, of course, the few instances of interaction over the years have been hardly friendly.
> (#IE2, elected official, opposition)

The administration, for its part, has explicitly recognized the social value of the experience. Much has changed since the first expression of acknowledgment of the TPO, in 2011, on the part of former *assessore* Ronchi and newly elected mayor Virginio Merola, who urged for a dialogue with experiences "who respect the rules and carry out activities that are useful in cultural and associational terms"[74]. In 2018, the administration Executive voted for the extension of the renting contract between the Municipality and RFI up until June 2021 (the date originally prescribed for the local elections, which have since been postponed to October due to Covid-19). The motivations of the positive evaluation of the TPO included in the document offer a useful illustration of such recognition.

> Having positively evaluated the activity carried out over the years by associations Ya Basta! And Atash in the locales in object; activities on which timely account has been provided in the annual activity reports (and relative financial statements). In particular, the cultural aggregation role played by both associations is noted, also recalled in the Strategic Plan for Sports, alongside APS IGBO, APD HIC SUNT LEONES, ASSOCIAZIONE CHEAP and numerous informal groups […].[I]n the cultural sector, numerous activities have been developed in Live Music, Underground Culture, Cinema, Illustrations, Comics, Books, Publishing, StreetArt, Dance and Performance, while the social and rights advancement sector has carried out activities addressed to youth and minors and migrants, with particular attention to interculturalism and the fostering of citizenship rights, the promotion of sports as an element of inclusion, international solidarity […] the rich program of activities for the 2018-2021 (June) period confirms the role that both associations still play within the territory.
> (Municipality of Bologna, *Delibera di Giunta 30/2018*)

In terms of *policy*, activists from the TPO claim an impact in several collective struggles led together with movement actors in the city over the years. For one, they acknowledge the radical change occurred during the last city legislature, and particularly since Làbas' eviction, in the administration's approach to the question of spaces and self-management. Naturally, the TPO was deeply involved in that phase of State-movement interaction, and prominent figures from the space contributed to the negotiations with the Municipality. 2017, in a way, represented the successful culmination of a long wave of mobilization on the issue of spaces in Bologna, a struggle in which all movement actors had played an active role. There, the political environment of the city, long dominated by the repression of occupied experiences, saw a significant transformation. A similar reasoning can be applied to the opening of new participatory opportunities of democracy from below and innovations in local deliberation mechanisms, although this struggle was embedded in a larger trend of demands for direct participation on the part of citizens and the civil society. Another pivotal struggle of Bolognese collective actors during the 2000s was the struggle for housing. In this respect, activists from different spaces, including the TPO, have shared their preoccupation on what remained an unresolved question in the life of the city. Since those interviews, however, a public municipal hearing on the subject of housing has been started and is still ongoing. Several movement actors are taking part in the process (for one, reports from the hearing's

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[74] A. Cori, "Dallo sceriffo Cofferati all'amico Ronchi così i centri sociali escono dal ghetto", *Repubblica Bologna*, 29 September 2011.

meetings relate an intervention by an activist from Làbas)[75]. However, as discussed later in reference to Crash, the attribution of this occurrence to movement struggles is not straightforward. Conversely, along with several other actors, the TPO took active part in affecting a policy change in the urban planning project of the area denominated "Prati di Caprara", in the Western part of the city. A sequence of planning provisions, elaborated by the Municipality since the late 2000s, had identified the area as a priority target for urban remodeling. The site was tightly linked to the refurbishing of the nearby football stadium. Up until 2017, the Merola administration stated its intention to proceed with a massive re-edification plan for residential, commercial and sports construction works and the realization of a vast park. The provision was already included in the municipal operative Plan (POC). The Prati di Caprara made the object of numerous informative hearings in the neighborhoods invested by the project, until the initiation of a public Lab devoted to the 'Western Quadrant' of the city, precisely related to the refurbishing project of the stadium. While the Lab itself stopped its activity due to issues with the stadium project, it was the occasion for grievances to emerge on the subject of the Prati di Caprara. In that setting, a citizens committee was formed, under the name "Regeneration no speculation" (*Rigenerazione No Speculazione*), contesting the project. The committee organized a self-managed participatory lab (called "ParteciPrati"), during which alternative propositions and an extensive scientific report were elaborated concerning the transformation of the area. Two meetings of the competent Council committee were then held, to establish an interlocution between the committee and the administration. Meanwhile, 200 people demonstrated in front of the Municipality building in May 2018, and several initiatives were organized throughout the year, including days devoted to the cleaning of the wooded area from garbage and informative activities. The TPO and Làbas were actively involved and among the promoters of the committee's campaign (some of the TPO's core activists were also directly engaged in the scientific direction of the committee). A large demonstration was called in October, which was joined not only by citizens and groups involved in the committee but also elected officials from Coalizione Civica and the Five Star Movement. Part of the PD administration also started to publicly acknowledge the need to rethink the planning project[76]. Strongly promoted by the committee, a municipal hearing on the matter took place during three public summits, on the 7th, 9th and 10th November 2018. The hearing saw the participation of activists from the committee, and was concluded with a Council O.d.G., by which the Council indicated a series of guidelines for the administration in the management of the project. Such guidelines were concrete and actually transformative of the project. They included an increased concern with the environmental and health-related issues regarding the project, and substantial modifications of the latter to reduce the building indexes initially foreseen, increase the proportion of green spaces across the Prati area (in order to reach a proportion of two thirds of green areas and one third of constructions), the preservation of the wooded area's ecological function for the city as a whole, and the limitation of construction to a set of specified uses of social, inclusionary and cultural value[77]. While the implementation of the new project is still under way, the Committee has been undoubtedly successful during the previous stages of the policy process. During an interview conducted in 2019, an historical activist from the TPO explained how they believe that the interaction

[75] Municipality of Bologna, *Istruttoria Pubblica in merito al disagio abitativo*, report on the advancement of the public hearing on housing, available at: http://www.comune.bologna.it/partecipazione/servizio_singolo/101:5903/.

[76] "Bosco ai Prati di Caprara, Lepore apre: 'Riprogettare l'area si può'", *BolognaToday*, 22 October 2018, available at: https://www.bolognatoday.it/cronaca/prati-caprara-est-lepore-bosco.html.

[77] Municipality of Bologna, *order of business 422.1/2018*, adopted by the City Council on 10 December 2018, available at: http://www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/odg_422.1_2018_istruttoria_pubblica.pdf.

between the movement in the streets and the movement in the palace works, in bringing about change.

> In my opinion we have impacted some policies, then I think that […] this happens when you have strong movements. Sure, Coalizione Civica brings the grievance of the Prati di Caprara inside institutions, but that level is moved by citizens, by people. […] So I think that those who are inside those rooms is strong if they have a strong social force behind them, otherwise it just becomes a statement presence, […] if there isn't a real element of social force, political parties have very small chances of changing both the governing power and the economic power. The issue of the Prati di Caprara, as the committee says, is not yet a full victory, but until a year ago the mayor talked about building an outlet mall, it was supposed to be an exchange for the construction of the stadium, and this entire thing fell through, because power realized that it would have been a terrible own-goal, because when you have thousands of people in the neighborhood that oppose a project, you need to acknowledge it.
> (#I1SC1 activist, TPO)

5.4 Xm24

Among the most peculiar experiences considered in this work, since its birth Xm24 has been a heterogeneous and contested hub of experimentations. Originated from Contropiani, a network of collective actors within the "Bologna Social Forum", Xm24 was never a political collective. Rather, it can be described as a physical space crossed, over the years (until its eviction in 2019), by a myriad of subjectivities and projects, and shaped, as a social space, by their relationships. Organized and managed through a weekly public assembly, Xm's action has been based on a logic of horizontality, rejecting hierarchical methods of deliberation and all vertical representation. Xm belongs to the radical autonomy branch of social antagonism; its guiding principles are self-management, antifascism, anti-sexism, anti-racism and anticapitalism.

The experience of Xm24 took rapidly root in a territorial enclave, the Bolognina neighborhood of the city, and a delimited relational environment. This encapsulation of Xm also resulted from the narrative (both constructed by Xm and imposed on it from the exterior) surrounding the space. Such encapsulation, and the practice of DSAs by Xm, allowed for years of more or less peaceful, autonomous coexistence between Xm24, the whole city, and institutional politics. Things spiraled as a crossing of conflicting interests intensified around the fate of Xm, the experience progressively lost ground, and all actors were compelled to see through their diverging positions. This resulted in the eviction of Xm, currently without a space.

The political influence of Xm24 across the decade has been overall limited. Xm has managed to influence small policy changes, and gained a limited extent of access to institutional decision-making. Despite some instances of strong institutional recognition, attitudes towards the experience have worsened over the years, putting in question its position as a legitimate interlocutor.

Table 5.6 Pathway of Xm24: mechanisms, sub-mechanisms and dimensions of political influence.

Collective Actor	Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms			Political Influence
XM24	**Encapsulation** Territorialization; Narrative.	**Partitioning** Double-tracking; Certification through Itemizing.	**Downward spiral of political opportunity** Polarization; Decertification;	Policy (low)

			Repartition.	

Encapsulation

Xm24 was born at the beginning of 2002, with the moving of an ensemble of collectives from the No-Ocse mobilization[78] into the spaces of the former market of via Fioravanti 24 (abandoned since 1994), in the 'Bolognina' neighborhood, following the proposal of mayor Guazzaloca that a temporary concession be granted to what was then called Contropiani, a network within the "Bologna Social Forum". Despite its 'secured' situation, at least for the time being, Xm24 was deeply influenced, in its early development and choices, by the ebb phase faced by collective action after 2003, by the new policy of repression embraced by the administration between 2004 and 2007 with respect to occupations, as well as by the intensification of right-wing and neo-fascist violence. As a consequence, as two activists recalled in an extensive recollection

> […] the political interventions practiced by the space and by the collectives and networks active in it in this period were largely, but not exclusively, along three broad lines: a collective attempt to re-imagine the theory and practice of anti-fascism; the collective and participatory theorizing of self-management; and the support of migrant activism against institutional and cultural racism and labor exploitation.
> (G. Zapata Foresti & S.P. Casey, "XM24: survival and inspiration against all odds", *Roar*, 14 September 2014)[79]

The trajectory of Xm (as illustrated in *Table 5.6*) was characterized, in the first place, by a dynamic of *Encapsulation*, investing both a spatial and a relational realm. In fact, since its early stages, the space took root within a territorial and network enclave.

Soon after its birth, Xm became rather embedded in its territory, the Bolognina, and started to take part in discussions concerning the neighborhood. One occurrence is especially worth mentioning, despite having taken place earlier than the time frame considered in this research. During the last months of the Guazzaloca administration, in 2004, the Municipality of Bologna put forth a redevelopment plan for the area of former fruit and vegetable market. As a result, an unusual alliance of actors formed, contesting the plan: the parishes of San Cristoforo and Sacro Cuore, the senior center Katia Bertasi (located next door to Xm), the environmentalist network "C'è un buco nell'acqua", the Dojo Equipe gym (also in via Fioravanti), the Association "Fuori le Mura", and Xm24 itself. In the space's accounts, it was Xm that proposed the idea of a neighborhood laboratory. In the Autumn of 2004, a "participatory urban planning laboratory" was launched by the Municipality, on the subject of urban redevelopment for the area. This was the first experiment of urban joint planning in the city. The lab entailed months of assemblies involving about a hundred citizens, Municipality bureaucrats and technicians, and a variety of actors ranging from church groups to unions. The Municipality's Urban Center published a book-report of the process. In the report, Xm24 is mentioned as an active contributor to the process of joint planning, particularly – through to the space's 'Indymedia' media activist group, specialized in audiovisual production – in reference to 'shared communication' and the dissemination of the process[80]. The lab culminated in 2006, with the approval by the City Council of an edited redevelopment project for the area of the former market, providing in particular for the

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[78] The mobilization that took place against the OECD summit, held in Bologna, in which the network Contropiani played a central role.

[79] Available at: https://roarmag.org/essays/xm24-social-center-bologna/.

[80] The edition of a 'Laboratorio Bolognina' magazine was also carried out within Xm throughout the process. The video-documentary recounting the process of the lab was also produced by activists.

planning of a park quadrant, the realization of the so-called 'Trilogia Navile' condo development, and the construction of a student residence. The student residence idea, an activist explained to me, had originated within Xm24. Overall, the space's struggle was aimed at ensuring that the construction project involving via Fioravanti would be devoted to social and cultural uses, rather than strictly commercial ones. The end result of the participatory planning process, in terms of how the new project was defined and implemented by the Municipality, was widely criticized by Xm. In several statements and materials produced by the space, activists have claimed that the project elaborated at the end of the participatory lab was unsatisfactory with respect to citizen demands. One activist I interviewed argued that the difference between the inputs offered by participants during the process and the actual development of the project on the part of the Municipality, was mainly due to the technical nature of the question, which allowed the administration to shape the project according to its own orientations.

> There was no project there, there was a very evident potential – which was all that sector, abandoned for years, and such a vast area left abandoned raised lots of issues. […] The previous project had been written by a right-wing administration – in a city like Bologna, which could not accept that that neighborhood, always considered as the development of the new Bologna, be left to a project drawn by the right –, so the center-left was more or less open to any idea. […] Then, the ideas have been gathered and also interpreted, in favor of a market that was not that of those who were proposing those things… 250 apartments at the price at which they are now sold, in Trilogia Navile, was not exactly the idea of those who took part in the lab. The idea was to safeguard the green areas, avoid a wall on the street, keep room for social housing. Then of course, the assembly that participated in the co-design lacked the technical knowledge of what volume requirements were, what it meant to maintain the functional purpose of the building, and so on. Therefore, those were chosen and implemented by the Administration.
> (#I1SC3, activist, Xm24)

However, the experience of the laboratory occurred at a time in which the space had no formalized interlocution with the Municipality. Beyond its outcomes, the lab served as a testing ground for the possible modes of interaction between Xm and institutional politics, as the different subjectivities inhabiting the space reflected on whether it was possible to interact with local institutions, while at the same time practicing politics autonomously from the rules dictated by capitalist interests. Also in light of this experience, the social center expanded its discourse on self-management, which activists increasingly construed as inseparable from an anti-fascist, anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-authoritarian political praxis, and as incompatible with the legalistic institutional framework, in the broader struggle for social justice[81]. At the same time, the lab was the occasion for the space to experiment in its relationship with the neighborhood. In this sense, it can be argued that since before the onset of crisis, Xm24 conceived itself as an actor embedded within a precise spatial realm, involved in the pivotal debates about the Bolognina, integrated into the daily life of the neighborhood and part of its development. Although, as shall be discussed further on in these pages, this relationship was hardly straightforward, certainly, the lab provided an opportunity for Xm to interact with the local civil society and bring forth a common struggle. What is more, it attested to the space's sensitivity to what were, indeed, the prodromes of a crisis that would hit the neighborhood severely. In fact, the works foreseen by the development project were started and almost immediately stopped, due to the onset of the economic crisis and the failure of construction businesses. As a result, the urban planning of the area was halted for several years to come (in fact, it has only recently been resumed). In this respect, the crisis

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[81] G. Zapata Foresti & S.P. Casey, "XM24: survival and inspiration against all odds", *Roar*, 14 September 2014, available at: https://roarmag.org/essays/xm24-social-center-bologna/.

demonstrated that actors such as Xm had reason to look at the planning process with a certain mistrust. Following years in which urban planning was compartmentalized into a sequence of individual interventions, and often informed by what one interviewee described as a 'Milanese' model of development – based on attracting financial investments to requalify urban areas –, one that inevitably collapsed with the recession. Indeed, Xm24 constitutes an example of how conflictual self-management produces urban space and territory. Since its early start, inhabitants of the space were involved in providing concrete alternatives to the dominant socio-economic and political paradigms. In fact, among Xm's first projects was the establishment of a cooperation with Campi Aperti, a self-managed cooperative network of farmers struggling for food sovereignty and the self-certification of organic products, which developed within the space and organized at Xm its first weekly farmers market of biological produce. In time, other initiatives took root inside the space, including a Popular Gym, media-activist groups, a bicycle repair shop, a Migrants Coordination, several arts and music-related collectives.

> Already in Xm24's first year of life, was born the core of what would become the Campi Aperti farmers' market: effectively, the first direct organic market in the city of Bologna; almost immediately, was born the SIM, the school of Italian with migrants; the street TV TeleImmagini; le Free University 'Contropiani'; the medical and legal desk; and a series of initiatives that would accompany Xm24 for several years to come […].
> (Xm24, *Xm24 in Bolognina: quindici anni di storia*, Xm24 contribution to the meeting "Città, spazi abbandonati, autogestione" organized by Laboratorio Crash!. 3 October 2017, Bologna)

The choice of Xm24 to carry out direct social actions, then, occurred already before the burst of the crisis. As in an iterative process, the engagement in DSAs on the part of Xm's set of composite subjectivities, informed the identity of the space itself and, at the same time, became an expression of the elements that those different identities had in common. Particularly, the shared willingness to be, and to build, an alternative arena for social, economic and political relations to unfold. However, while the adoption of direct social actions within Xm was largely moved by the crisis' prodromes (in particular, the crisis of urban regimes, the pitfalls of neoliberal capitalism, and the increasing solitude of marginalized groups), it was expanded in meanings and forms with the onset of the Great Recession. One spatial consequence of economic stagnation in Bologna has been the crystallization of urban voids, especially in non-central areas, while abandoned buildings have often sheltered migrants and Roma people, and occasionally become drug dealing spots (Calafati 2015). A popular neighborhood such as the Bolognina, outside of the city center, with large areas originally destined to redevelopment left unutilized, experienced a similar pattern. During an interview, I asked an activist what shifts the burst of the crisis had determined for Xm. Their first answer pointed precisely to the question of space and territory.

> Precisely in the extreme proximity of places, one thing that changed is that all of the [construction] sector collapsed. There was a series of successive failings, which brought to the halt of the construction skeleton you can see there, the cancellation of another building, the slowing down of the urbanization works, the failed sale of all the apartments prepared. Hence, a strong stop to all that planning project. Even the elderly community center which was to be built, is still under construction. And […] for the Administration, the fact that there was Xm there, even though it had never been officially recognized, in such a neglected area, was a spark of life, a point of activity.
> (#I1SC3, activist, Xm24)

In such a context, the choice of engaging in direct social actions allowed the space to offer opportunities of socialization and involvement and to build ties between different groups of activists and people, through a *territorialization* of collective action, producing alternative urbanity and expressing through action the conflicts inherent to the urban space.

> The school of Italian with migrants is one of the projects that has existed since the beginning, and has always seen a high participation, precisely due to the characteristics of the Bolognina. The bicycle repair shop, the popular gym, have always been free activities, like all of Xm's activities, but these, being the more engaging and open… when the bike shop is open, it sees 30-40 people in one night, the same numbers for aerial contortion classes or boxing, so the fact that there were those free activities was appealing and evidently responded to a necessity: a school for migrants that wouldn't ask for your papers, a gym that wouldn't require a 60-80 euros fee a month, a bike repair shop where while you worked on your bike with someone helping you, you could also discuss about the world around you, do something more.
> (#I1SC3, activist, Xm24)

In this respect, the same activist suggested, Xm24's configuration as an actor of territorialization was shaped by the former market area in which it was located.

> In that very phase of transitions and transformations, we discussed extensively about the fact that the shape of the market has in a sense determined the kind of political interaction of the space. That is, contrary to other experiences in the city, this is not a political collective who found a space, thus with a uniform political perspective. But rather, different groups, a confederation of workshops and projects that meet weekly in what is the space's assembly, which has the political value of the space's decisions, but often also the logistic one, for the management of the space. […] In sum, over the years it has seen so many projects and subjectivities, and this more or less has always been the idea of Xm… there was simply the informal group of individuals and projects inside the space. To reflect this, Xm has called itself a "self-managed public space", because it meant a different form than the traditional social center – even through, then, I think than in the common imagery there was probably nothing more similar to a 90s social center than Xm, really in its form.
> (#I1SC3, activist, Xm24)

As a matter of fact, one distinctive feature of Xm24 as an actor – particularly in phases characterized by a relative coexistence with institutions, before the polarization and expansion of the debate around the space[82] – has been that of intercepting and aggregating often disenfranchised groups and individuals. The plural, fluid and unconstrained identity of Xm, combined with its consistence in maintaining autonomy from power-holders and resisting pressures to formalize and institutionalize, have made the space a hub for many who perceived themselves as outsiders of the polity, and rejected established social norms and hierarchical structures. Since the crisis, the action of Xm was also enriched by the surge of the struggles for migrants' and citizenship rights around 2008. As Bologna became a significant center of the Italian migrant struggle, Xm24 played a crucial role in supporting these mobilizations, and hosted several related projects inside the space. The questions of multiethnicity and foreigners' rights, enhanced by a crisis that was increasing inequalities and marginalization, were addressed through a widening set of DSAs practiced within Xm. Conversely, while Xm's network was expanded with respect to its constitutive subjectivities, with groups and collectives joining (and leaving) the space throughout the years, the process of consolidating the set of actors with whom the space cooperated did not fully set off beyond the perimeter of the movement arena. Throughout its history, Xm24 could count on a rich array of allies among other spaces and collective actors across Italy (as well as some

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[82] Which would attract increased attention on the experience of Xm and spur expressions of support on the part of more institutionalized or mainstream actors.

abroad), and was regarded as a reference for the movement landscape of Northern Italy, but had much less steady relationships with non-movements sorts of actors. In this sense, we cannot talk about a network dynamic for Xm's trajectory of political influence in the city environment. Some exceptions to this trend can nonetheless be found in the urban planning coalition recalled above, and in Xm's participation in the Bancarotta project in 2019, a tentative alliance of associations, collectives and informal groups seeking, through the collective inhabitation of one space, new pathways for the management of public goods. This being said, it would be shortsighted to talk about this experience merely as a 'space of the outcast'. Individuals from quite different backgrounds and paths inhabited Xm over time, each contributing with their presence, time and worldview to an experience whose complexity has often been disregarded, and yet which in a way was able to embody an essence that could not be found elsewhere.

Admittedly, it can be quite difficult to tell the history of Xm24 without falling into the trap of caricature. More often than not, the debate surrounding Xm has been reduced to polarized simplifications, failing to acknowledge that this experience has been carved by nuances, contradictions, advancements and missed targets. What is more, its pathway is still very much under way. Indeed, one crucial cognitive dynamic that has shaped the trajectory of Xm24 and the debate around it, is the construction of an actor *narrative*. On the one hand, Xm itself has built and projected a narrative of its own experience. On the other hand, the pathway of this subjectivity has been placed by the local media and political debate into an overarching narrative. Both being strongly connoted by an idea of uniqueness of this space, and of its distance from what is considered conventionally 'acceptable' or 'normal' within a polity, the combination of these two rails of narrative has contributed to the encapsulation of Xm's experience. All throughout its history, Xm24 has presented itself to the world as something 'other'. Daring, provocative, restless and simultaneously carefree, separated from the mainstream and institutionalized realms of life. The recollection on the part of an activist of the only initiative remotely connected to electoral politics led by the space, illustrates well this aspect.

> We have always had this spirit – an element of distinction compared to many movements – of being irreverent, situationist, mocking the adversary without ridiculing the issue at steak, I mean antifascism is an important issue, but you don't need to show your muscles every single time […]. For instance, Xm has never recognized the logic of representation. […] But in 2011, during the electoral competition for Merola's first mandate, Xm created the campaign "politics is a sacred thing", which saw as a contestant for the role of mayor Willie Bullshit[83], and it offered the opportunity to talk about elections, candidates' proposals, but I think that the signatures for an actual potential participation were collected the morning of the deadline, there was never any true intention of participating.
> (#I1SC3, activist, Xm24)

In a sense, Xm projected an image of itself almost as an enclave, a bubble space, within which it was possible to practice alternative ways of live and social relationships than the conventional ones practiced on the outside. This was also mirrored by the space's inhabitants use of separate communication channels, platforms and social networks than the mainstream ones, in a communication for the most part directed inwards, and a strong stress on safeguarding the anonymity of its activists – even before the escalation of the space's situation with the Municipality, therefore not just as a way of protecting individuals from legal consequences, but also as a distinctive identity trait of the experience. Furthermore,

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[83] The mobilization was built around the alleged candidacy of Willie Bullshit, 'the shaman of Bologna's underground', as mayor of the city.

since a constitutive part of Xm's social context was the interception of marginalized, disenfranchised, unrepresented segments of society, a 'deviant' image of the space was widely projected. One aspect in particular had to do with drugs. The space explicitly engaged in projects aimed at harm reduction and at education about the use of psychoactive substances[84], also denouncing through demonstrative actions what activists believed to be the shortcomings of the Municipality in acknowledging the issue of drug use in Bolognina. At the same time, the space was largely described in the public and political debate as a place of conspicuous drug dealing, one element that came up several times also during my interviews to elected officials. Simultaneously, Xm was in fact placed by the local debate within a broader narrative related to urban security and degradation. In Bologna's urban policy agenda (and overarching political debate), as elsewhere in Italy, the issue of security has gained an increasingly pivotal role after the mid-90s (Bergamaschi et al. 2014; Pavarini 2006). Bologna, who had always been described at the national level as a model of local administration, particularly for the left, came to be depicted in the local and national media as a city of degradation and crisis, despite having remained among the cities with the highest quality of life in the country (Scandurra and Giuliani 2006). Cognitively and discursively, the category of urban degradation provided a reassuring response to the increasing complexity of the social environment, shaped by a changing demography and social stratification, allowing for a silent process of marginalization of specific social groups (*ibid.*). Since the turn of the century, local elections have also been invaded by the rhetoric of insecurity, illegality and urban degradation. Local administrations have often attempted to respond to citizens' growing perceptions of insecurity through provisions aimed at countering, or at concealing, the presence of people considered a source of degradation or disorder (Bergamaschi et al. 2014). As citizens committees were increasingly formed around this subject (Lewanski and Mosca 2003), prompted by a rising discourse on civic participation, the municipal use[85] of security and decorum by-laws has particularly involved the central university area and its main squares and streets of aggregation. From the prohibition of bivouac in the university area passed by Mayor Vitali in 1996, to the surveillance and decorum initiatives of the Guazzaloca administration, to the securitarian policies of Sergio Cofferati, to the ordinances restricting the consumption of alcohol and the reinforcement of police presence, two administrative practices that have persisted to this day (for an extensive review, see Bergamaschi et al. 2014).

Given the limited size of the city, and its relatively homogenous configuration, the non-central areas of Bologna do not resemble banlieues, rather, they can be better described as parts of a 'subtle' periphery (Scandurra and Giuliani 2006). The Bolognina is a clear example of this phenomenon. The relatively affordable housing market of the neighborhood has made it attractive for students, foreigners, and young and working-class families. Despite being fairly close and well connected to the city center, the Bolognina has suffered from a lack of spaces for social aggregation and leisure (largely concentrated in the historical center or in locations further away and less serviced by public transportation). This has made it difficult at times for its inhabitants to enjoy the life of the neighborhood, but also prompted a series of grassroots experimentations and proximity initiatives over the years, from popular gyms to solidarity, recreational and decorum projects.

As effectively argued by Scandurra (2015), the area of the Bolognina has been deeply impacted by the transition to post-Fordism and the economy of services. The shift from

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[84] For one, the main organizer of the 'Lab57' project for education and harm reduction, when not traveling to raves across Italy, lived in an RV parked inside the space.

[85] In addition to local police regulations against urban disorder.

factory work – with the closing of numerous local establishments, historical settings of workers' struggles – to a majority of information technology and third sector jobs, the local employment market of neighborhood has increasingly marginalized individuals endowed with lower social and relational capital, such as migrant youth. Local administrations have increasingly regarded the Bolognina as a strategic quadrant for the city, due to both its position – close to the historical center and adjacent to the main train station and some major thoroughfares – and its spaces' potential for urban planning. While, more recently, the area has been making the object of a composite planning and regeneration strategy, earlier interventions throughout the 2000s and particularly the consequences of the crisis have left the Bolognina a conflicted neighborhood. Its representation in the local media has been widely tied to criminality, urban degradation and disorder. The overall image of the neighborhood was painted for years through the shades of crimes, thefts, dirt and scarce street lighting. In this environment of coexisting identities, citizenships and struggles, for seventeen years Xm24 stood in the middle of a border territory, populated by elderly, student and multicultural inhabitants, between the communist memory of the proletarian Bolognina of the past, with its distinct spaces for channeling conflict, and the disorientation of the contemporary high-speed railway line, construction sites, and promises of development. With its geographical location within a conflicted neighborhood, and given a broader framework of degradation perceptions and security demands, Xm24 was placed in the local debate in an overarching negative narrative, serving at times as the scapegoat for wider concerns. This placement took root within a broader social construction of urban degradation carried out in the local media, juxtaposing the dissonant images of Bologna as a mythic city and Bologna as a sick, dystopic city, incarnating the crisis of the Bolognese model itself (Olivi 2014). Throughout the 2000s, Xm was regularly mentioned by the local press in relation to riots, protests, rave parties, and portrayed through the frame of a 'rebel space'. In time, the public discourse revolved significantly around the role of (and consequent contraposition of Xm with) the Municipality and law enforcement, stressing elements such as order, security, degradation, and the relationship of Xm with an allegedly increasingly hostile public of Bolognina residents. These frames and representations would be mobilized, later, with the escalation of the conflict around Xm.

Partitioning

In turn, the encapsulation of Xm24 within a territorial and relational enclave, with the consolidation of its social action in a delimited and problematic urban space, allowed for the unfolding of a *Partitioning* mechanism. Indeed, for several years, Xm and the Municipality followed separate courses and maintained a distant but overall peaceful relationship, which overall benefitted both parties. Xm was left free to nurture its political space, while services and opportunities were being offered to disenfranchised portions of the city. The question of the experience's boundaries, both in geographical and in action terms, was raised from time to time, but without causing too much conflict. In 2008, while the space took part in the Onda protests, the neighborhood Council discussed the urban planning of the area surrounding Xm24. As the area was one of high planning interest, the question of how to deal with the presence of the social center was raised. The Neighborhood authorities, however, reassured the public about it, recalling that the experience had been legalized under the Guazzaloca administration and describing it as 'non incompatible' with the development and livelihood of the neighborhood. Similar statements were made again by the Neighborhood president in 2010.

In this respect, Xm24 followed a path of *double-tracking*. While rejecting entirely the level of electoral politics and representation and the establishment of direct interactions with institutions, Xm carried out parallel cooperative initiatives with the municipal Urban Center and other institutional actors, on projects such as urban gardening and participatory labs. In the meantime, the space took part in protests and affirmative actions, in support of student mobilizations, during the Indignados mobilizations, contesting far right demonstrations together with the other social centers of the city. While maintaining a strong level of contention, Xm24 was able to also carve itself spaces of cooperative action with respect to local institutions, preventing these different dimensions from intersecting and affecting one another. The collective destruction in March 2016 of the "Occupy Mordor" mural, painted by street artist Blu on the walls of Xm, to protest against the commercialization of graffiti on the part of the most prominent art foundation in the city, deprived the city of a highly valued work of art, but was also one of the numerous actions carried out by Xm24 – though probably the most remembered one – that set the record straight about the space, its willingness to preserve ideological integrity and independence, and its radical, carefree approach to partitioning.

This separate coexistence also emerged through a *certification through itemizing*. In 2009, alongside Vag61, Xm was among the 11 areas formally selected by the Municipality to host the farmer's market of Campi Aperti. Already around this time, while the prevalent frame in the representation of the space was that of protest and confrontation, actors of the city started to certify the experience through itemizing. In 2010, renowned local civil society figure, Roberto Morgantini, involved in long-established social initiatives in the city, particularly addressing poverty and homelessness, praised Xm24 in the local press, as one of the few actors providing Italian courses to immigrants. Several articles around the same period described the space and its peaceful coexistence with the surrounding urban environment, precisely through the lens of direct social actions.

Downward spiral of political opportunity

However, the sustainability of the space's partitioned coexistence with the city and its institutional politics, came to an end. The third mechanism that set off in Xm24's pathway, was a *Downward spiral of political opportunity*. This dynamic must not be understood as a changing contextual factor shaping Xm's trajectory of influence, but as a constitutive block of such trajectory, determined by actors' mutual interactions. Xm did not so much as disrupt the competition for power. Rather, the local power competition intensified, at that point, on the terrain of Xm24 as an experience (and what it represented), reducing the political leeway for the collective actor and negatively impacting its pathway. That is, Xm24 found itself subjected to the dynamics and consequences of a wider power competition.

The first sub-mechanism through which this downward spiral of political opportunity unfolded, was the *polarization* of the city's political debate. This sub-mechanism describes the widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode, and the gravitation of previously uncommitted or moderate actors toward one, the other, or both

extremes (McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow 2004: 322). Xm24, specifically, was placed in the middle of an intensifying crossfire of interests, directly resulting from the local institutional elite's competition for power and especially the growing pressures of political adversaries on the administration at the beginning of the second Merola legislature. In addition to the habitual divisions and conflicts between the political forces in the city, increasing pressures on the administration came from within the Democratic Party and the cabinet themselves. In 2017, the local PD held the congress for the election of its secretary. Throughout the spring and summer, leading up to the consultation scheduled for the early fall, internal divisions grew sharper. Among the two main camps, one mobilized a steady anti-social centers posture, while the other, though fragmented, included prominent figures from the administration explicitly more open towards self-managed experiences. In such a setting, as the local right-wing opposition increasingly pressured the administration on the subject of security, rumors also started circulating about the mayor intending to resign. As a consequence, the question of CSAs quite naturally became an overarching terrain for institutional political competition. The right, mobilized the issue to attack the Municipality, while the Democratic Party identified it as one of the key cleavages of its internal contraposition. Rather soon, it appeared clear that the administration and the more pro-CSAs faction of the PD would come out on top from the discussion on Làbas (evicted during the summer of 2017), claiming a successful model of legalization and simultaneous preservation of the experience. Conversely, the debate around Xm24 was much more complicated in its resolution, and its potential as a political battleground greater. Hence, Xm's critics devoted growing discursive resources and energies to encircling the administration and the mayor on the matter, pressuring them to express a clear position on the renewal of the space's convention. Finally, the economic interest around the Bolognina area had been revamping, both in terms of construction works and in terms of housing market, an element that added to the already dense crossfire of political pressures.

This crossing of overlapping and conflicting interests around the experience, resulted in a second dynamic: the progressive *decertification* of Xm. This relational sub-mechanism is defined as the lack or withdrawal of validation and recognition of actors, their performances and their claims by external authorities (McAdam et al. 2001, p. 204). Decertification occurred, on the one hand, within the PD administrative majority, in which support for the experience (already not unanimous) progressively decreased, and for the right-wing opposition, on the other, intensifying its attacks against Xm in the hopes of weakening its adversaries. In December 2016, Neighborhood President Daniele Ara declared:

> «It is up to the Municipality, obviously, to establish if it is right for that experience to remain in the Bolognina, but we, as Neighborhood, can say that there is a widespread opinion that the experience is not in the adequate place»
> (G. Baldessarro, "Criminalità, la Bolognina ci prova nasce un comitato bipartisan". *Repubblica Bologna*, 29 December 2016)

Other similar recollections appeared on the local press throughout 2017. Interestingly, distinctions were regularly made concerning the farmers' market organized by Campi Aperti. From the administration and the Neighborhood authorities, to the most critical opposition in the city Council, elected officials insisted on the value of the initiative and the need to preserve it, regardless of the future of Xm24 as a whole, often stressing discursively the distinction between the two. An element that attests to the pervasiveness of public support for the market, and its consensus-sensitive nature.

In the neighborhood, over 500 signatures were collected against Xm24, to call for its relocation: residents complain about parties exceeding by far the capacity of the space, about the noise, drug dealing and degradation. «There was a change of attitudes in citizens – says Ara – center-left ones, too, have started to see Xm24 more as a problem». Different story for the weekly market held by Campi Aperti, which, he explains, «has an autonomous convention and in the future will be moved under the Nervi porch, when it is completed. In the meantime, I invite them to contact the municipal executive to be assigned a temporary space»
(C. Giusberti, "Il Comune all'XM24 'Fuori entro giugno' 'Noi restiamo qui'". *Repubblica Bologna*, 2 February 2017)

«In many years of presence, they have never cooperated – continues the mayor – nor socialized with the citizenry, instead the hostility of residents towards them has grown. And, it must be underlined, they are there for free, based on a convention that has expired ».
Actually, the farmers' market held inside Xm24 is very much attended by the neighborhood's residents, as you must know. «Of course, I also know that that farmers' market has nothing to do with Xm24, they just host it, that's all. In fact, you'll see that even when Xm24 isn't in via Fioravanti anymore, the market will stay in the Bolognina». […]
Anyway, beyond the different opinions and Minister Minniti, the future of Xm24 remains the eviction, right? «Yes, enough with the assistentialism in exchange for nothing»
(G. Egidio, "Piano sicurezza per la Bolognina, commissariato e sede dell'Arma". *Repubblica Bologna*, 4 February 2017)

Interestingly, this was also the case for much of the right-wing opposition.

We undergo yet another disfigurement of institutions, of legality, of rules, civil life, after years in which a neighborhood suffers noise, dirt, unauthorized concerts in non-compliant locales in which alcohol and food are sold; have you listened to the interviews released by demonstrators? "I have never been to Xm24, but they must be defended"; then, everyone talking about the Campi Aperti market, which has nothing to do with that arrogant den of runaways, and that no one calls into question. Spaces are to be given to those who build, not those who destroy […].
(F. Scarano [Lega], "XM24: ennesimo sfregio alle Istituzioni per colpa della Giunta Merola". Opening intervention, City Council 1 July 2019)

Throughout 2017, the increasingly polarized debate on Xm and the evolving situation of other social centers in the city spurred a general discussion on spaces. Institutional actors at multiple levels, political actors and civil society actors took sides within this discussion. In the local press, in February, the president of the senior center Katia Bertasi, located next door from Xm24, confirmed that the space created degradation and problems, claiming that the situation had worsened over the past year, and suggesting that Xm24 negotiate with the administration for a different location. Neighborhood president Ara also stated that over the last year the interlocution and coexistence with the space had become much more difficult. In the meantime, Xm mobilized a discourse, supported by the other social centers in Bologna, that increasingly framed the situation as a clash between freedom and repression. Among the projects being discussed for the former Fioravanti market, was the construction of a Carabinieri police station: frames of legality and security were deployed to counter that of urban degradation; however, the administration engaged in the difficult search for a discursive balance, to avoid projecting an image of the Bolognina as an unsafe neighborhood and thereby legitimize the right-wing opposition. The Municipality progressively reframed the conditions necessary for a dialogue with the space.

For years, Xm24 was considered by the administration as a legitimate interlocutor, without the need for legal representatives, associative forms, and partnerships of any kind. Only more recently […] has the administration imposed a change in the legal nature of the collective managing the space, subordinating the possibility or impossibility of dialogue to this request. In this context, over the years Xm24 has maintained

In February 2017, the Municipality sent a written communication to the ESA Committee (the committee for the promotion of self-managed experiences, formed by the assembly of Xm24 that in 2013 had signed the convention for the use of the space). The document stated that, in light of the expiry of the convention in December 2016, occupants had up to 30 June to vacate the premise. The complex of via Fioravanti 24 was to be destined to a project of redevelopment and repurposing. The inhabitants of Xm publicly responded that they did not intend to leave. At this point, the administration and the Council majority were highly divided. While the Lega presented an *o.d.g.* urging the eviction of Xm, the Democratic Party fought internally as *assessore* Lepore, from the mayor's cabinet, attempted a dialogue. In June 2017, nearing the deadline for the vacation of the premise, the administration declared that an agreement might be reached with Xm, while the party publicly pressured the mayor to go through with the eviction. The Pride demonstration of that summer, as recalled in earlier sections, was imprinted with the call to support «all of the antifascist, antisexist and antiracist experiences who cross the public space of the city». Xm's convention was prolonged to the Fall, as negotiations progressed also during 2018, further away from the spotlight (although the press leaked some propositions of spaces emerged during the talks). At the general election of March 2018, Matteo Salvini's radical-right party Lega obtained 13,6% of votes in the city (13,9% in the Bolognina neighborhood, against the 1,94% of the previous election in 2013). The situation of the city Council in June offers a clear illustration of the growing cross-cut divisions among elected officials and the escalation of the power competition. As Xm had announced the organization of a party for the following weekend, the Democratic Party approved the *o.d.g.* proposed by the right, aimed at ensuring that the party be held as to not disrupt the life and sleep of residents. Coalizione Civica abstained and praised the reaching of what was considered as a 'step forward' in the debate around Xm. However, the right-wing opposition kept asking for a tough stance on the matter. The arm-wrestling within the administration culminated in an ultimatum launched by the PD component more opposed to Xm24. Xm itself, as reported by the local press and confirmed throughout my research by several interviewees, was internally divided between a more extremist and a more dialoguing component. In one instance, the proposition emerged to split the space's activities, moving the 'noisy' ones (such as parties, concerts and similar) to different locations, while acknowledging that the social initiatives could be maintained in the current site. Xm, however, demanded that its activities be granted continuity as a whole, on account, activists claimed, of their rootedness in the neighborhood. Among other things, the administration stated that it wished to devote the area of the former market to a social use, likely a co-housing project.

Much like Làbas two years earlier, Xm24 publicly displayed its mobilization capacity, with a large demonstration against the eviction in June 2019 and a visible campaign in support of the CSA (with 'I love Xm24' flags, signs and wall tags appearing all over the city). This, however, did not shift the balance of contention to the electoral consensus arena. In the sequence of mechanisms that make up Xm24's trajectory (encapsulation → partitioning → downward spiral of political opportunity), the weight of Encapsulation emerges strongly, notably by the rooted representation that portrayed the space as backed by a largely disenfranchised, non-voting constituency of supporters, which reduced the consensus concerns of the institutional elite. Later, in the downward spiral of political opportunity, the

decertification dynamic insisted on many of these same elements. Among others, during the demonstration of June 2019, historical buildings in the city center were damaged and covered in wall tags in support of Xm; this fostered the critiques of its opponents, who described the space as incapable of a civil coexistence within the polity.

At the point to which the situation had escalated, due to the complex crossing of interests around the fate of Xm, and with the decertification of the experience, each actor was compelled to see through their position, in order to gain as much as possible from the terrain of political struggle (political capital, credibility, alliances, a certain representation of their political adversary). That is, a final sub-mechanism set off, which can be defined as *repartition*. This is a situation of interaction in which each actor feels compelled to see their position all the way through, in order to gain as much as possible from the terrain of political struggle and exit the interaction with their part of political resources. If one were to look at actors' interplay through lens of game theory, this relational configuration would be described as a situation in which the dominant strategy for each actor – that is, the strategy with the highest political payoff, regardless of the strategies chosen by the other actors – is to adopt a non-cooperative, confrontational posture. In the same line of reasoning, one could argue that this sub-mechanism describes instances of interaction between actors in which political capital makes the object of a zero-sum game. In fact, as the conflict around Xm24 rose, a critical point was reached when it became clear that only one side (movement or institutional politics) could come out on top of the struggle for political capital. The vision and demands put forth by Xm, and the responses proposed and supported by institutional politics (despite the latter's extreme internal diversity, which included relevant favorable segments), could not be reconciled. From a strategic dilemmas' perspective, this entailed evaluations of threats and risks, and the progressive shift of more dialoguing actors, within both Xm and institutional politics, to non-cooperative positions. Political actors opposing Xm24 and calling for its eviction from via Fioravanti, leveraged their dissent in full force. Actors from the administration that were publicly engaged in the setting of an agreement with the space, maintained their position and took steps towards a different form of recognition of the value of the experience, promising that a new solution would be sought to safeguard it. In the end, the space received its eviction notice. Local newspapers published letters from citizens both in support and against of the safeguard of the experience. Formal and informal meetings were held between institutional figures and Xm, and at multiple instances it seemed as if an agreement was being reached, but each time the negotiation fell through at the last moment. One key informant I talked to, explained how they read the failure of these negotiations as indicative of the difficulty of the city's political actors to overcome the cleavage of 1977, separating institutional politics from movements.

> Around Xm have coagulated some historical lines of fracture of this city, which to this day remain open, and these are the fractures of 1977. The city was divided in '77, and still, this line of division between the party, and thus the Administration, and movements, remains, through in a world that has completely changed – the geography and anthropology of movements in the city has changed, the Administration has changed, the world… but this still remains as a terrain of symbolic positioning. And in Xm this fracture returns. […] It's a sign that the conditions weren't ripe, that the overcoming of that '77 cleavage was not ready. When the negotiation failed, the Municipality (therefore the PD and the Administration) just as much as Xm, felt freed, because they could more easily remain on that kind of political-ideological positioning, which would have been somehow put forcefully into question by a negotiated solution.
> (#KI2, key informant, municipal bureaucracy)

After two blitzes inside the Municipality to make their demands heard, the inhabitants of Xm24 were forcefully evicted from the former market of via Fioravanti on 6 August, 2019.

Negotiations progressed with the administration to find a new space for Xm, but reached a dead end. In November 2019, Xm activists occupied a barrack building, the Caserma Sani, which was evicted on 17 January 2020. The discussion on the future of Xm24 and its possible new spaces is still ongoing. Meanwhile, the experience has remained active and has nomadically taken part in protest actions and self-managed initiatives across the city.

The political influence of Xm24: Xm, a symbol

The trajectory of Xm24, for the timespan considered in this work, appears as one of low influence on institutional politics (*Table 5.7*). Across the decade, Xm's three dimensions of influence have evolved overall simultaneously; yet, a pivotal shift has occurred in institutional attitudes.

Procedural access - Participation in some participatory processes - Some interactions with elected officials and bureaucracy, especially around eviction
Policy - Moving of roundabout (2013) - *Bancarotta* project
Attitudes - From coexistence (with administration) to overall dismissal.

Table 5.7 The political influence of Xm24: dimensions and outcomes.

In *procedural access* terms, and more broadly in its interaction with institutions, Xm has been penalized by the issue of its 'non-form', or the composite horizontal structure of its constitutive subjectivities. This lack of a univocal identity has caused significant internal divisions within the space, particularly during phases of high tension, and simultaneously undermined the ability of institutional politics to Xm to be perceived as a full interlocutor during negotiations. The space, as recalled, took part in municipal participatory planning laboratories, as a way of gaining voice and access to institutional decision-making, but became overall less involved in them after the first participatory experience. The participation of Xm24 to municipal committees or other formal institutional discussions was also minimal. The space entertained informal interactions with elected officials and the municipal staff, particularly during the 2013-2014 phase leading up to the signing of the convention, and in the time leading up to its eviction.

In terms of *policy* outcomes, Xm affected in part the process of urban planning of the Bolognina area in the years before the crisis, but few signs of impact on policy and institutional decisions seem to be retraceable afterwards. One single-issue policy change that resulted from Xm's presence and action, was, in 2013, the moving of a roundabout, foreseen by the Trilogia Navile project of the Municipality. As the roundabout was planned to be located in front of Xm, the project called for the demolition of a relevant segment of Xm's structure, including the kitchen, the gym and a concert space. From the perspective of activists, these construction works were a pretext of the administration to undermine the core actions and, thereby, the very existence of the experience. A large mobilization took place as a response, as Xm engaged in a public and media campaign revolving around the defense of its space. The culmination moment of the campaign was the painting, by renowned street artist Blu, of the enormous mural 'Occupy Mordor' (the same mural that

would be erased a few years later, as a form of protest), depicting Bologna as a clash between good and evil, social movements and institutional actors. This work of artistic resistance, which became the symbol of the battle for Xm24, drew massive attention to the issue, and cornered in a sense the administration in its margin of action. Prominent cultural figures, such as writers' collective Wu Ming, took a public stance in support of Xm. The space also organized several events with artists, writers and musicians. At the same time, it worked to provide an alternative technical solution for the roundabout project, by seeking the support of an architects' firm. Finally, activists blocked the first day of works, and held a press conference to present a possible alternative plan to the Municipality. As a result, the administration established a roundtable on the matter, and the project was changed, safeguarding Xm's space and moving the roundabout a few meters further away. On the side of activists, few policy outcomes (and generally speaking, few instances of involvement in 'administrative' battles) are reckoned for Xm's trajectory. These mostly coincide with the impact of the space in the first pre-crisis participatory lab on urban planning, and the moving of the roundabout. However, an interviewee expressed the feeling that the long duration and capacity of mobilization and attraction of the space constitute, in themselves, a success of the experience.

> The very existence of Xm is a success. So much effort goes into keeping together the heterogeneity of fifteen collectives in a shared space. […] Mobilizations too, they are in themselves an expression of force.
> (#I1SC3, activist, Xm24)

In 2018, Xm24 also participated in a public tender on the use of public spaces across the city, for the allocation of a space in via Fioravanti 12, a few steps away from the social center, as part of a consortium of grassroots and movement initiatives called "BancaRotta srl". Bancarotta's proposal won and the formation was entrusted with the space in May 2019. The project was aimed at establishing a new paradigm of common goods, following the inputs of the Neapolitan experience on the subject. However, the experience has not truly set off, as Xm has had trouble reconciling its approach to a presence in a formalized setting, and has been negotiating with the Municipality for different conditions. At present, the Bancarotta space is unitilized.

The third dimension to consider is the *institutional attitudes* towards Xm24. Undoubtedly, on the side of the city administration, there have been instances where the CSA has made the object of institutional recognition. One relevant element of recognition on the part of the city administration can be pinpointed in the signing of Xm's three-year convention in 2014. The document, significantly impacted by the then *assessore* Ronchi, took unprecedented steps towards the legitimation of the experience, but also, even further, of what a self-managed experience such as Xm stands for.

> The municipal Administration (henceforth, Administration) has the objective to foster cultural activities rooted in the territory, which have obtained over the years a defined and recognized identity, as well as projects involving the search, experimentation and integration between different expressive forms and cultural traditions: in this framework, are of particular interest the initiatives self-managed by associations, especially in the field of culture, sports, environmental protection and generally significant with respect to the capacity of self-organization, as well as activities aimed at fostering the knowledge of all communication forms among youth. The Administration is aware that the development policy of the city must be coherent and compatible with social cohesion and inclusion, placing the issue of rights at the core, and increasing the attention towards the various forms in which social aggregation unfolds, and that it is advisable to value the practice of self-management, which constitutes an important value for the modes of interaction that it entails, and allows forms of expression that would not have the opportunity to emerge and develop otherwise.

The text of the convention stresses Xm's nature of 'laboratory' for forms of art and aggregation, and its commitment to social inclusion (particularly with the engagement of migrant youth from the neighborhood, through the establishment of the Italian language school). Thus, the document not only recognizes the social value of the experience of Xm, but explicitly leverages DSAs as an argument for such recognition. The document lists in detail the activities and initiatives carried out within Xm, and states that the space has restored an area, that of the former market Fioravanti, that had been abandoned and was facing degradation. The text also reckons the value of Xm's internal deliberation and managing approach, based on anti-discrimination, self-management and horizontality. Obtaining this formal recognition, Xm24, for its part, committed to paying the space's bills, taking care of routine maintenance, and managing the influx of people to and from the premise. Finally, in the convention, the city administration "in anticipation of identifying a legal form that would recognize self-managed forms as they truly are, respecting the more unusual forms of aggregation and management, and their history", formally entrusted the space to a third party, the ESA Committee (*Comitato per la Promozione e la Tutela delle Esperienze Sociali Autogestite*, or the Committee for the promotion and protection of social self-managed experiences). The Committee, created the year before, was born with the idea of providing an instrument of advancement and pressure to self-managed experiences, moving past their reduction to the form of associations, usually necessary for the completion of administrative procedure of space concessions. The process was the result of a long dialogue with municipal and neighborhood institutions. What is more, while relying on the Committee as a third subject, the convention foresaw that the management of the space remain in the direct hands of the self-organization assembly of the space, thereby de facto recognizing the managing responsibility of Xm's assembly. A similar instance of recognition occurred in 2019, on the day of the eviction of Xm from via Fioravanti, as *assessore* Lepore, among the municipal officials who had engaged in the search of a solution agreement to preserve the experience, signed a public engagement document, undersigned (with an anonymous X) by four Xm activists, promising that a new home would be found for Xm24 by November 2019. However, this certification was mitigated by considerations on the space's management, a few days later, denouncing the unsanitary and unsafe state of the premise, as found and reported by the practitioners of the social housing agency ACER that entered the space after the eviction.

Yet overall, as recalled, the experience of Xm24 has been a highly polarizing one. Elected officials willing to support the social center, found themselves confronted with a very tense and delicate discussion, as frames of insecurity, degradation, criminality were being mobilized daily against the space in the local debate. The question of Xm insisted on the internal divisions of the administration and the local party landscape. As for the Democratic Party and the administration, attitudes towards Xm shifted from an overall peaceful and distant coexistence, to openings on acknowledgments of its value as a social actor, to an almost full de-certification, and the questioning of Xm's legitimacy as an interlocutor. Looking beyond the PD majority, Xm appears as a known experience, as it was long part of an intense political debate. The features of its action inside the space are not always known (in contrast with experiences such as TPO and Làbas, about which even critic elected officials are well informed), but the space is deemed among the most relevant ones, largely due to its

prominent place in the local debate, and often also its antagonistic nature. Attitudes towards this experience were composite, but mostly leaning towards the necessity for the Xm to be located in a different spatial and normative setting (with the exception of Coalizione Civica, who clearly supported the space, although its relationship with Xm was more complex and less tight than with other social centers). For a majority of elected officials, legality has remained the key question, as the necessity for the space to enter into an agreed set of rules.

> Xm24, I know less – I do know that in the area there were neighboring problems, but there too, there had been a cultural offer to the city, an experience that many people appreciated, and that is now without a home. […] Xm, too, needs to understand that there are rules to respect. Of course, you risk losing a part of political message or originality, but you also affirm that your project is better than others and because of that, it deserves a space and costs to be sustained by the collectivity. Others have done it before, sometimes reluctantly, and even with irony[86].
> (#IE3, elected official, opposition)

Finally, an interesting element lies in how other elected officials, very critical of the experience, when asked to express their opinion on Xm24 during interviews, immediately referred to the space's DSAs and tried to discursively undermine them. It seemed as if direct social actions carried out by Xm automatically seemed to them as the main argument to dismantle, in order to comfortably deny recognition to Xm's experience.

> There are still many "I love XM24" flags in Bolognina, to this day. It is undeniable that that reality offered some services – addressed to a segment of the population, I wouldn't even be able to quantify it. And so, there was indeed a popularity, but there was also a certain hostility, something that for example is not the case for the TPO […]. I know that they provide services, but being provided by what is basically a private subject, we have no account of how useful they actually are – maybe they are, I don't rule it out. Xm24 organized the Italian school for immigrants. There are many associations who do the same thing. That, I always said, is a deserving initiative, others are less deserving, but even so, being self-organized, we do not know what they did and with what results, claims could be entirely invented as far as I know. I must say that the PD has tried every possible thing to find a solution, but on the other side there was no openness to any sort of dialogue, they expected that space, in their view they were entitled to it, in light of their cultural and social activities.
> (#IE1, elected official, opposition)

> How they manage to survive is a question that I have often asked myself. Because if they say that they do all this for free, the social swimming pool for children and so on… You have to find the money somehow. Where does it come from, how to they make it? Then, there too, it's legitimate, but you need to document the fundraising. At Xm they held Campi Aperti, a farmers' market that has different spaces across the city and moves from place to place. They used to organize it in front of where I live, and it was always full of people. When they moved it, people were angry […]. This is to say that when you do things well, I have no issue at all to defend you. But that was a market, farmers with their fruit crates, everything legit and in order, with a perfect municipal tender.
> (#IE2, elected official, opposition)

In the dimensions of influence on institutional politics considered in this research, Xm24 appears as a lowly influential experience during the post-crisis decade. Its ability to influence policy has been limited, although, it should be noted, Xm24 has rarely set out to influence policy as such. Its access to the decision-making process, and the attitudes of the institutional elite, have also been deeply affected by the peculiar configuration of this experience, its divided and fluid subjectivity, and its inherent approach to institutional dialogue. This being said, as the excerpts of interviews show, the symbolic role of Xm has been pivotal in the city

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[86] The interviewee's reference was to the ironic "Born to be dissolved" association created by Làbas.

debate, for its critics as much as for its supporters. One fundamental aspect in the pathway of Xm24 lies precisely in its grip on the symbolic level. A local journalist I interviewed explained how, in their opinion, this capacity to mark the imagery of people, this process by which for years Xm had become the symbol of something beyond its own experience, appeared evident after the space's eviction.

> What strikes me is that, to this day – and it has been what, two years since the eviction? – every day I open Facebook and see posts about Xm, people saying how great it was when there was Xm… And now that they organize the farmers' market in front of Xm, it's always full of people, almost like pilgrims. In Bologna, there's always been a strong presence of a left "outside the line of the left", it was the city where the PCI was strongest and this of course has generated an opposition, from '77 onwards… But there is a certain tendency to attract all the people that have this idea of an ideological left, helped by the fact that in recent years the reference for the line of the left is a party (very strong in the city) that tends to move further away from this idea. Paradoxically, this has fostered more radical approaches. And Xm became a place where all these groups aggregated, so you would find there: the punkabbestia, Blu drawing a masterpiece, the farmers' market, leftist university professors, outpost students, people who did not know where to sleep, Anarchists, grassroots unionists…
> (#KI1, key informant, local journalist)

Undeniably, the pathway of Xm24 across the last decade has, in itself, established a sort of negative benchmark in the city debate, as far as the relationship between social centers, municipal politics and the wider city goes. In this respect, it will be interesting to see how the recent happenings of this highly symbolic experience (and possibly, its future developments) will affect the interaction between self-managed spaces and local institutions.

5.5 Vag61

Vag61 – Free self-managed space ('Spazio libero autogestito') was born in the early 2000s, in the peripheral Cirenaica neighborhood of Bologna, from a group of activists of the Bologna Social Forum. The CSA's action revolves around self-management, self-organization and self-production; its space is also a media center and archive of the history of social movements. Managed by a generationally diverse internal assembly, Vag61 hosts and supports several initiatives and mobilizations within its space.

Table 5.8 details the mechanisms of Vag's pathway across the decade. Long intertwined with the pathway of radical left political parties, after 2009 the space cut its ties to representative politics and shifted its focus to a much more territorialized action, building a strong network within its neighborhood and developing social projects. At the same time, the attention of the public debate was increasingly focused on new or more contested spaces. An overall partitioning followed, between Vag61 and institutional politics, as the experience was perceived and represented in progressively normalized terms. Balancing its contentious element with the cooperative one, Vag was able to openly criticize the administration, while also entering into new formalized frameworks in force of its engagement towards a larger city public.

Despite some attempts, Vag has not strongly impacted municipal policy. It has, nonetheless, gained solid recognition of its engagement by the local Administration and increased procedural access, particularly on social projects. Elected officials more politically distant from social centers tend to either know very little about Vag61, or to see it as a lowly polarizing experience.

Table 5.8 Pathway of Vag61: mechanisms, sub-mechanisms and dimensions of political influence.

Collective Actor	Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms		Political Influence
Vag61	**Focus shift** Territorialization; Network.	**Partitioning** Normalization; Double tracking.	Procedural (low) Attitudes (low)

Focus Shift

In December 2003, the Bologna Social Forum occupied a building in the former Afterwork of the State Monopoly, in via Azzo Gardino 61, from which originated the acronym name of the newborn social center Vag61. The space was evicted after a few weeks, but established since the beginning a dialogue with institutional politics. The following July, under the new Cofferati administration, Vag signed a convention with the Municipality, in which the latter granted the space six years and fourteen thousand euros of rent, for the use of a building in via Paolo Fabbri 110. Vag, in the meantime, had formally constituted an association, which counted about fifty adherents. In October 2004, Vag inaugurated its media center, with editorial boards on one floor and study and meeting rooms on the other floor, alongside a documentation center and archive dedicated to the history of social movements. In these respects, since its early start, Vag was widely perceived, indeed, as politically connoted, but also as a space open to a wider public than just activists, intending to produce information and provide opportunities of social aggregation.

Vag, as other established self-managed experiences investigated in this dissertation, has been at the center of a mechanism of *Focus Shift* within the political landscape of the city.

On the one hand, the space itself has shifted its focus away from the direct engagement in institutional politics, and instead walked a path of progressive *territorialization* of its action. In fact, of the spaces active in Bologna, Vag has historically been the most structurally linked to political parties. Valerio Monteventi, prominent figure of the space, was part of the city Council (elected as an independent in the lists of Rifondazione Comunista) from 1993 to 2009[87]. After that experience, and as the independent list led by Monteventi failed to affirm itself in the election of 2009, at the onset of the crisis the space dropped the pursuit of representative politics. At the same time, the space has increasingly perceived itself as embedded into a wider urban context, therefore placing a careful focus on the coexistence and integration with the surrounding neighborhood, also in devising the initiatives to carry out. The burst of the crisis, in this respect, has contributed to transforming Vag's relationship with its territory.

> The crisis has forced pretty much everyone to confront it, in the sense that it has produced first an economic disaster, and as a consequence a social disaster, which has affected the most fragile sectors of the population, and determined an unprecedented degree of loneliness. A space that has in its name the word 'social', had to necessarily deal with this issue. And so, a reasoning started, slowly and with some fatigue, on mutualistic practices, trying to combine the experience that in these territories has been so crucial in the early 1900s, with the social needs of the present. This has resulted in cases of resistance, solidarity brigades, and then on each occasion opportunities and moments of political standing were built, with respect to emerging situations. From a struggle in a workplace, to students contesting the price of the canteen, to the issue of housing. […] For a long time, social centers were "forced" to confront social needs, and over the years developed a series of initiatives in the attempt to provide responses, through the only way that they

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[87] A few months before the end of the legislature, Monteventi exited the council grouping of Rifondazione Comunista.

knew – that is, squatting, and from there building something alternative. Then, with the social crisis, social centers were confronted with even more dramatic situations: homelessness, people sleeping in the streets… We, here, have had a very peculiar reality, being neighbors with the largest public shelter in the city. And so, we have started to develop part of our activities with an eye to what was happening next to us, building projects in cooperation with social workers and the guests of the shelter. This brought us a few years ago to develop one of our most significant projects, a popular gym inside the public shelter[88].

(#I1SC4, activist, Vag61)

We are a peculiar experience, but I don't think that today we can think of Vag outside of this neighborhood context, with respect to the projects we have built (with the shelter but not only that), with everything that has moved these past years. Nowadays, social centers are no longer merely spaces where to organize concerts, or seats of a given collective, they are spaces that are traversed by parts of the city.

(#I2SC4, activist, Vag61)

In fact, Vag61 has been widely shaped by the idea of being a traversable space, a hub open to hosting and crossing a variety of struggles and movements, with a clear political connotation but also a dialoguing way of interacting with other actors, forming ties, producing territory.

Within this dynamic of territorialization, Vag has increasingly taken part in local mobilizations, fostering grassroots initiatives and campaigns. In doing so, the space has encountered a variety of actors mobilized around its same causes and projects, and has thereby consolidated a wide *network* of partner organizations, from cultural actors, to associations, to local projects, to civil society initiatives engaged in the provision of welfare services. Vag has increasingly become a hub for a number of different mobilizations, hosting from the meetings of parents organizing protest against the tariffs and quality of school canteens in 2014, to the assemblies of the local branch of Black Lives Matter.

Partitioning

Linked to the shift of focus of the space in the local movement landscape, is a second mechanism. In fact, what best describes the relationship between Vag and institutional politics in the decade following the crisis, is a *Partitioning* dynamic.

This mechanism unfolded along two main dimensions. On the one hand, it occurred through a process of *normalization* of the experience in the local debate. Overall, Vag61 has been mildly covered by the local press, compared to the average coverage of CSAs in the city (*Figure 5.1*).

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[88] The project in question was launched in 2012. Vag's popular gym is still currently active.

Figure 5.1 Vag61, local press coverage (2008-2019).
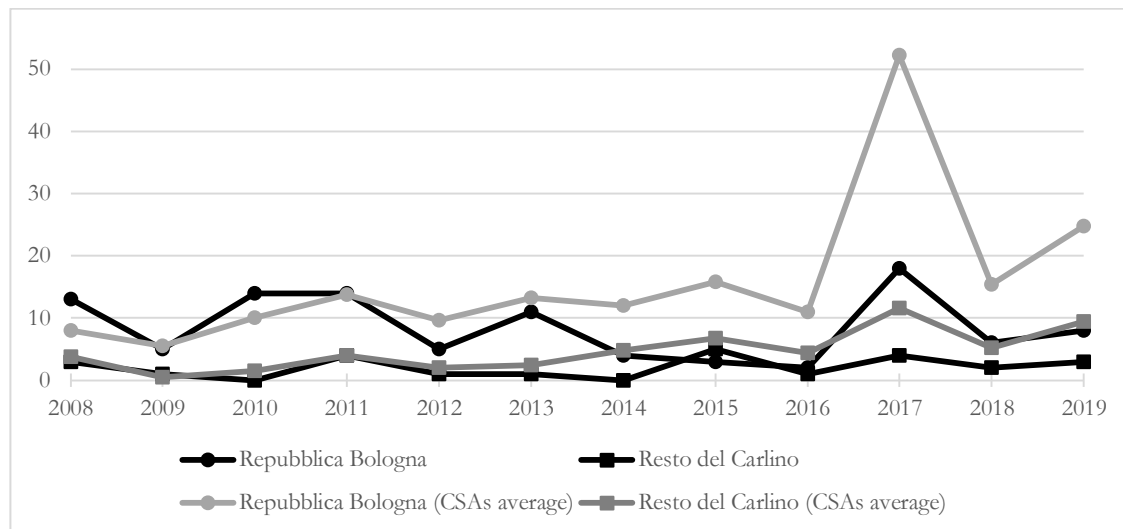
Source: manual selection for the automated search results of the articles available in each newspaper's online archives[89].

For the time period between 2008 and the beginning of 2020, especially, the search engine of Repubblica Bologna yields a little over 400 articles. For the same time span, the TPO yields over 1.350, and Xm24 over 500. Out of around 400 articles mentioning Vag61 published in Repubblica Bologna from 2008 to 2020, 187 appeared between January 2008 and November 2012 (in a total of four years, which amounts to an average of 40 to 50 articles a year). The other half of the articles, about 213, were published from 2012 to 2020 (which equates an average of 26 articles a year). Furthermore, and even more telling, of the 213 articles identified in the 2012-2020 timespan, only 67 are political articles, while the rest is comprised of articles listing the cultural events (book presentations, music initiatives and so forth) of the upcoming week or weekend. Data on 2017 render a slightly higher coverage, due to articles mentioning Vag as part of the demonstrations in support of Làbas, widely covered by Repubblica Bologna. A similar analysis of the media coverage carried out by the Resto del Carlino on Vag, yields a total of 44 results from 2007 to the early 2020. There, too, for the most part Vag is mentioned in relation to the organization of cultural initiatives and events, or as a participant in collective mobilizations and protests carried out by the Bolognese social centers. Moreover, the frequency of articles has decreased drastically after 2011-2012. Aside from media presence, the debate around Vag normalized also on an institutional level. For one, no interrogations, questionings or orders of business can be retraced as having been presented in the city Council on Vag after 2013. Among the very few pieces of legislation available on the subject of the space are the provision granting Vag the use of the building of via Paolo Fabbri, and the deliberations regarding the collaboration agreement with Campi Aperti, for the holding of the farmers' market inside Vag.

On the other hand, the preservation of an autonomous path, overall separated from institutional politics, has been accompanied for Vag by a *double-tracking* approach. Throughout the 2000s, Vag interacted directly with (and within) institutions. Since early on in its history, the space never held back with respect to criticizing the city administration's actions, despite being materially supported by the Municipality (as well as the regional

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[89] Article leads, previews and summary columns are archived separately in newspapers' online search engines (that, therefore, render two distinct results, one for the article lead and one for the main article). In order to offer a more faithful picture of media representation and not skew the distribution of the articles published for each actor, leads and summary columns are counted here as part of the main article to which they refer.

authorities). Frictions were, at times, quite strong. In 2007, as the then *assessore* Cristina Santandrea accused Vag of not being in compliance with norms on food and beverage dispensing, Monteventi accused her of legalism and criminalization of social centers, and of not knowing the experiences active in the city. The clash between Rifondazione Comunista and mayor Cofferati grew stark, and ultimately led to the idea of an independent list for the following election. At the time, several political actors took the side of Vag, such as the Greens and the president of the San Vitale neighborhood. What is interesting to note, is that the discourse around the space was widely informed by comparisons with volunteering organizations and associations. This was the case despite the fact that Vag kept up its conflictual approach: in 2008, after receiving a fine, activists publicly stated that if that was the treatment devoted to legitimate experiences, they might as well squat; in March, Vag, Livello57, Tpo, Xm and Crash briefly occupied the City Hall, in a protest aimed at rediscussing the relationships between the Municipality and social centers. This double rail in the action and image of Vag became increasingly more engrained in the years following the crisis. Having exited the arena of institutional politics[90], and reduced its interaction with that realm to a minimum, Vag was able to further balance its contentious dimension with the cooperative one. This aspect contributed to defining the partitioning in the relationship between the Municipality and the space. Between 2010 and 2011 Vag took significant part in the mobilization against austerity. In 2011 and 2012, the space engaged in ever more social struggles, on the issues of poverty and homelessness, and in numerous solidarity actions. Activists also marched in the streets against the eviction of other spaces, such as Atlantide and Bartleby, and accused the administration of ghettoizing self-managed experiences and purposefully pushing them towards the city's periphery. Meanwhile, Vag cooperated with municipal initiatives such as, for instance, urban vegetable gardens. The local press also periodically mentioned the farmers' market of Campi Aperti held at Vag. As for other Bolognese experiences, partitioning did not equate full everlasting independence in the relationship, and instances came where institutions and Vag had to inevitably cross paths. The persistence of this double-tracking approach, however, allowed Vag to openly criticize the administration, while also entering into new formalized frameworks in force of the value of its autonomous engagement towards a larger public. In 2017, the space's convention having expired, as tensions rose around Xm24 and Vag mobilized at the side of the other social centers in the complex battle in defense of Xm, Vag and the Municipality signed a collaboration agreement. Through to this provision, the renewal of the convention was to be linked to the space's social engagement with the nearby shelter Beltrame, via the popular gym and a series of other projects.

«We have always worked together with Vag, in the Cirenaica – explains the manager of the Beltrame shelter, Annamaria Nicolini, from the Dolce cooperative – but for the past few months we have been working to provide our guests with the opportunity of meeting their families and loved ones at Vag, to have dinner and spend time together. The idea, which Vag has immediately welcomed, was to provide dignity to these people, a space and a time reserved for them, every Thursday».
(C. Giusberti, "Il Vag61 tratta e segue le orme del Cassero". *Repubblica Bologna*, 17 May 2017)

A call for tender was published in 2019 for the space, and Vag61, though deeply critical of the decision, decided to compete to safeguard its experience. Vag won, and was entrusted with the space.

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[90] As a result of an electoral defeat, initially, but also as a result of a developing approach of intentional detachment from institutional politics.

Now, on the city's table, is a tender. What we think about the use of this tool for the use of public spaces, we have already expressed in the past, and we have not changed our minds. A tender cannot measure the complexity that emerges from self-managed experiences, it cannot respond to the need of shaping innovative forms of cooperation and organization. A tender places social experiences in mutual competition, when for each space put up for grabs, there are ten that remain abandoned gathering dust. A public tender entails the risk of overshadowing years and years of previous activities. This, which is a threat, now hangs over Vag61 and endangers what we have built over the past fifteen years. Therefore, we wish to transform this threat into yet another challenge, knowing that in the past the community that makes Vag61 live has already been able, several times, to resist the risk of remaining without a home. This time, we are forced to resist by participating in a call for tender, because the alternative would be that of handing over a pretext to claim rights over the spaces that lie between the walls […] of Vag61. We have no guarantees, and we can definitely not forget that this administration is the same that has evicted numerous social centers, opening as many wounds that we feel as ours on the skin. We take a risk, not to face a bigger one.

(Vag61, "Qui siamo, qui restiamo", press release, 9 August 2019)

The political influence of Vag: failing to impact?

Today, Vag61 is among the 'old-generation' self-managed experiences. In terms of activists' ages, it definitely is one of the most heterogeneously composed spaces, and probably the one with the highest average age. Even more, likely on account of this rich configuration, Vag appears as having a different approach to movement politics than other Bolognese experiences. Certainly, this social center is perceived by many today as a sort of repository of the historical memory of Bologna's movements. The impression I had, while talking to activists, is that even the younger ones share a 'long' look on the unfolding of social centers' influence across decades. Such look is not always a rosy one. Activists have difficulty identifying general outcomes of collective action in the city, despite acknowledging specific victories on single struggles and an overarching cultural impact.

At least on an experiential and cultural level, surely there has been a strong contribution. I think that we need to remove a bit the idea that there have been specific gains, I wouldn't say that precise battles have been won, if not on single spaces, single places, single campaigns. I remember that when we occupied the Ferrhotel in via Casarini, we brough to the table – it was a group of Roma migrants, Romania wasn't part of the EU yet – an issue, and the Administration talked to us, and was somehow forced to listen. An issue was raised on the management of migrants' reception. But the relationship was always conflictual – or rather, on parallel tracks, then it's clear that you clash on single issues, on evictions, on different ideas of the city. A different thing for the cultural level, and this I believe needs to be sought way earlier in time, there was a strong contamination with a culture that came from below, accessible, free of charge, and administrations have had to come to recognize this aspect. But if I have to think of specific issues or struggles, I find it hard to see any, if you look at the urban development of 2020, with respect to 2000, and with respect to the 1980s. The direction was rather precise, and I think self-managed spaces are quite marginal in that respect, be they strong or weak, they haven't been involved in that planning process.

(#I2SC4, activist, Vag61)

One area of attempted *policy* impact, in which Vag's mobilization did not succeed, has to do with an urban planning issue involving Vag's city district. In 2017 Vag promoted the creation of the citizens' committee "Resistenze in Cirenaica" (Resistances in the Cirenaica area, where the space is located), contesting the realization of mega supermarkets across the San Donato neighborhood. After having collected over 200 signatures, the committee obtained an open summit of the Neighborhood Council, at the presence of the *assessore* in charge of Urban planning, Valentina Orioli. In 2018, the "Becco" committee was formed (an acronym for "Eastern Bologna against cement and for oxygen"), to specifically contest the construction of a mall in via Libia, always in the Cirenaica area, and asking for a participatory

planning process. The committee collected over 650 signatures, however the project proceeded, and the supermarket was built.

In terms of *procedural access*, Vag61 enjoyed (increasingly so) an extent of citizenship within the polity necessary to gain some access to decision-making. For instance, contacts were entertained with the municipal bureaucracy and other local institutions on social projects. Informal and formal dialogue was also generally possible with elected officials. The interviews with activists from Vag, which I was lucky to conduct in person in 2020 despite the pandemic, yield some insights on the frames of the Bolognese political discussion, and how Vag has perceived the frames utilized by institutional actors and the mainstream debate. One element in particular has to do with the paradigm of security (particularly during the Cofferati era), but also the more comfortably deployable one of legality[91]. Indeed, as recalled, spaces like Vag have chosen to adapt to legalized frameworks in order to preserve their activity. Through their legalized framework, and their engagement in direct social actions, they have gained a part of access to decision-making and institutional figures. However, in cases such as Vag's, such access has been limited, and mostly related to either practical matters for cooperative social projects, or questions linked to the participation of the space in the formalized municipal framework.

In terms of *institutional attitudes*, Vag61 has overall been much less debated than other social centers, therefore the occasions for politicians to make statements or take a stance on the experience have been rarer. During the interviews I conducted, Vag was seldom mentioned by elected officials, and the mapping operated by many interviewees attests to the fact that a less polarizing nature equates lower saliency, and lower perception of the social center's influence among elected officials.

> Given that they are not part of my culture, I have never attended them, so I wouldn't want to mix them up… Some, for instance, I have known since I was elected in the City Council, like Vag… sixty-one, is it? All these matters that I did not know. […] If I had to rank social centers based on relevance, I would say Làbas, Xm, TPO and Vag. I don't know if there are any others, these are the ones I know.
> (#IE2, elected official, opposition)

Certainly, a recognition of the value of the experience has come from the administration, within the debate surrounding the convention's renewals, but also from the municipal evaluation of the space's proposal in response to the 2019 tender. Among the last sporadic attacks to the permanence of the experience, in 2010 the local branch of the PDL (*Popolo della libertà*, Silvio Berlusconi's party) asked not to renew the convention, while in 2013 PDL city councilor Lorenzo Tomassini presented an interrogation to the municipal executive (namely to the *assessore* Alberto Ronchi), contesting the renewal of the convention, and the alleged noise and disturbance caused by Vag's activity on a specific evening. Ronchi answered defending the space, stressing the value of its experience and the citizenship rights of Vag's frequenters. Overall, attitudes towards Vag61 have been fairly positive, or at least lowly critical, for some years now. Activists attribute this effect to Vag's action focus, and its capacity to be part of a territory and build bridges and projects with the local community. Granted, this comes with the ambivalent awareness that a space that is well integrated, open, and performs well in the public eye, without being too polarizing, is in a sense perceived as a less contentious, therefore a less 'problematic' experience.

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[91] Both are also perceived by activists as having largely shaped the institutional elites' approach towards Vag. In this respect, one activist suggested, the question of legality goes back to the 1977 fracture between the institutional left and the radical left.

Surely, now they will say that Vag is an asset, we participated in the tender and obtained the highest score possible, so they will say this, this is the social center that can be liked because it operates in a logic that takes into consideration the surrounding context. We made a choice when we entered this space, to be in an urban context. Other spaces would have rave parties, concerts and so on, but we were interested in developing other topics, the question of information and communication to us was pivotal […]. When hostile neighbors tried to organize a petition, the usual one that is often organized when a new social center opens somewhere, they collected twelve signatures. This means that we were able – this is a welcoming neighborhood for an experience of this kind, but we were also able to build initiatives that were compatible with the context, and we were careful and attentive to it, I think this is element is really worth highlighting. Then, we have always tried to make sure that this wasn't perceived as an Indian reservation, but a place able to not only dialogue, but also cooperate and build things together with the neighborhood and the people that inhabit it.

(#I1SC4, activist, Vag61)

5.6 *Laboratorio* Crash!

The experience of Laboratorio Crash cannot so much be described as that of one space, but rather as the nomadic history of a political collective across the city. Crash was born in 2003, from the encounter of a group of left-wing university students with members of the former Autonomia Operaia, whose legacy as a model of resistance and appropriation of urban space has been widely taken up by the experience of Crash (Hajek 2013). Part of the radical autonomy branch of social antagonism, for almost two decades Crash has been especially active in housing struggles, the protests of logistical workers, environmental mobilizations. Its action has been permeated by a radical experimentation of autonomy, the production of antagonistic culture and the practice of urban social inquiry. The experience of Crash extends to multiple relevant subjectivities in the city's landscape of political mobilization: notably, the student collective CAS (*Collettivo Autonomo Studentesco*), the university students' collective CUA (*Collettivo Universitario Autonomo*), and Social Log, a collective engaged in work and housing struggles.

Table 5.9 describes the trajectory of this actor since the crisis. For much of its history, and still during the first few years after the onset of the crisis, nomadic collective Laboratorio Crash! experienced a deep encapsulation with respect to the city political environment. Highly disruptive, Crash was accompanied by a narrative portraying a radical and erratic subjectivity. What is especially interesting about Crash, is how a mechanism of encapsulation in the urban arena has come to coexist, and be progressively replaced (although this process is not complete) by a bridging of the experience. While still perceived and represented, on some levels, as a highly contentious and even problematic actor, Crash has in fact been able to also unlock its perimeter, entrench its action in the city's periphery and thereby weaving community ties, and start to be gradually certified by institutional politics (at least within the Administration).

The recent entry of Crash into a formalized municipal framework has indeed coincided with some degree of procedural access. However, the most relevant impact of this actor lies in its farsightedness in anticipating, with its struggles, some of the most pressing questions of the late 2010s, such as the rights of logistics workers and Bologna's housing crisis. Although the establishment of a cause-effect relationship isn't straightforward, Crash's housing activism has played a key role in raising an issue that has, since, been placed high on the local political agenda and entailed some policy developments.

Table 5.9 Pathway of Laboratorio Crash: mechanisms, sub-mechanisms and dimensions of political influence.

Collective Actor	Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms		Political Influence
Crash	**Encapsulation** Disruption; Narrative.	**Bridging** Territorialization; Perimeter unlocking; Certification.	Policy (agenda-setting) (Procedural)

Encapsulation

Although its dynamicity sets Crash apart from other actors investigated in this work, some insightful recurrences can be identified in the evolution of its trajectory.

The beginning of the *Encapsulation* mechanism experienced by Crash dates back to before the crisis. However, this dynamic persisted and stretched well into the post-crisis scenario, both in terms of disruptive actions carried out by the collective, and through the narrative built around this experience.

Let us start with *disruption*. This is, of course, a highly distinctive feature of collective action, and one that has been found to largely contribute to movement outcomes (Piven and Cloward 1977; Cress and Snow 2000). In this respect, in a recent work, Clarissa Hayward (2020) has argued, against McAdam's established framework, that disruption can be politically effective even when it fails to win widespread public sympathy, by means of informing relevant public on specific questions, thereby impacting the political agenda. This suggestion is tightly linked to the disruption vs. moderation debate in social movement literature, and may be pathbreaking in expanding scholarly understandings of movement outcomes. In the trajectory of Crash, for one, a decade of highly disruptive actions around specific subjects (such as housing rights), has indeed been matched by the placing of issues on the policy agenda, although, as detailed below, a causal relationship between the two is not straightforward to establish. At the same time, if we look at the sequence of interlocking mechanisms that compose the pathway of collective actors, the case of Crash also shows how an approach dominated by disruption can work as a relational sub-mechanism for the encapsulation of an actor within a narrow social environment. The pathway of Crash has been marked by one of the most radical and antagonistic approaches in the city, and the collective has consistently and massively engaged in demonstrative actions, protests and occupations. Naturally, Crash is not the only collective actor in Bologna having adopted disruptive forms of action: however, what sets Crash apart is how this element intensified with the crisis and contributed, contrary to other collective actors, to the encapsulation of Crash in the urban environment, by fostering a specific narrative and representation of the experience.

The history of 'Laboratorio Crash!' started on 28 November 2003, with the occupation of a dilapidated building in via di Corticella 203. The property, of private ownership, was cleared within a few hours. In 2004, the visit of the British ambassador to Johns Hopkins University's seat in Bologna was met by the 'Enduring Resistance' protest, contesting the US military intervention in Irak. Crash took active part in the mobilization, which resulted in riots between protesters and law enforcement. On 5 March 2005, Crash occupied a space in Via Avesella 2/2, only a few steps away from an historic Antagonist Communication Center. Later that Spring, on 15 April, Crash handed the keys to the premise in via Avesella to housing policies *assessore* Antonio Amorosi, in exchange for the administration's engagement to build public housing for families affected by the housing shortage crisis, and to remove two electric huts deemed harmful. In the meantime, the collective occupied the former train

depot in via San Donato 27, only to be evicted four months later, on 16 August. On 25 February 2006, the Occupied Laboratory of Precarity occupied a former cantineen in via Gioannetti 2, always in the popular San Donato neighborhood. To the eviction of the space a few months later, on 12 May, Crash responded with the occupation of a warehouse in via Zanardi 48. In May 2007, as the struggle for migrants' rights intensified, Crash was amongst the promoters of a demonstration against the temporary permanence center (CPT) of via Mattei, in which a few thousand participants marched asking for the closing of the center. Later that year, in August, a new eviction left Crash without a home. In a climate of increasing tensions between the city administration, championing the rule of 'legality', and collective actors claiming citizenship for self-managed spaces, on 6 October, as thousands demonstrated in the streets of Bologna, Crash carried out its sixth occupation, appropriating the locales of via Zanardi 106. Meanwhile, Crash took part in numerous housing squats, progressively evicted. In November 2008, the premise in via Zanardi 106 was cleared out, and Crash occupied the former Bologna Motori factory in via Donato Creti 24. On 3 December, at dawn, law enforcement evicted Crash from the locales: it was the eighth eviction in four years. In February 2009, a new space was occupied, a former Unicredit building in via della Cooperazione 10. This time, the occupation lasted for eight years. With the crisis, the disruptive nature of Crash's action intensified, as the space took part in the Onda square protests in 2010 and 2011, as well as in many solidarity actions with the No TAV movement, contesting the construction of the high-speed train line in Val di Susa, Piedmont. Contention has remained a pivotal feature of Crash's political approach, also after the anti-austerity protest cycle ended in 2012, embracing a wide range of struggles, from the riots during the first logistic workers' mobilizations in 2011, to the contesting of banking institutions, to the physical defense of several occupations (carried out by Crash itself or by other subjectivities). Housing squatting, in this respect, has particularly marked Crash's action, although it has progressively decreased in more recent years. Still in October 2016, an occupied apartment building (Condominio Sociale Occupato) in via Mario de' Maria was cleared out, which also resulted in riots taking place with the police in the nearby via Carracci and via Matteotti.

The encapsulation dynamic of Crash also resulted from the building of a specific *narrative* around the experience. As a result, for the most, of its extreme disruptiveness, Crash was widely portrayed in the local media debate as a radical, erratic and problematic subjectivity. Even for more progressive newspaper Repubblica Bologna, the mapping of the discursive representation of the collective's actions between 2010 and 2019, yields a highly polarized picture. Even in a mainstream left-wing media outlet, the press representation of Crash, despite being limited in quantity, qualitatively was largely informed by terms relating to public disorder, riots, demonstrations and activists taking the squares. Often times, Repubblica mentions Crash as part of broader mobilizations carried out by the movement actors of the city. However, Crash is also associated to riots, violence and legal proceedings (in addition to evictions, for obvious reasons) to a much larger extent than other subjectivities. A similar representation has concerned the university branch of Crash, the CUA, engaging in mobilizations through a variety of disruptive actions.

In this depiction as the 'quarrelsome son' of the Bolognese squatting movement, Crash was also associated with the narratives surrounding Xm24 and the most disruptive collective actors in the city. For one, the covering of Blu's murals, involved Crash activists just as much as Xm ones. Three Crash activists were denounced as they helped the artist erase a painting from via Zanardi, and charged with bedaubing walls and trespassing onto private property. Finally, as the frequency table above shows, a regular mentioning of Crash in the local press

was put forth in association with the debate around Làbas. The high frequency of the term Làbas, despite the relative newness of the social center with respect to the timeframe considered in the analysis of Crash, attests once again to the saliency assumed by the question of social spaces during the negotiations for the safeguard Làbas. As recalled shortly below, the city's changing environment on the matter of self-management has contributed to Crash's choices and trajectory.

Bridging

A second mechanism that has been playing out in Crash's trajectory, over the past few years, is *Bridging*.

The first element in this dynamic has been the *territorialization* of Crash's engagement. This aspect has much to with both the practices and the focus of Crash's action. Aside from protest actions across the city, inside its spaces Crash has long participated in a variety of creative, cultural and aggregation projects. The InfoFreeFlow blog, for one, aimed at providing an alternative, free source of information, particularly on subjects of cyber resistance. The project was shut down in December 2013. Crash also held "Dans la rue", a project devoted to the creation and diffusion of underground and antagonist culture, and forms of auto-production. The Anti-racist gym 'Red Rose', whose activity ceased in 2015, held courses of boxing and thai boxing. Among the different editorial projects were then Anomalia, a university magazine published between 2009 and 2012 during the Onda Anomala movement, and the fanzine "Sottobanco", curated between 2011 and 2013 by the Autonomous Student Collective (Collettivo Autonomo Studentesco, CAS), the high school students' branch of Crash. The Laboratorio also took part in four book projects: the afterward to a re-edition of *Bologna marzo '77… fatti nostri* (2007), an account of the protests of 1977 in Bologna; the curation of a collection of short stories by Philip K. Dick "set in a metropolis of the near future, very similar to Bologna"[92]; the *Ricettario di cucina meticcia* (2016) recipe book, which was written based on the mestizo cooking course organized in the occupied apartment building (Condominio Sociale Occupato) in via Mura di Porta Galliera; and the original work *Il campo di battaglia urbano. Trasformazioni e conflitti dentro, contro e oltre la metropoli* (2019), resulting from a two-year militant research effort on the topic of the major urban transformation under way as the 2020s approached. It appears, in this respect, that for the past decade DSAs have been a part of Crash's repertoire, although in a discontinuous way – also on account of the experience's turbulent history of occupations and evictions. Indeed, the core focus of the collective remained conflict, which took the form of DSAs among many others. One especially relevant element relates to the resort to housing squats. While this practice had long been pivotal in Crash's pathway, activists became even more structurally involved in the countering of the housing emergency with the formation in 2013 of Social Log, a collective born from the mobilizations of local logistic and precarious workers and students. The name of the collective recalls the 'logistic of social struggles', attesting to its role as an instrument at the service of the city struggles for the right to housing and to income.

> The name of the collective underlines its nature of "logistics of struggles", an instrument of service, support and emancipation to those who struggle for the achievement of the right to a house (contrasting evictions, forced removals and foreclosures), to housing in a broader sense (residence, health, transportation, education, happy childhood and more), and to income.[93]

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[92] See: Laboratorio Crash!, *produzioni*, at: https://laboratoriocrash.noblogs.org/produzioni/.

[93] Social Log (12 December 2018) "Chi siamo", *Social Log*, https://sociallog.noblogs.org/post/2018/10/12/chi-siamo/#more-36.

Starting in 2012, Crash hosted the first plenary assemblies in the city on the subject of housing, and activists were significantly involved in the establishment by Social Log of a series of experimentations in the Bolognina neighborhood. Social Log notably works to counter the emergency through three main channels of action: assistance, negotiation and reappropriation (see further Bazzoli 2016). The first step consists in an inquiry work, with the interception of housing needs through a support desk – the first desk was established in 2013 within the occupation, subsequently evicted, of a building in viale Masini –, which offers legal and general assistance to individuals in situations of housing precarity. In a second step, support is provided in the negotiation process with the landlord aimed at retaining the accommodation. When bargaining fails and an agreement cannot be reached, Social Log engages in demonstrative actions, such as picketing to prevent evictions from being executed. For those cases in which adequate alternative housing solutions are not available, Social Log has established a series of housing experimentations, occupying unutilized premises and claiming a wider right to dignified living beyond just housing. In this direction have developed the so-called 'social condos', or social experimentations of aggregation, solidarity and welfare (with initiatives such as community playrooms for the children) inside the occupations of via Mario de Maria, via Mura di Porta Galliera and of the Ex-Telecom building, all in the Bolognina neighborhood. This radical practice became particularly relevant during 2014. It has been estimated that around 350 people have found an accommodation within Social Log's occupations, for the most part individuals of foreign origins having resided in Bologna for several years; and that the group of militants has been progressively enriched by the integration of people having consulted the support desk, coming to count almost 500 activists (Bazzoli 2016). What is especially significant in terms of territorialization of collective action, is how these occupations, while providing a temporary solution to a material necessity, also allowed for the preservation of social ties and networks that inhabitants had built during their life in the neighborhood (*ibid.*).

A second and simultaneous element of territorialization concerns the progressive rooting of Crash in the peripheral area of Bologna. Although this aspect, along with Crash's social actions, has been underplayed in the public debate, it has entailed significant developments in the identity and strategies of Crash's experience, as well as its interactions with municipal institutions. One activist particularly explained how they feel that the territorial localization of the space(s) across the decade has played a role.

> Every neighborhood, every urban area, has its specificities, and the type of relationships that one can establish in a peripheral area are different (then, Bologna's periphery has very singular features, that are not those of a large metropolis), they are different in neighborhoods like the ones in which the experience of Crash has developed over the past ten years, from the kinds of relationships that one can establish in the city center. So, I believe that the localization element has undoubtedly played a role, in ways that can be both positive and negative. There can be a form of 'invisibilization' in the public and media debate, but also a form of higher recognition by social contexts in which social experiences tend to be absent. To give a concrete example, trying to not generalize, but in the Bolognese periphery there is a historical associational fabric (of various kinds, from Legambiente to Anpi, to very local experiences born around single issues), there is a long tradition of this sort of pathways, which have now been in crisis for some time, and surely this type of experience has always looked – even in the political distance or difference, if you will – rather positively at a youth actor like Crash. And, as a consequence, administrative levels linked to that territory tend to adopt a different idea of this kind of actor.
> (#I1SC5 activist, Crash)

What this activist argued during the interview is that, indeed, the public debate has long encapsulated the experience into a narrative mostly centered around disruption and

contestation. These more newsworthy elements (conflict, the physical defense of certain pathways) have surely been claimed by Crash as part of its action, and to this day are widely practiced, and still take the majority of media space. However, Crash's rootedness and weaving of social ties and activist networks in the peripheral neighborhoods have also been a part of its action for some years. One that has become more apparent to institutional actors in recent times, particularly since the participation of Crash to municipal participatory Laboratories and the obtainment, through a public tender, of its current space in the Corticella neighborhood, in 2019. From the perspective of an institutional interviewee, this was largely the result of the changes determined by the 'case' of Làbas.

> The case of Làbas, then, has had effects on other experiments, too, […] it has introduced new dynamics for experiences like Crash. Crash had always made the choice to occupy private spaces, because it did not want to entertain any kind of relationship with the Administration. Recently, precisely by participating (quite unthinkable, until a few years ago) in the experiment of the Lab on Spaces organized by the Fondazione Innovazione Urbana, they have obtained the space of the former Central Dairy. This produced a transformation in their perspective: now, they participate in the neighborhood's reunions and assemblies with the elderly of Corticella, around issues related to health… they have entered a different course.
> (#KI2, key informant, municipal bureaucracy)

These changes, despite the contrasting readings provided by activists versus institutional actors as to their starting point, attest to an effort of *perimeter unlocking* on the part of Crash. In a way, it could be argued that the turn of 2019 was in fact a consequence of a broader dynamic of enlarging the perimeter of the experience. From the intensification of social experimentations and territorial rootedness, to the reappropriation and refurbishment of abandoned spaces. Certainly, some critical elements were also at play in the space's strategic choices and overall reflections. For one, the fatigue of the illegal squatting movement in Italy and across Europe, and probably also a questioning on the sustainability and purpose of keeping up a pattern of successive occupations and evictions, which heavily impeded the continuity of Crash's action. An activist from Crash told me on one occasion that "for the experience of Crash there was never an ideology of squatting, there was always a practice of squatting, but it always looked at the possibility to see certain struggles and claims recognized". In this respect, Crash has known several forms of both mediation and conflict with institutional politics over the years.

However, it was in 2017 that, within a shifting (and more favorable) social environment, Crash started to fully claim this recognition. Crash was once again evicted from the premise of via della Cooperazione on 8 August 2017, on the same day in which, in the city center, Làbas was being evicted from the Caserma Masini. As a response, this time the Laboratorio launched the "Crash again!" campaign, calling on the municipality to provide a solution to safeguard the experience, supported by the city's collective actors. On this occasion, a progressive *certification* of the experience on the part of institutional actors started to emerge. The president of the Neighborhood, Daniele Ara, declared that Neighborhood and Municipality were working to promote the encounter between Crash and private property owners, to find a home for the project, and called to owners to make contact with institutions, arguing that many empty properties were available in the city, and that they would be put to better use and maintenance if entrusted to someone. At the same time, a variety of prominent figures started to express their support for Crash in the public debate. Some signs of the recognition of the cultural value of the space had already appeared also in the local mainstream media, where the initiatives proposed by Crash were being progressively added into the agenda of cultural events, despite its illegal status. However, this element became blatant as 190 signatures from renowned culture figures and artists were added to

the petition launched by Crash[94], urging institutions to preserve this experience engaged in social, cultural and political action in the periphery of the city. In actuality, despite certification, what followed was a contested pathway of interactions. In November 2017, Crash occupied the ex-Veneta, a former local railway station building in via Zanolini. The aim of the collective was to shine a light of visibility on their struggle, while also allowing for the continuation of Crash's grassroots action. The occupation was evicted after a few days. One element, among others, that indeed attests to the changed social environment in the city with respect to self-managed experiences, lies in how references kept being made to the wider struggle of social centers in the city, and particularly to the evictions of 8 August and the pathway of Làbas that, at that point, had already accessed its new space in vicolo Bolognetti.

> Starting today, however, the Laboratorio Crash! will no longer be an invisible ghost: the social, cultural and political struggles that animate a peripheral social center, want to take the color of struggles, red, and go back to being central! We express solidarity to all social centers, collectives, self-managed projects and individuals who are struggling at our side, in the social struggles and conflict, we salute the assembly of Làbas that is taking place inside the new space, and we invite you to come visit us to support a stuggle that concerns everyone who wants to resist the Bologna of speculation and evictions, and who practice solidarity and alternatives on a daily basis.
> (Laboratorio Crash, press release, "CRASH AGAIN!", 10 November 2017)

In April 2018, Crash occupied for the eleventh time. In this case, target of the squatting was an empty abandoned building owned by Ubi Banca, in via Don Fiammelli, in the peripheral Corticella area, in the Navile neighborhood. The collective immediately started refurbishing the space, while calling for the opening of a negotiation table with the Prefecture, the Municipality and the property. After the rejection on the part of the property of Crash's proposal to take charge of a 'social custody' of the space, and continuing interactions with the municipality – both publicly and off the record – the collective decided to take a different turn.

> Our assembly has thus decided to reiterate the call to local institutions and the Administration, to find a positive solution to the demands emerged from these months of self-management in Corticella, avoiding an eviction and safeguarding the community of the assemblies, projects, workshops and self-managed initiatives. In this direction, we propose ourselves to the city, in the framework of the "neighborhood labs" for the former Central Dairy in via Corticella 129, a buiding that can preserve territorial ties while also hosting our self-management, opening a long abandoned public space to a regeneration from below.
> (Crash, *Lab Crash sotto sgombero, difendiamo l'autogestione in periferia!*, press release, 3 January 2019)

Under a proposition of the administration, Crash was then temporarily hosted inside the 'Caserme Rosse' barrack building in via di Corticella 147/2. Finally, later in 2019, after participating in a municipal tender, Crash's assembly obtained the management of the former Central Dairy (Centale del Latte) in via di Corticella 129. To finance its project of regeneration of the space, developed with the support of the architects' network 'Architetti di strada', Crash also launched a crowdfunding campaign.

The political influence of Crash: anticipating urban crises
The trajectory of Crash has seen some pivotal developments in recent times. In this respect, it is probably too soon to address the influence of this new phase of Crash's experience.

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[94] Acabnews Bologna (28 August 2017). "Dal mondo della cultura 190 firme per Crash". *Zic*. https://www.zic.it/dal-mondo-della-cultura-190-firme-per-crash/.

As for the *procedural access* dimension, the channels available to Crash over the years have been narrow. For quite some time, the leeway of interaction was larger at the local level – that is, with neighborhood institutions –, than at a city municipal level. Nonetheless, in more recent times, the decision of Crash to take part in the participatory laboratory on spaces, has granted the experience new access to decision-making, in terms of affecting the ideas and propositions emerging from the participatory process, but also, since winning the use of the new space, in the creation of new opportunities of steady access to institutions.

In terms of *institutional attitudes*, Crash was almost never mentioned during interviews in elected officials' mappings of Bolognese social centers. Indeed, a certain awareness of the experience amongst politicians of different legislatures is attested by the numerous statements and interrogations put forth on the subject within the city Council, for the most part by opposition groupings. However, probably also on account of its lack of a stable physical location, Crash as an experience was only mentioned to me by elected officials from the administration or from Coalizione Civica, in addition to one interviewee from the municipal bureaucracy. Conversely, the critiques of other political forces about Crash have for the most part surfaced, throughout the decade, in relation to riots and demonstrative actions, or around the dialogue established with the administration after the eviction of 2017. In this respect, the focus of the right-wing forces has largely been on denouncing the allegedly excessive closeness of the city administration to movement actors, rather than describing Crash as a more or less legitimate interlocutor. Surely, a recognition of the experience from the Municipality has occurred with the establishment of Crash's new path in the Corticella district.

In light of Crash's approach to the interaction with institutions, it is difficult to retrace a straightforward impact on *policy* changes. Nonetheless, and despite the relative limitedness of the other two dimensions of influence, one element that can be highlighted is the agenda-setting impact of this experience. In broad terms, Crash has undeniably anticipated some of the struggles that have become crucial in more recent years. One is the mobilization of workers in the logistics sector, which was among the key moments of Crash's struggles. Between 20 and 25 January 2014, Granarolo, a large and well-established business in the outskirts of Bologna, was shaken by the protests and the strike of logistic porters, demanding better working conditions. Crash was among the very few actors that took on the struggle, and was at the forefront of its organization for several months. That struggle, which has also been investigated in its connection with citizenship and the crisis of the city (see further Cuppini 2017), did not result in policy actions, but contributed to placing the grievances of logistic workers vehemently on the public display. Only a couple of years later, with the proliferation of workers' struggles and the emergence of a variety of forms of oppression within gig-economy employment, the issue has started to be widely embraced by local political actors, in ways that have ranged from the simple expression of solidarity in the squares of the mobilization, to the approval by the Municipality of charters for the regulation of certain sectors, such as food delivery work.

Yet, evidence suggests that the greatest impact of Crash over agenda-setting was in a policy area of more specific municipal competence: the question of housing. With Social Log, and along with a variety of (movement and non-movement) actors in the city, Crash has engaged heavily in the struggle against housing shortage and for the right to dignified living. The question of housing (and of the failings of a housing market saturated by significant proprietary concentrations, a staggering demand, high prices, and the diffusion of

Airbnb[95]) has only been brought to proper light fairly recently in the institutional debate. In 2019, the Municipality launched the public hearing on the subject of housing, still currently ongoing. For many observers, including some elected officials, it is hard not to see an impact of the collective actors that, for years, have been denouncing the issue through their multifaceted, often disruptive, political action.

> As for issues, certainly the housing question (with Crash and Socia Log in particular). In the face of an Administration that evicted housing squats, they replaced the administration by finding places for those who needed them. […] The overarching order of business on the right to housing, at the end of the public hearing on housing. Thanks, also, to a certain awareness that has developed in the city, we were able to gather the signatures to obtain the hearing, we invited from Piazza Grande to Làbas, from associations that cooperate with the Municipality to social centers that have been raising the issue for a long time. In the end, the o.d.g. was voted by the majority, too. An impact there is undeniable. […] On housing, there still needs to be the implementation phase, but the Administration, at the beginning of this mandate, did not even acknowledge the issue, they would say 'there is no housing problem', instead we have come this far. In the document, it is said that 30% of housing constructions will be devoted to social and student housing.
> (#IE4, elected official, opposition)

However, not everyone agrees with this interpretation. While acknowledging that things have been changing on the subject of housing at a municipal policy level, some believe that the reasons and actors behind this are different, and have more to do with the changing configuration of the city's housing needs, and a new awareness on the part of those who run the municipal machine.

> There are no housing squats anymore. As for housing policy, in quantitative terms a good job has been done. What was lacking, was an idea, a model of housing policy for the city. Basically, there was still a model of classical public housing construction, and this does not fit the city's needs any longer. Some of these things, in the last PUG *[general urban plan]* that is under way, are being addressed. But this, not because movement actors have changed the agenda, it is more of an administrative process, those who are in charge of housing policy in the Municipality (civil servants, more than political leaders), have understood that the world has changed. It is no use, building houses to sell, because this market isn't there, 70% of the rented places in Bologna are inhabited by non-residents, Bologna has a dramatic demographic turnover, every three years 80% of the population changes. This means that you need houses for rent, to provide for middle to low-income levels, and you have new types of users (researchers and so on), so you need something different from traditional social housing. But I wouldn't say that this was due to social movement or struggle-related dynamics.
> (#KI2, key informant, municipal bureaucracy)

5.7 Exiting the ghetto: a decade of social centers' influence in Bologna

Bologna					
Collective Actors	*Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms*				*Political Influence*
Làbas	**Bridging** Perimeter unlocking; Territorialization;	**Legitimization** Contentious branding; Brokerage;	**Disruption of power competition**	**Double-edged institutiona-lization**	Attitudes, Policy, Procedural

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[95] As an instrument feeding the expulsion of residents from the city in favor of tourists and fostering processes of gentrification, by making short-term renting significantly more convenient for homeowners than medium and long-term renting contracts.

	Network.	Certification through Itemizing.	Seizure of political space; Representation; Contested tokening.	Double-tracking; Reciprocity.	
TPO	**Bridging** Perimeter unlocking; Territorialization; Network.	**Double-edged institutionalization** Double tracking; Normalization; Tokening.	**Disruption of power competition** Seizure of political space; Conflict segregation.		Procedural, Attitudes, Policy
XM24	**Encapsulation** Territorialization; Narrative.	**Partitioning** Double-tracking; Certification through Itemizing.	**Downward spiral of political opportunity** Polarization; Decertification; Repartition.		Policy (low)
Vag61	**Focus shift** Territorialization; Network.		**Partitioning** Normalization; Double tracking.		Procedural (low) Attitudes (low)
Crash	**Encapsulation** Disruption; Narrative.		**Bridging** Territorialization; Perimeter unlocking; Certification.		Policy (agenda-setting) Procedural

Table 5.10 Social centers' pathways of influence in Bologna.

When looking at the trajectories of social centers in Bologna over the past decade (*Table 5.10*), one element that emerges powerfully, is the evolving nature of the city environment, intended as the dynamic relationship between collective actors, the broader city, and institutional politics. The city has shifted away from an environment that could be described as 'classically' repressive – that is, characterized by spirals of forceful evictions, riots, institutional disavowal of illegal self-managed experiences and a relative ghettoization of the legalized ones. What appears to have taken shape, in the post-crisis decade, is a hybrid model, where the lack of tolerance for occupations – and their contrasting –, and the strong institutional pushes towards the definition of administrative frameworks for self-managed spaces, have been balanced by the affirmation of some collective actors at the core of the city's political landscape, with pathways of high influence on institutional politics, and by the emergence of innovative administrative forms for the valuing of self-managed experiences.

In these respects, institutionalization has been a double-edged dynamic for the collective actors that have experienced it. In addition, in the particular political phase that the city is currently crossing, this mechanism also appears to have worked as a double-edged, overall favorable dynamic for institutional actors on the left[96]. Surely, some issues remain to be

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[96] As of October 2021, the local Democratic Party is dominated by the more left-leaning internal faction, traditionally more favorable and dialoguing towards social centers. What is more, the new local administration just elected in October 2021, is led by some of the most publicly committed supporters of the city's collective actors from the PD and Coalizione Civica (the latter having also gained seats in the city council and the cabinet for prominent social centers' activists).

solved, and such enduring contradictions cannot be properly comprehended without bearing in mind the city's peculiar history and political culture. As one interviewee articulated, the established 1977 fracture between the post-communist, institutional, party-centered left (now embodied by the PD), and the movement arena, is yet to be recomposed. This shows strongly, for one, in the analysis of Xm24's pathway, and generally in the struggle between the legitimate impulses of local institutional politics and the impossibility of making some urban collective experiences fit into the perimeter of administrative frameworks (at least the ones that presently exist). In turn, this leaves open the question of the recognition of actors like Xm24 as legitimate interlocutors. Nonetheless, there seems to be ground for moderate hope on this matter, judging by the proliferation of experimentations and searches for innovative tools in recent years.

The Direct Social Actions carried out by social centers in the city have been significant and diverse. The more heterogeneous and pervasive forms of DSAs can be found in the experience of the TPO, Làbas, and Xm24, where DSAs have ranged from mutual aid, to alternative economic actions and critical consumption, welfare and support desks, educational and sports activities, solidarity actions. Other spaces have focused on specific initiatives, responding to emerging local necessities of their territory (as for Vag61), or targeted particular issues, as in the case of Crash. Overall, the pathways of influence retraced in this chapter show that DSAs can work as a powerful vector of impact for collective actors. The decade following the burst of the crisis has seen an affirmation of social centers at the core of the local political landscape, and DSAs have played a crucial part in some highly influential pathways. However, this has only been the case for actors that have mobilized DSAs within a broader dynamic of bridging of their social environment, and that have managed to intercept and seize a space in the competition for power, as a result of their affirmation within the local society. For the TPO and Làbas, in particular, DSAs have prompted the construction of wide social environments, through the building of bridges with civil society actors, grassroots committees, volunteer organizations. This rich and diverse interplay with actors from different backgrounds, engaged in common causes and sharing practices, has allowed for the expansion of these spaces' direct social activism towards new and larger publics, and the progressive gain of societal grip. In turn, the dynamics unfolding in these arenas have allowed the two experiences to intercept the local competition for power in the institutional realm.

Another element that emerges from the analysis of these spaces' trajectories, is the potential of DSAs not only to prompt distinct relational dynamics across the city system, but also to provide a sense of self-efficacy, and a perception of impact, to collective actors themselves. This is the case for actors, such as the TPO and Làbas, who have largely engaged in DSAs and integrated them as a crucial part of their identity and public image. Interestingly, this idea was confirmed by an interview I conducted with an activist from the Circolo Anarchico Berneri, a long-established anarchist space in the city center – which, on the contrary, has only seldom engaged in DSAs. The Circolo Berneri can be considered as an example of a much different approach to that of self-managed social centers. Throughout its history, the space has underlined how it does not fall under the – albeit broad – definition of a social center, with which it shares the logic of self-management. Over the years, the Circolo has rather called itself a social space; activists wish to perpetuate its vocation as a place of encounter and a home for the anarchist movement. The ideational foundations of the Circolo Berneri are different than those of the other city experiences explored, and in general of Bolognese social centers – the anarchist movement in Bologna having been, for many years, a discreet presence. The Berneri, also in light of its distinct ideological approach, has rejected

all sorts of interaction with institutional authorities. The locales in which the Circolo is situated belong to the Municipality, to which the Circolo pays rent. In time, the Berneri has made mild openings to the social demands of the city at large. The space has cooperated with other collective actors in the city on specific solidarity and critical consumption initiatives, and carried out a few Direct Social Actions itself. During an interview, an activist explained how they perceived that, within a broader context of difficulty for movement actors, where the distance between collective militancy and people's social needs seems to expand constantly, actions "similar to those of CSAs" (in their words) were the most impactful ones. In this respect, the activist referred to the perception, among the subjectivities of the Circolo Berneri, of the space's impact as strongly linked to the few direct social actions undertaken over the years. Specifically, critical consumption and soup kitchens, have allowed the Berneri to have a concrete impact on people's lives beyond the traditional perimeter of its attenders. Even further, in the activists' view, the resort to these practices on the part of collective actors in the years of the crisis, has played a role in the emergence of similar initiatives (i.e., soup kitchens) on the part of more mainstream and institutionalized political actors, such as unions, associations and political parties, and a growing promotion of these initiatives on the part of the Municipality. Surely, it is of particular interest to think of a space like this one, for which formalization and legalization have historically been chosen as means to enact a full segregation from institutional and representative politics, and yet, whose sense of efficacy and impact, also with respect to institutional politics, is so tightly linked to direct social actions.

Indeed, the pathways of social centers that, for the post-crisis decade, show a high degree of influence on institutional politics, share some specific mechanisms and sequences of relational dynamics. These include the bridging of the spaces' social environments, an effective interception of the local power competition, and a double-edged dynamic of institutionalization. Làbas and the TPO stand out as the spaces that have more strongly impacted the municipal level in terms of policy, have been more widely recognized as legitimate interlocutors by local institutional actors, and have gained the larger extent of procedural access to decision-making. At the same time, in appreciating the differing trajectories of political influence of Bolognese social centers, it must be noted that these two experiences are strongly influenced by the dialoguing approach towards institutions of the Disobedient tradition, and the actors that more purposefully aimed at impacting municipal decision-making on a variety of issues. In the years around the crisis, the long-established experience of Vag61 has, conversely, shifted away from the representative political arena, to embrace a more localized focus of action, less characterized by institutional claims-making and generally marked by a dynamic of normalization, with respect to other, more visible experiences. The trajectory of Vag confirms that partitioning (or a course that is separated from institutions) does not equate radicalization of practices, issues or composition, and points to a more complex relationship between the moderate vs. radical and the institutional vs. antagonist cleavages. The recent developments in the trajectory of Crash, then, point to an evolving approach, increasingly focused on the territorialization of collective action and the negotiation of a wider social environment, which has been resulting in a small yet significant increase in the access to administrative decision-making and institutional acceptance, although this path has only just begun.

With respect to policy, social centers in Bologna have been influential in placing issues on the political agenda, from both within and outside the institutional arena (it is, for one, the case of the housing emergency, recently discussed in a dedicated public hearing), as well as in impacting the contents of several institutional acts, of varying scope and focus. These

have ranged from the regulation of public spaces, to the concession of specific buildings or locales to self-managed experiences, to changes in large urban planning projects (as for the Prati di Caprara), to the determination of smaller interventions. Outcomes, in this respect, were achieved through mixed strategies, encompassing protest actions, direct social actions, and varying degrees of institutional dialogue. The most results have been obtained by the collective actors that have strongly combined these three levels.

Moreover, the ability of social centers to impact municipal policy has been affected by the evolution of the available channels of access to decision-making. This has equated a resort to formal and informal channels of interaction. In this respect, the post-crisis decade has seen a progressively more open and dynamic dialogue with the municipal Administration, prompted to a significant extent by the societal legitimization and grip of social centers' action – in that, the role of DSA emerges as crucial in the trajectories retraced throughout the chapter. Simultaneously, movement actors in the city have been able, overall, to extend and leverage the presence of activists in institutional settings. The experience of the Coalizione Civica has entailed the affirmation of a platform aimed at representing collective struggles. However, it should be noted that the input of Làbas and the TPO was predominant in this respect, compared to other social centers. By admission of both the elected officials and the activists interviewed throughout the research, the establishment of a relationship with Xm24, for one, was more difficult and remained somewhat incomplete[97], while other self-managed experiences have contributed to the construction of the Coalizione Civica, but overall played less prominent roles in it. Several interviewees explained that some battles were won, thanks to the combination of collective action outside and inside institutions, in that the actions carried out within society were strong enough to be capitalized and leveraged through elected officials. And yet, activists from the TPO and Vag argued during interviews, this autonomous electoral experience has shown some limits, bringing many, in the city's movement landscape, to think that a small opposition grouping, endowed with only two city Council elected officials, can produce relatively little change, especially in monolithic local systems such as the Bolognese one[98]. Indeed, collective actors have affected the contents of municipal projects beside the leveraging of institutional positions, by taking direct part in municipal urban planning processes and forms of deliberation from below (such as neighborhood laboratories, public hearings, the participatory budget).

At the same time, collective actors in the city have obtained significant influence through the expansion of the forms of access to the institutional decision-making process. To a certain extent, these achievements have coincided with innovations in the forms of democratic deliberation and citizens' involvement. In fact, in addition to standard access opportunities, such as the possibility of participating in open Council commissions, CSAs have been able to access decision-making through municipal bottom-up and participatory deliberation processes, namely the yearly participatory budget, laboratories on urban planning and the management of public spaces, and thematic public hearings.

Some of the latter were called by the Municipality as a result of the effort of the city's movement activists and civil society groups, alongside institutional allies. In this sense, they can be acknowledged as outcomes of collective action: despite their temporary nature (public hearings are delimited in their duration), they have set a relevant precedent in the local administrative practice, and allowed for the construction of societal alliances as well as a

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[97] The willingness of Coalizione Civica to provide support to Xm's cause in the negotiation for the keeping of the space, was only partially welcomed by Xm24 activists, and seen with a certain degree of diffidence.

[98] While this was not a unanimous sentiment, it was the predominant one in the end. Despite causing some fractures, it was the reasoning that spurred later developments of the Coalizione Civica and its choice to establish an alliance with the Democratic Party in the 2021 election.

capital of administrative know-how in the movement realm. At the same time, the progressive updating of the municipal regulations on civic collaborations, has provided for new possibilities of agreement on the self-management of public spaces[99], increasingly more inclusive towards informal actors, and particularly aimed at favoring horizontal, self-managed and mutualistic experimentations. Literature has raised some critical arguments as to the potentially ambivalent effects of social innovation, such as the introduction of participatory procedures marked by an individualized, institutionalized and "presentified" socialization (Alteri, Cirulli and Raffini 2019). The main risk, scholars have argued, is that these initiatives foster the visibility, leverage and over-representation of privileged segments, and amplify inequalities, stifling the possibility of conflict, instead of redistributing resources and providing opportunities for emancipation. In these respects, one consideration that can be made, concerning the participatory processes that have developed in Bologna, is that the latter have been shaped to increasingly include collective actors (in addition to individuals), and, though with higher difficulty, informal actors[100] (in addition to ordinary citizens and formalized organizations, such as civil society associations). Undeniably, the risk of fostering the participation of individuals and groups already endowed with high social capital, or more highly politicized and active citizens, exists, as in a vast majority of modes of democratic participation. However, at least in potential, this risk can be mitigated by seeking forms for the expression of collective and informal actors, when the latter happen to intercept disenfranchised segments of society.

While the gain of increased access to decision-making constitutes, in itself, a reference for the influence of collective actors, the democratic innovations that have taken place throughout the decade have stemmed from a wider process of negotiation of practices, meanings and experimentations. Institutional politics and citizenry, also within frameworks of technical and academic coordination[101], have taken part in a redefinition of governance forms (Paltrinieri and Allegrini 2018). In fact, while participatory modes of decision-making at the municipal level are, understandably, a minority in the realm of administrative action, nodes of community care and cooperative planning have proliferated in Bologna in recent years, prompting the increase of territorial initiatives, but also the structuring of new governance units, specifically dedicated to administrative co-production[102]. These interventions intertwine with complex and multilayered questions of political consensus and democratic legitimation. However, they attest to the developing of new reticular models of decision-making and institutional relations, also as a response to ongoing processes of decentralization of State powers. An extensive discussion of these phenomena is beyond the scope of the present work. Throughout the discussion of Bolognese experiences, I have sought to disentangle the procedural access influence of social centers from, and within, longer processes of democratic innovation, whose outcomes cannot be credited, as such, to collective action. Yet, as contended by qualified interviewees, it can be argued that in Bologna the unfolding of these innovations has been accelerated – and shaped in its contents – by the pathways of collective actors over the last ten years.

Within informal means of procedural access, collective actors in Bologna have experienced – to varying extents depending on the space in question – evolving channels of

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[99] As recalled, the most significant institutional acts produced on this subject are the *Regulation on the collaboration among citizens and the city for the care and regeneration of urban commons* (adopted in 2014), the Single Programming Document (*Documento Unico di Programmazione*) for 2017-2019, and the *Delibera* 241 of 2017.

[100] Especially in procedures such as the municipal laboratories on the management of urban spaces.

[101] Particularly, the Foundation for Urban Innovation (formerly, Urban Center), founded by the Municipality and the University of Bologna, has managed much of the work on co-production processes and participatory urban planning.

[102] Such as the creation, in 2016, of the municipal division (*assessorato*) for Civic Imagination.

interaction with institutional and political figures, from elected officials (particularly ones more sympathetic towards the CSAs) to cabinet members of the city administration. What is more, some self-managed experiences have enjoyed access to the municipal bureaucracy and staff, either as a consequence of their political interlocutions, or, more autonomously, based on their space's engagement with specific social matters through DSAs. For instance, spaces holding job desks or sports and educational activities have established direct interlocutions with the social services and dedicated administrative divisions of the Municipality. The opening of new and steady channels of access has fostered the political influence of these actors also in terms of policy impact, allowing them to intervene more directly in the shaping and execution of municipal projects and policies.

As for the dimension of institutional attitudes, Bolognese self-managed experiences have been recognized to different extents by institutional politics. Overall, throughout the decade the orientations of the administrative majority have shifted to more favorable attitudes towards social centers, and the contribution of collective actors to the life of the city has been more explicitly acknowledged. Institutional actors have generally attributed value to self-management and bottom-up welfare and solidarity initiatives. DSAs, in this respect, have played a role in mitigating the attitudes of elected officials more opposed to social centers. Still, the debate has been highly polarized and has known a divarication between accepted and unaccepted experiences. On the side of institutional actors, ideology appears relevant in shaping attitudes towards social centers, as progressives typically exhibit more favorable dispositions. However, both on the right and on the left, personal ideological orientations and political culture overtake the weight of partisanship, explaining much of the differences in stances among members of the same party or Council grouping. This is especially the case within the Democratic Party, among whose elected officials two opposing political cultures can be found: one strongly informed by frames of legality and usefulness; the other, more focused on the social value of self-managed experiences and closer to the stances of the radical left. Similarly, gathered statements and interviews with M5S elected officials yield a highly diversified approach towards social centers, more so based on individual values. Personal backgrounds and experiences with activism are also significant in determining the extent to which politicians are willing to engage with collective actors, and to recognize them as legitimate interlocutors. The local institutional elite – across the political spectrum – tends to know and debate only specific experiences, while neglecting (or ignoring) less divisive or visible ones. The less debated ones are often considered as lowly influential, and conflict was mentioned by both radical left and right-wing interviewees as a pivotal viaticum of influence. At the same time, protest and disruptive actions emerge as factors that negatively affect elected officials' attitudes. However, it is not so much the actual engagement of social centers in protest actions that inhibits institutional acceptance, but the extent of that engagement that is reported to elected officials – that is, mainly through media. As media coverage has privileged more 'salient', polarizing social centers over others, and credited contention to those spaces in particular, many elected officials have formed the perception of some experiences as less contentious, regardless of the fact that all Bolognese social centers may have taken part in the same demonstration or disruptive action together. In general, perhaps also due to the relatively limited number of social centers in the city, institutional attitudes are highly differentiated by specific space, particularly among more critical politicians.

Overall, the elements that mark the shaping of institutional attitudes towards social centers are transversal to both social centers' characteristics and elected officials' multi-layered identities and belongings. The discursive categories recalled during interviews by

elected officials from the past two legislatures (*Table 5.11*), pinpoint some of the most relevant aspects.

Table 5.11 Coding the main discursive categories in institutional attitudes' configurations, Bologna.

usefulness	social actions	polity boundaries
useful	beneficiaries	rule*
commendable	replac* / complement*	respect
fruitful	public service	legal/legality
participation	courses	civil coexistence / neighborly
awareness	sports	relationships
provid* services	farmers market*	territory
offer	integration	residents
		antagonis* / disrupt*
		degradation

Source: review of responses to open-ended questions asking institutional interviewees to describe social centers in Bologna, and inductive categorization after automated content analysis.

The first relates to the perceived "usefulness" of self-managed spaces, in terms of what they offer to the citizenry, particularly through cultural initiatives, participation and aggregation. Linked to DSAs, here, is the idea of social centers as providing services to the city, a notion which is often framed in moral terms as commendable, deserving and useful. Second, are the social actions practiced by spaces: in this respect, elected officials mentioned specific courses, sports activities, farmers' markets. Regardless of the party or political affiliation of interviewees, this was typically framed as a provision of services to categories of beneficiaries, complementing public service and/or non-political civil society initiatives. Such a widespread resort to the idea of services and usefulness could lead to view institutional attitudes as permeated by a neoliberal and commercial logic. However, while this may be the case in part, this phenomenon deserves to be contextualized within a wider perspective, taking into account the weight of free welfare services provision in the local political culture. The environment of Bologna, despite the crisis, has not been marked by a condition of high, lasting socioeconomic need. However, the culture of welfare and service provision for citizens is traditionally pervasive, and relates to an extremely rich and lively fabric of volunteer associations, engaged in grassroots social and solidarity work. What is more, the juncture of the crisis has made socioeconomic issues more visible and politically high-priority.

In this sense, it is not surprising to find that DSA works as a distinguishing element for the recognition and leverage of self-managed social centers, even for elected officials that are generally critical of these actors. In fact, as recalled in the sections discussing single social center experiences, DSAs in their transversal "morally compelling" forms (education and sports activities, courses, desks, initiatives aimed at integration) were always mentioned and, at times, downsized discursively by more critical interviewees, as if these aspects were the most difficult ones to counter on a political level. In this respect, DSAs have played a significant part of the shifting institutional attitudes towards social centers in the city, and of some in particular, as the recognition of social activism, in its most "service-like" forms (support desks, solidarity and relief initiatives, courses…), was often unavoidable. However, this was not the case for all DSAs: housing occupations, for one, fall into a much more contested territory, which relates to overarching frameworks of legality and coexistence within the polity.

In fact, the third category mobilized in Bologna's elected officials' attitudes configuration, relates to the boundaries of the local polity. Attitudes appear largely linked to the capacity of collective actors to establish positive relationships with the urban territory, to coexist with the residents of their neighborhoods, and overall to show their standing as an integral part of the polity – which, for a large portion of elected officials, entails abiding by the polity's rules. In this respect, the forms of action deployed by social centers are filtered through an additional lens, which relates to notions of legality and "civility". As a result, the integration of social centers within their territorial environments, by means of responding to social needs and engaging with local communities, positively affects the recognition of these experiences as legitimate. Conversely, disruption is viewed in strongly negative terms by many elected officials, as are most practices that the same politicians perceive as highly contentious, in that they overstep the legitimate boundaries of social life in a political community. In this sense, the line that separates a political value judgment against social centers from their cognitive rejection as legitimate interlocutors, lies in the extent to which institutional actors deem that the forms of collective action practiced by a given space violate the rules of the polity.

Chapter 6. Pathways of Political Influence in Naples

This second empirical chapter focuses on the pathways of political influence of social centers in Naples. First, the [introductory section](#) problematizes the socioeconomic configuration of Naples, marked by a set of endemic issues, and its representation as a 'city in crisis'. This section provides an overview of the history of CSAs, in the evolution of the rich tissue of Neapolitan social centers within the city's complex urbanity, and of the features of local institutional politics. If pre-crisis administrations had maintained a generally dialoguing approach, the crisis decade has marked a significant turn of proximity in the relationship between social centers and institutions.

Sections 6.2 to 6.6 of the chapter retrace the trajectories of political influence of five collective actors: respectively, the Ex Opg, Villa Medusa, Insurgencia, L'Asilo and Officina99. Each section discusses the sequences of interlocking mechanisms and sub-mechanisms of the actor's pathway, as well as the forms and extents of its political influence.

In a city where collective action is traditionally strong, the crisis decade has represented a particularly lively phase. Several spaces and subjectivities were born with, and as a consequence of, the crisis; some CSAs have chosen to enter the path of electoral representation, at a local and/or national level; others have purposefully rejected institutional interlocutions. Furthermore, during this time, Naples' social centers have experimented significantly with DSA, often mobilized under the label of mutualism. Naples' social centers have been able to impact policy, in areas ranging from social and work-related provisions to the establishment of a regulatory framework on urban common; they have obtained increased procedural access to varying extents (through fostered political interlocutions, institutional presence, new administrative tools); their action has been met at an institutional level by a general acceptance of their participation in the polity.

[Section 6.7](#) draws some considerations on the city case as a whole and on its relationship to the thesis' research questions. The trajectories retraced in the chapter paint a diverse picture of CSAs across the decade, from lowly to highly influential actors. They show that different courses have led social centers to political influence in Naples during the decade: from the participation in the city government, to a pervasive investment in DSA, to a focused struggle around commons. Still, the pathways of highly influential actors share a set of core mechanisms: all of them have bridged their social environment, intercepted the local competition for power, and/or institutionalized.

6.1 The urban environment of Naples
6.1.1 A city in crisis?

Naples is a large regional capital in the South of Italy, and the third Italian municipality by population, counting over 940 thousand inhabitants. The Municipality lies at the core of the broader administrative unit that is the Metropolitan City of Naples (until 2014, the Province of Naples), comprised of 92 towns. The government architecture of the city of Naples itself, includes a central power structure (the *Comune* or Municipality) and ten decentralized units or districts, in Italian *Municipalità*, established in 2006 by mergers of the former 21 districts of the city (Mazzeo 2009). Although the local districts retain limited

administrative functions, in addition to elected councilors they are endowed with specific executive cabinets, appointed by the presidents of each *Municipalità.*

Endemic problems of the city, including elevated urban density, high degrees of social marginalization, unemployment, institutional inefficiency and corruption, black economy and the diffusion of organized crime, have dominated Naples' external representation for decades.

Undoubtedly, Naples presents a unique urbanity and some structural socio-economic issues. Its most severe challenges have to do with social, economic and political exclusion. Since the end of the 1990s, as several other cities in Italy, Naples has known a process of expansion of inequalities and increasing social inhomogeneity. Already twenty years ago, Serena Vicari (2001) identified, as the main factor of social exclusion in Naples, the staggering unemployment rate of the city, determined by deindustrialization and the insufficient development of a modern tertiary sector, and tightly linked to other socio-economic challenges, such as a vast shadow economy and an often discriminatory and clientelist access to welfare provisions.

In time, several scholars have shown how a strong presence of organized crime, and widespread illegality, act as severely depressing factors for local economic development. Compared to the mafia of the 1990s, contemporary Italian criminal organizations have increasingly invested in legal economic activities (including many in the North of Italy), while simultaneously profiting from growingly profitable illegal businesses, such as the disposal of dangerous waste. Research works conducted on the role of organized crime during the crisis, has highlighted how mafia organizations have offered usury as an alternative source of credit and social insurance at a time of credit crunch, while raising consensus, making profit and laundering money (Lavorgna and Sergi 2014; Le Moglie & Sorrenti 2020). Paradoxically, in this respect the presence of organized crime – unaffected by the cash flows reduction – inside legitimate economic activities, has acted as an economic stabilizer in the very short run (Le Moglie & Sorrenti 2020). At the same time, it has kept depressing economic growth in areas where the necessity of alternative sources of credit and insurance for individuals and businesses was greater. In addition, the presence of organized crime has entailed serious implications in the functioning of local administrative institutions. This has been especially true in the South of Italy, and in the province of Naples, where institutional bodies have been dissolved due to mafia infiltrations in several municipalities, over fifty times from the 1990s up to 2020.

In addition to work-related factors of social marginalization, Vicari's (2001) work also mentions spatially induced and culturally induced forms of exclusion. As for the spatial dimension, it should be underlined that the expansion of inequalities and the increasing social heterogeneity have affected not only the social composition of the city, but also the disposition and organization of the urban social fabric (Municipality of Naples 2016)[103]. Research has talked about the urbanization of Naples as a case of urban anomy, exhibiting multiple imbalances, both in the inner city and in the more peripheral areas. The decade-long power of construction entrepreneurs in the city, and their clientelist relationships with local politicians, have ensured a lacking supervision over subcontracting and exploitation, as well as on the quality of urban developments, and the dominion of a group of well-connected businesses in a closed market (Vicari 2001). Some scholars have come to classify Naples as a 'city in crisis', highlighting the degradation of its inner city, the dispersed and disordered nature of its suburbs, and the emergence of scattered urbanization nodes – such as malls in

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[103] Municipality of Naples (2016) *Strategia di Sviluppo Urbano Sostenibile della Città di Napoli,* available at: https://osservatorio.urbanit.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/All._3_Strategia_di_sviluppo_urbano_sostenibile.pdf.

deserted peripheral areas – unable to exert a positive impact on local-scale development (De Rosa and Salvati 2016).

One noteworthy feature, which directly impacts its social and administrative challenges, is Naples' population density. While the territorial surface of the city is not extraordinarily vast (117,27 squared kilometers), Naples accounts for the highest population density among Italian municipalities. The disparity between the average population density of Naples over the last years and national density levels, amounts to around eight thousand inhabitants per sq. kilometer, against a national average of 190 inhabitants per sq. kilometer. Naples' population is also structurally younger than the national average, while at the same time, the city has been historically known for its high migration rates.

Economic indicators have traditionally presented more critical levels compared to other Italian cities. In the early 2000s, Naples' unemployment rates were as high as three to four times the rates of Northern cities such as Milan or Bologna. The quality of public services has also been traditionally lacking compared to the rest of the country, particularly Northern regions. Concerning the spatial configuration of inequalities across the urban territory, the report (2012) compiled by the Municipality of Naples along with the Italian National Institute of Statistics, the Regional Healthcare Agency and the Ministry of Justice, shows that the areas most concerned by socioeconomic and housing issues are the Eastern part of the city (corresponding to the 6th *Municipalità*, or administrative district), the North (Secondigliano, Scampia, Miano and Piscinola) and North-West (9th *Municipalità*), but also, increasingly, the historical city center, in the neighborhoods of San Giuseppe, Montecalvario, Pendino, Mercato, San Lorenzo and Avvocata. In these areas, education levels are critically lower than the average of the city, and housing situations are significantly more dire: the percentage of rented homes in underprivileged neighborhoods is more than double compared to the one of wealthier areas, and good structural housing conditions are inversely correlated with rented homes. In addition to its other effects, the crisis has also impacted the ability of individuals to cater to property maintenance.

In such a context, the crisis has acted as an intensifying factor for pre-existing issues, such as social exclusion and urban degradation. The global crisis began at the end of the political era of Antonio Bassolino[104], following two decades of left-wing administrations of the city of Naples and the Campania Region. In retrospect, the outcomes of that governing action have been widely criticized, both at a political level and by intellectuals and civil society commentators, lamenting the inability of ruling classes to bring about processes of social and economic development (for a critical account, see Ragone 2009).

Since the 1980s, Naples has experienced a phase of de-industrialization and transitioned to a post-industrial city. However, the growth of third sector activities, with the exception of tourism, has been slow. Attempts at relaunching the city's development through investments on large events – such as the America's Cup World Race in 2003, or the International Forum of Cultures of 2013 – were also rather unsuccessful (Marra 2017). Then, the crisis began, heavily affecting the economy of the city and, as a consequence, its social situation and composition. Data on welfare indicators for the early post-crisis period, show rising levels of social malaise, particularly in reference to unemployment, which has come to affect the city as a whole in a much more transversal manner than in the past (Municipality of Naples,

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[104] Antonio Bassolino was mayor of Naples from 1993 to 2000, and President of the Campania Region from 2000 to 2010. In addition to a long-lasting popular consensus, his administrations enjoyed a large support from the media, the cultural and knowledge sector and elite, as well as the local bourgeoisie.

2012[105]). Between 2008 and 2011, 85.000 jobs were lost. Data from 2012 captured an increase of +12,5% in unemployed youth (making for a total percentage of 43,2%), an average unemployment rate of 15,05% and a female unemployment rate between – 40,3% for the youth and 51,8% for adults –, in addition to 27.000 people receiving unemployment benefits (Municipality of Naples 2016). From the growing number of businesses defaulting and in crisis, and the increasing rates of unemployment (particularly among women and youth), have derived the necessity of many to leave the city and migrate, and a further expansion of black economy (with a subsequent increase of exploitation forms).

While social demand was already strong before the crisis, since 2011 the local welfare system has been confronted with cuts to social expenditure and austerity measures, which have restricted the access, availability and quality of essential social and health services. In fact, due to its skyrocketing debt and budget deficit, the Municipality of Naples has had to undergo a procedure of financial recovery, through a multi-year rebalancing plan. Of course, the financial situation of the municipal institution has had serious implications on investments and the provision of services. As well explained by Marra (2017), until 2011, the civil society associations providing welfare services in Naples acted as creditors for the Municipality's delayed payments, going into temporary debts with banks and guaranteeing the continuity of social initiatives across the territory. This cycle was broken when the administration adhered to the fiscal adjustment procedure, resulting in the impossibility for many associations to continue providing services and bringing a growing uncertainty over the ability of the public actor to sustain local welfare.

In environmental terms, the Campania region, and Naples in particular, have experienced several challenges in recent times. Over the last decades, the Northern and Southern areas of the province of Naples have undergone serious environmental and urbanization issues, and the crisis has accentuated challenges such as unregulated and illegal urbanization, environmental degradation and neglect (Marra 2017). Among the most pressing issues, is certainly waste management, an established problem that became especially known during its most acute crisis phase, between 2008 and 2010, as news reports in Italy and abroad showed images of garbage invading the streets. However, due to lacking infrastructures and to speculation, the costs of waste management per capita in Naples have remained significantly higher than the national average (see Marra 2017). Over the years, protests against landfills and incinerators, and against the disposal of dangerous waste, have mobilized the residents of Naples' peripheries time and time again, in several local struggles for health and environmental rights. A second issue relates to pollution and the decontamination of industrial and former industrial sites, particularly in the Eastern and coastline areas of the city. While several sites have made the object of national decontamination plans, the processes of regeneration of these areas (such as Bagnoli-Coroglio) have been slow, and often inadequate or lacking. The crisis and austerity measures, with the collapse of public and private investments, have been expectedly detrimental to environmental protection and territorial regeneration, opening new leeway for speculation and illegal activities.

However, Naples has also suffered from a chronic form of intergenerational poverty, only partially affected by the global crisis. Poverty particularly affects numerous and complex family units (both widely present across the urban territory), much as in other Southern cities, but with a much higher territorial concentration (Municipality of Naples 2016). Inequalities

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[105] Municipality of Naples, Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), Regional Healthcare Agency Napoli 1 – General Direction for Social Services, Ministry of Justice – Department of Penitentiary Administration (2012) Profilo di Comunità della Città di Napoli 2010-2012.

are also highly intersectional in their dimensions. Socio-economic hardship is often associated with issues of addiction, periods of detention, or disability, and exposes families and individuals to multiple factors of social exclusion, including education, regular and legitimate work, housing rights. Indeed, a high correlation exists between poverty and school drop-out rates, and in the territory of Naples the percentage of NEET youth (not in education, employment or training) is currently around 23%, with peaks of 30% in some neighborhoods. In addition, situations of unemployment and poverty place many out of the system of regular work and restricts access to opportunities. A similar issue involves the elderly, highly exposed to risks of poverty and marginalization (Municipality of Naples 2012). Where the crisis has played a role, is in intensifying these divides, and extending them to new categories of individuals, such as the migrant population, increasingly concentrated in the difficult areas of the city.

Tightly linked to this last aspect, and embedded in the urban question, is the critical relationship between social justice and democracy. The aura of prejudice that typically surrounds the city of Naples, is not merely the byproduct of its material socio-economic conditions, but the result of a long perpetuated, negatively connoted narrative of the city. The history of Naples, marked by centuries of foreign dominations and oppression, and by widespread governmental corruption, has been used to explain the low levels of trust in politics and institutions of Naples' inhabitants (and often, Southern Italians in general). Indeed, Naples' popular culture is often described as endowed, at its core, with strong elements of spontaneity, adaptability and resilience (De Rosa and Salvati 2016) – shaped, among other factors, by a structural socio-economic and administrative uncertainty. However, these sorts of discussions have also often been accompanied by moral narrations of Naples (Marra 2017), portraying a territory torn between a developed and educated elite and the rest of the uneducated, marginalized citizens, associated with sluggishness and a mentality of dependence. In turn, such narratives have been used an alibi to condone the inertia of ruling classes, and the conservation of crystallized structures of power. At the same time, situations of material and social deprivation and inequality, translate into political exclusion and, thereby, severely restrict the possibility, for individuals experiencing social injustice, to gain representation and participate in change (on this subject, insightful contributions are found in Marra 2017 and Secchi 2013).

Recent years have seen the emergence, in Naples, of a lively grassroots entrepreneurship and social innovation initiatives. However, such a complex urban environment necessitates a general, structured strategy. De Rosa and Salvati (2016) have notably argued that, from within the context of the Great Recession, Naples could appropriate an alternative strategy from the urban models traditionally imposed by European examples, restructuring its urban morphology while also valuing of its specificities – such as informality, adaptation and unique territorial configurations.

6.1.2 Representative politics and self-managed spaces in Naples

Social centers first emerged in Naples at the end of the 1970s. Concentrating first in peripheral and semi-peripheral areas, the phenomenon then spread to the historical center, in popular neighborhoods marked by a significant presence of abandoned spaces and by high social malaise. Among the first occupations was that, in 1977, of the social center Jessica, in the Vomero neighborhood, a quite well-off area outside of the city center. The occupation, carried out by a group of activists linked to the local Autonomous collectives, did not last long, but represented in a sense a forerunner for the social centers' squatting movement in Naples, manifesting the necessity of creating spaces of aggregation, particularly for young

people (Cavaliere 2013). Another short-lived yet significant experience was that of Eta Beta, a CSA born in 1986, from the squatting of a building in the peripheral area of Soccavo. The space, occupied by a composite group of activists from the Neapolitan Communist Collective, the unemployed mobilizations, anarchists and students, was evicted after six months. High levels of involvement and participation were attained with the CSA Tien'a ment', active from 1989 to 1996, born from the occupation and refurbishment of a large structure in via Arno, in Soccavo, by a group of collectives (Cavaliere 2013). At the time, the social centers' movement was gaining momentum on a national level, as well as increasing attention in the media (particularly with the reoccupation of the Leoncavallo, in Milan).

In 1991, was born one of the most significant experiences of the Neapolitan and Italian season of 'classical' social centers – that is, Officina99. For two decades now, this CSA has been active in the peripheral neighborhood of Gianturco. During the mobilizations and struggles of the 1990s and 2000s, Officina99 was the connecting node of the region's movement actors, largely shaping the imagery of Naples and more generally of a political era of collective action, also through the artistic and musical experiences that developed within the space (such as renowned music band *99Posse*).

The galaxy of Naples' self-managed experiences from the 1980s to present is vast and uneasy to map. It probably suffices to say that even the national mapping conducted in 2019 by the Ministry of Interior (led, at the time, by Lega's secretary general Matteo Salvini), only identified seven social centers in Naples. As far as social sciences go, due to its complex and, even more importantly, mutable configuration, the landscape of Neapolitan social centers has been mostly addressed by academic literature by single case studies, or proceeding by small groups of experiences. Dines (1999, 2012) has notably focused on three key spaces of Naples' social centers' landscape during the 1990s, namely the DAMM, L.O.Ska, and Officina 99. More recently, research, particularly in urban studies, has focused on the role of self-managed experiences for cultural and urban regeneration, social innovation and inclusion. Pascale Froment (2016), for one, has explored the role of informal communities in creating new places of culture in Naples' city center, and their ability to convey political meanings through informal cultural action. In this respect, Froment discusses the presence in Naples of a political informality that unfolds through contested and imagined cultural spaces. In a successive work (2018), Froment has focused more specifically on the occupied spaces recently recognized as 'common goods', dissecting their role as actors of a spatialized social innovation. Indeed, the Neapolitan 'laboratory' on the regulation of commons has attracted increasing attention over the past few years (see further Micciarelli 2014, 2017). Finally, literature has started to investigate Neapolitan collective actors as agents of self-organized mutualistic practices (Greco 2017) and direct social actions (Bosi and Zamponi 2019).

Today, political self-managed spaces are quite numerous in Naples, although many of them do not self-identify as social centers anymore. Instead, several identify as "Case del Popolo" (People's Houses), or, in a broader definition that has become fairly popular and stresses above all else the urbanity value of these experiences, as 'freed' spaces.

In a work published in 2013, Riccardo Cavaliere mapped about ten social centers in the city, several of which located in central neighborhoods. Among them, were: Officina99, C.S. Coordinamento di Lotta per il Lavoro, Banchi Nuovi, Spazio Occupato Zero81, L.O.Ska, the Mensa Occupata, the DAMM[106] (Diego Armando Maradona) social center in

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[106] The experience of the DAMM has been characterized by a less political connotation compared to other coeval experiences. Well rooted in its neighborhood, the DAMM has been engaging in mutualistic practices since the mid 1990s, and has entered into an agreement of *comodato d'uso* with the Municipality, just after Officina99. Dines (2012) has notably highlighted the role

Montesanto, Insurgencia, Terra Terra, Bancarotta, the Ex Asilo Filangieri Occupato. In 2017, Vittoria and Napolitano have sought to peruse the landscape of Naples' social centers construed as informal communities, engaging in cultural activities comparable to the twelve priorities defined by the European Urban Agenda. The main criterion for the identification of these experiences being the initial factual occupation of an abandoned building, the authors mapped 25 active spaces across the 1981-2016 timespan (in addition to seven housing squats). In a more recent work, Napolitano et al. (2020) have compiled another thorough mapping of the self-organized spaces in Naples engaged in different forms of cultural production, though here too embracing a broader definition of the actors investigated, also including non-political and associational experiences. The spaces identified by Cavaliere in his geographical recognition are for the most part currently active. Since that mapping, however, eight spaces, in both central and peripheral areas, have been formally recognized as common goods: the Asilo Filangieri in the neighborhood of San Gregorio Armeno, Villa Medusa in Bagnoli, the former 'Lido Pola' also in Bagnoli, the Ex-Opg in Materdei, the 'Giardino Liberato' also in Materdei (the former Convent of the Teresian order), the former Conservatory of Santa Fede Liberata (in the neighborhood of San Giuseppe), the Scugnizzo Liberato (within the abbey complex of San Francesco delle Cappuccinelle, in Montesanto)[107], and the fomer 'Schipa' school in Materdei.

Among other active spaces, not included in the municipal provision on common goods, are also Mezzocannone Occupato (in the former canteen of the University of Naples Federico II); the artistic and cultural production space *GalleRi Art*, located within the Gallery 'Principe di Napoli' in the city center; CAP 80126 - Centro Autogestito Piperno (located in the peripheral Soccavo area); the still active historical spaces such as Officina99; and the social center Insurgencia, born in 2004 from the homonymous political collective that has taken active part in mayor Luigi De Magistris' administration and occupied a series of prominent political roles in recent years.

The institutional political environment of Naples has not been marked by the same stability of the Bolognese context. Nonetheless, the city has known a prevalence of left-wing administrations throughout its history. From the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, specifically between 1984 and 1993, Naples was governed by left-wing parties, and, after a brief right-wing mandate in 1993, again by the left up until 2001. Occupations were more frequent during the 1980s, and progressively decreased. Elected in 1993, mayor Antonio Bassolino made it a priority to take a stance in contrast to the approach of other city administrations across Italy, who bluntly challenged the right of social centers to exist and capitalized the threat of evictions for political gain[108]. Bassolino therefore stated that youth had a right to spaces, and that institutional politics was in charge of making sure that those spaces be integrated into the city environment. The 2000s, then, saw, under the centrist Iervolino administration (which governed Naples from 2001 to 2011), the legalization of prominent experiences such as Officina99 (for which the administration actually bought the occupied building from its private owner) and DAMM. Municipal politics in Naples was then shaken by the election as mayor of nationally renowned prosecutor, Luigi De Magistris. Through his charismatic, often controversial and strong-willed leadership, De Magistris has been the apical figure of the city's institutional politics of the last two mandates, way beyond the

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of DAMM in the redefinition of urban space in the popular city center of Naples, and in impacting urban planning strategies during the Bassolino administration at the end of the 1990s.

[107] Reopened and repurposed through the action of the network of collectives "Scacco Matto".

[108] It should be noted here that, in his political path within the Italian Communist Party, Bassolino had been part of the internal area led by Pietro Ingrao, the 'Igraian left' of the party, the closest to leftist social movements. Thus, his openness towards youth mobilizations also stemmed from this political proximity.

conventional appellation of 'first citizen'. Involved in several highly mediatized trials across the 2000s, De Magistris won with the support of a small coalition comprised of minor parties (notably, Italia dei Valori[109], Federazione della Sinistra, and Partito del Sud[110]) and a civic list called 'Naples is yours' ('Napoli è tua'). Coming in second during the first round of municipal elections (defeating the Democratic Party's candidate) behind the right-wing candidate Lettieri, De Magistris won the second round with 65,37% of votes, after having rejected the possibility of formal support on the part of the Democratic Party. Certainly, 2011 was already a time, in the national landscape, dominated by discontent and by the progressive leaning of portions of the electorate towards protest voting[111]. What is more, locally, citizens were increasingly disappointed with the sclerotized and clientelist situation of mainstream party politics in Naples. However, the affirmation of De Magistris was an unexpected turn. Despite the centrality of legality as a frame of his 2011 campaign, De Magistris did not adopt a securitarian or repressive approach with respect to occupied spaces. On the contrary, he consolidated relationships with grassroots mobilizations and local collective actors (already leading to the 2011 election, but increasingly throughout the first mandate), and took progressive interest in the self-managed experiences active in the city. A significant contribution to the shift in the mayor's political platform and alliances also came from the judicial proceedings that involved Luigi De Magistris himself. In fact, in 2014, De Magistris was temporarily suspended from office according to the Severino law, which provides for the automatic suspension from public office for anyone convicted of offences against the public administration (including when the criminal conviction has not yet become final). The legal battle that quickly led to De Magistris' reinstatement translated, politically, in the severing of the mayor's ties to the political area of Italia dei Valori, centered on anti-corruption and judicial populism, and a consolidation of a new alliance of civic and political actors. Come the 2016 election, De Magistris had formed a political force, DemA, which included important pieces of the local social centers and movement landscape. During his time in office, eight occupied spaces have been legalized through their recognition as common goods and their entrusting to the managing assemblies of inhabitants.

These relationships, however, have not always been smooth. The first cracks started to emerge already in 2017, early into the second mandate, as Naples' collective actors took steps to mark their (critical) autonomy from De Magistris. The movement actors of the city had started to build a network reconnecting their experiences, especially after the fractures caused by the choice of Insurgencia to support De Magistris' first run. This recomposition was attempted starting in 2015 with the platform 'Massa Critica', aimed at constructing a shared political program centered around the question of common goods, and later with the network Mutual Aid Naples, linking the various social desks, healthcare and solidarity initiatives, work and housing struggles. Then, in September 2017, the experience of NDO (Napoli Direzione Opposta) was born, bringing together the collectives Iskra and Bancarotta 2.0 and the movements from the area of Bagnoli (with the spaces Lido Pola and Villa

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[109] Italia dei Valori was founded in 1998 by Antonio Di Pietro, former prosecutor of the *Mani Pulite* political corruption trials of the early 1990s. De Magistris had been elected to the European Parliament in the party list of Italia dei Valori in 2009, gathering an overwhelming electoral consensus.

[110] Italia dei Valori obtained 8,13% of votes, and the Federazione della Sinistra (the Federation of the Left, grouping different movements and parties of the left, most notably Rifondazione Comunista) obtained 3,66% of votes, while the Partito del Sud 0,32%. The civic list 'Napoli è tua' obtained 4,61% of votes.

[111] In time, the center-left has remained more steadily strong in the Eastern periphery of the city and in the areas with a prevalence of middle-class, white-collar residents (such as Arenella and Vomero). The center-right, conversely, has kept a high consensus in the Northern peripheries, the historical city center, and the bourgeois neighborhoods of Chiaia and Posillipo. Luigi De Magistris has collected significant consensus in middle-class and more well-educated neighborhoods (see Istituto Cattaneo 2021).

Medusa), the Soccavo Collective, the collective Scacco Matto with space Zero81, the housing struggles experience of Magnammece 'O pesone, and the Scugnizzo Liberato space. NDO was formed with the aim to be a stinging interlocutor for institutional politics, on issues such as the right to housing, mutualism, the countering of unemployment, against the culture of austerity, financial and real estate speculation, inequality and discriminations. This federation of collective actors was read by many commentators as the preparation for a social centers' party. Soon, NDO engaged in a dialogue with movement actors, such as the Ex Opg, who cultivated more national ambitions (the Opg, specifically, has since then constituted its national political party, *Potere al Popolo*, or 'Power to the People', formed in 2018). Almost simultaneously, the other branch of the movement landscape, that of Insurgencia, by then an integral part of De Magistris' movement DemA, and holding a series of prominent institutional positions, launched its own initiative, called *Partenope ribelle*, encompassing citizens' committees, activists, grassroots experiences and elected officials. Both platforms, however, have been halted by the political developments of the following years. Fractures had emerged between local movement areas, particularly between some of the largest actors. The relationship between Insurgencia and De Magistris kept deteriorating and reached the point of separation in the spring of 2021, as De Magistris (who, after two mandates, could no longer run as mayor) announced his choice for succession, indicating Alessandra Clemente, member of his executive cabinet, as the candidate for the upcoming election. At the same time, over the last two years of De Magistris' mandate, a majority of movement actors in the city disavowed the mayor's action. Some, especially the Ex Opg, attempted nonetheless to recompose a relationship with DemA and took part in the municipal election of October 2021, backing Alessandra Clemente (Potere al Popolo, in particular, ran with its own list within the coalition supporting Clemente). Insurgencia, conversely, did not participate in the election, while other former members of DemA decided to back center-left candidate Gaetano Manfredi. Clemente obtained 5,6% of votes, and Manfredi, supported by a vast coalition, was elected with 62,9% of votes.

Overall, Neapolitan CSAs have not had to contend with particularly hostile administrations, and have not been confronted, at least in the last three decades, with harsh repression phases. Contrary to the Bolognese experience of '77, we cannot talk about a cleavage between institutional and movement left for Naples. In that, the dominant political culture, throughout Naples' administrative history, has been marked by a substantial proximity, and overall continuity, between the different realms of the left. Since the crisis, then, the interplay between social centers, institutions and the broader city has produced new opportunities for change. A relevant role was played, in these respects, by the features of the local environment. These include the city's extension, heterogeneity and complexity of management, and the presence of numerous unutilized or abandoned spaces, as well as a continued and more pressing need for social actions (due to the socioeconomic configuration of the city) and for places of aggregation (due to its urban configuration). The role of grassroots experiences of urban regeneration and social activism in Naples is more widely recognized, also in its potential to build culture and inclusion.

6.2 Ex Opg – Je so' Pazzo

The Ex Opg (which stands for former criminal hospital) – Je so' Pazzo ("I am crazy"), was born in 2015 from a conglomerate of youth collectives, in the central neighborhood of Materdei. Marked by a strong Marxist-Leninist approach, the Opg has placed DSAs (and, particularly, contentious mutualism) at the core of its political struggle and identity. The space

is managed by a numerous group of militants, organized in a political assembly (as well as in several project-specific sub-assemblies).

The Opg's trajectory (*Table 6.1*) started with a bridging dynamic, as the space unlocked its physical and social perimeter, operated a deep territorialization of collective action and engaged with a large network of political and civil society actors. This effort, and the key focus on mutualism, have resulted in a legitimization of the experience, determined by a strong identity work, and by means of growing public support and certification, all of which have revolved around the leveraging of Direct Social Actions. Lastly, the city political system has known a dynamic of disruption in its competition for power. As a partial convergence was found between the goals of the space and those of the De Magistris administration, the Opg has mobilized its representation potential and has seized a political space within the city movement arena and radical left, through a unique method for gathering and organizing grievances (combining inquiry work, public pressure and institutional cooperation).

Of all this has allowed the Ex Opg Je so' Pazzo to produce significant policy outcomes even from outside institutions (though the space has, later, chosen to pursue electoral representation at a national level), significant access to decision-making, and the contested recognition of local institutional actors.

Table 6.1 Pathway of the Ex Opg: mechanisms, sub-mechanisms and dimensions of political influence.

Collective Actor	Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms			Political Influence
Ex OPG - Je so' Pazzo	**Bridging** Perimeter unlocking; Territorialization; Network.	**Legitimization** Contentious branding; Public support; Certification through Itemizing.	**Disruption of power competition** Representation; Convergence; Seizure of political space.	Attitudes, Procedural, Policy

Bridging

On 2 March 2015, the former criminal asylum of via Imbriani 128, located in the Materdei neighborhood in central Naples, and closed since 2008, was occupied. At the time, although the building was owned by the State Property Office and still entrusted to the Penitentiary Police, it had long been abandoned and was in dire conditions. The group of occupants, who then counted around forty structured militants, had been consolidating since 2007, and brought together three youth collectives: the 'Studenti Autorganizzati Campani' (a collective of high school students), the 'Collettivo Autorganizzato Universitario' (the autonomous collective of university students) and the 'Clash City Workers' collective[112], engaged in struggles around work rights and unemployment. The premises behind the birth of the experience of the Ex Opg are pivotal, to try and comprehend its evolutions and pathway of influence. For one, what is peculiar about this experience is that it was born from and within the crisis, following a thorough reflection, carried out by activists, on what the 2008-2011 cycle of mobilizations had represented, where it had failed, and what the way forward could be.

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[112] Naples' Clash City Workers experience being part of a wider network of workers' and unemployed collectives, active since 2009 in several cities across Italy, and mainly focused on counter-information and social inquiry on the conditions of workers and workplaces. These collectives have become part of the national party experiment of Potere al Popolo (Piazza 2018).

The analysis was this: between 2008 and 2011 there was a wave of mobilization around the world, in response to the crisis of capitalism. […] We, in Italy, have participated in these struggles, but we were all unable – for us, due to our young age and low organizational capacity, and our limited numbers – to structure a political response adapted to that historical phase. […] Thus, we were in a double impossibility: we, as movements, to structure ourselves and go beyond the mere idea of social conflict, and on the other side, the political representatives of the left, very discredited, could not think of themselves as anything other than 'the left of the center-left'. Instead, in the rest of Europe, experimentations developed not so much in force of an ideological model, a political positioning, but rather, of social practices adopted in response to concrete needs. […] From this analysis, stemmed our idea to occupy a place that would allow us to experiment this attempt.

(#I1SC6 activist, Ex Opg)

Thus, the response that activists envisioned for that political phase was, and that shaped the pathway of what would become the Ex Opg – Je so' Pazzo, was rooted in the idea that the course of action needed to be both political and social. That is to say, that collective actors needed to experiment new (or re-discovered) modes of channeling social conflict.

Constantly, throughout the history of socialism, of communism, the idea recurs, that at some point you need to take root. And you cannot do it just by showing a faraway horizon of transformation, but you need to show that that transformation is possible here and now. And so, we have tried to understand how we could bring into a context like this, in Naples, in the South of Italy, very similar in some ways to Spain and Greece, an analogous mode of intervention, that could be at the same time social – that is, responding to social needs –, but not mere assistentialism. In other words, that would not be limited to 'put a patch' on a collapsing system, but somehow tried to develop and rebuild a community.

(#I1SC6 activist, Ex Opg)

In this respect, the experience of the Ex Opg – in its different articulations – has grounded its political practice in a clear Marxist-Leninist ideological foundation, towards a shared and precise aim. The Opg has pursued the end goal of a radical – revolutionary – transformation of society, through the identification of means and strategies capable of reconstructing a social block, endowed with the class conscience and the organizational resources to bring forth the struggles of the proletariat of the 21th century. The 'toolbox', as activists themselves define it in their Manual of Mutualism (p. 15), was comprised of three main elements: the People's House (the Opg itself), social inquiry, and popular control. The latter two, were reclaimed from earlier struggles carried out by the same activists in their youth collectives days; while the former was that missing element of novelty that, activists deemed, the historical phase required, and went through the appropriation of the abandoned former criminal hospital.

Based on these premises, right after the occupation, activists started refurbishing the locales, and opened the space to the neighborhood. It was the setoff of a *Bridging* dynamic, which started through a radical *perimeter unlocking* effort, immediately and purposefully making the space's activities and participation opportunities accessible to the public of the neighborhood and the city at large. First of all, the space itself was opened and shown to those who wished to visit it, sparking the curiosity of many to whose imagery this vast structure had been long associated with fear and exclusion.

"We want to give it back to the city", they say, showing for the first time to the people of neighborhood the containment cells, but also gardens, courtyards, the theatre and the church inside the building. "Everything was scavenged, but we will restore these spaces".

(A.L. De Rosa, "Occupato l'ex opg di Napoli". *Repubblica Napoli,* 4 March 2015)

The underlying idea of the occupants was to reappropriate this space that had been, first, a site of suffering and marginalization, then, an object of neglect and desertion inside the urban environment, and to open its doors, replenish its rooms and angles of presence, meanings, actions and aspirations, to give it back to the city and transform it into a place where struggles and grievances are brought forth collectively, through inclusion and solidarity. In this respect, with the occupation of the Ex Opg, the previous subjectivities of the youth collectives embraced a new repertoire of action, and brought their struggles into a new, broader and richer framework. Even more, as it appropriated this physical space, embedded into the popular historical center of the city of Naples, the new experience did not seek to build a freed zone, a territorial enclave where to escape repression and contest social norms. Rather, being born out of the most severe economic crisis in decades, and following a season of mobilizations that had not been able to fully permeate the political fabric of the country, it emerged as an attempt to unlock the perimeter of movement sectarism, of the self-sufficiency pursued by conventional social centers, and to bathe in society. In the ideological framework of the Ex Opg, voicing grievances is not just a matter of witnessing hardship, or making social conflict manifest per se, but aims at building hegemony – in this sense, modes of action derive from meanings and goals, and are identified through a constant back-and-forth work, between the concrete features of the evolving social reality, and the ideal dimension. From this, and from the pressing nature of the issues characterizing the city's broader socioeconomic environment, has also derived a certain pragmatism of action. However, the situation of the space was especially complicated from a legal standpoint, as the building was still formally entrusted to the Penitentiary Police. As a consequence, immediately after the occupation, a complaint was filed and resulted in an attempt of eviction. The collective slept every night in the building to prevent it from being cleared out, and was compelled to directly start its activity inside the space. This resulted in DSAs being immediately practiced, simultaneously as a means for the defense of the space, and for its reappropriation by the local community, to whom it was finally opened.

> The fact that a complaint was filed, that the matter was in the hands of the penitentiary police, that the eviction could happen without even being cleared by the DIGOS[113] because the building was still formally a prison, made it so that we had to immediately start the activity. Even before the place was ready – bear in mind that when we entered it, it was completely destroyed. An interesting mix emerged there, between the material refurbishing of the place to make it accessible, and the first services already being offered. The soccer for the neighborhood kids to build community and take them off the streets, becomes a way to regenerate a space, because the same users would help us clean up or do masonry work or raise funds to fix something. This developed for more or less all activities, within a month most of the desks that exist today were operative (except for the medical desk, due to the sensitive nature of health questions, and the migrants' and refugees' movement, which would start a few months later). But the afterschool, the sports activities – the gym itself would come in a few months, but some open-air activities were possible since the beginning –, they were immediately operative.
> (#I1SC6 activist, Ex Opg)

A second sub-mechanism working closely with perimeter unlocking was the *territorialization* of the Opg's activity, revitalizing the territorial dimension of collective action through the development of ties of vicinity, reciprocal knowledge and solidarity within the local community, building a sense of collective belonging. The Opg's action thus stretched

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[113] The General Investigations and Special Operations Division (*Divisione Investigazioni Generali e Operazioni Speciali*), generally referred to by the acronym DIGOS, is an Italian law enforcement special operational division, charged with investigating threats to public security, as in sensitive cases involving terrorism, organized crime and specific serious offences such as kidnapping. The DIGOS embodies the political intelligence branch of the Italian police force, and acts as prevention police.

beyond the community of activists, to encompass a wider public across the neighborhood. Especially in earlier stages, this was made possible by the tackling of a series of small local questions, perceived as relevant problems by residents. In this respect, social action worked as a way of prefigurating societal transformations also at a highly localized level.

> We started to work on some micro-issues, which for the neighborhood were extraordinarily important. And this was also a product of our inquiry work. […] We found out about things that were small, but could change a person's life. For example, restoring the accessibility to a stairway, which the Municipality had abandoned and allowed to cut through the neighborhood. It was invaded by man-high plants and no one could use it, which meant walking for 5-6 more minutes instead – now, for a homemaker with grocery bags, that's a lot, especially if you do it twice a day. So, we decided to clean it, and we discovered that publishing the before and after picture of the stairway resulted in a great success. One could think, well, people are crazy, why does a demonstration against the Jobs Act[114] – which is a million times more important, you have to wake up at six, it takes a day out of your time an all – is considered as a useless thing, whereas cleaning a stairway, which in the end takes six people and half a day, is considered an amazing think, "you are wonderful, guys, you are incredible", comments like this were pouring in. […] And not by the bourgeoisie, also because being a popular neighborhood there were lots of street people saying "good job", so you can't think that the people you wish to intercept are animals that don't understand… you must think that maybe it is you who don't understand, what it is that speaks for them, inside that action. And in my opinion, what spoke was a narrative of victory. Sure, a small thing, because a stairway is nothing, and people know that – but for one thing is something I need, something that has been done, and that has showed me that by joining forces together it is possible to solve things.
> (#I1SC6 activist, Ex Opg)

For years, the space has kept a 'popular chamber of labor'[115] (*Camera Popolare del Lavoro*), a people's health clinic, a support desk directly linked to the struggle of the city's Migrant and Refugee Movement, as well as a variety of popular sports, afterschool activities, and art and creative workshops. For the experience of the Ex Opg, the choice of direct social actions constitutes a foundational element, certainly one that stems directly from the experience's approach to political activism in the post-crisis context, but also one that shapes the space's choices and rhythms. In this respect, it might prove insightful to briefly recount the story of my access to the field. On my very first day of interviews in Naples, I had three meetings scheduled with activists from the Ex-OPG Je so' Pazzo. By then, I had only conducted a few interviews in different spaces in Bologna, where everything had unfolded rather smoothly. I climbed up the stairway that leads to the entrance under a dazzling June sun, rang the bell, and met the first activist. On the way to the room where we would do the interview, they started showing me all of the different areas and rooms of the space, in order to better explain the organization of the Ex-OPG's various activities. In one of these rooms, the activist was stopped by a comrade in need of assistance. A young man, about 20 years old, was sitting close by, visibly shaken and confused, who needed help with a work issue. We stopped, and I waited across the room as they talked. Although they knew each other a little, their communication was complicated by the fact that he spoke almost no Italian at all, and that they couldn't seem to find a common language to interact properly. With a natural gesture, and a trust that surprised me, one of them turned to me and asked: "Is there any chance you speak French?". I nodded and sat with them. The guy started pouring out the challenges of

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[114] The job market reform package put forth by Matteo Renzi's government, highly contested.

[115] Broadly speaking, chambers of labor are structures aimed at the representation of workers' interests. In the Italian context, where the birth of the first chambers of labor dates back to the late 1800s, these are traditionally territorial union organizations aimed at advancing labor rights and improving working conditions. The popular chamber of labor set up within the Ex Opg independently maps and sustains workers' struggles and carries out inquiry work inside workplaces; activists run a legal desk on work matters within the chamber; a redundancy fund is in place to sustain the financial consequences of workers' struggles; education initiatives are organized on the forms of workers' exploitation and the legal tools available to counter them.

his situation. He was a migrant, who had landed on Italian shores a little more than one year earlier, and had worked irregularly in the fields in the outskirts of Naples up until that Spring. After a year, his employer had decided to regularize his position, but the exploitation had hardly ended, as the landowner kept paying him in cash at the end of each week and withheld a conspicuous portion of the daily salary that was due. I did my best to translate carefully, to grasp and render every nuance, and had to explain to him, with a bitter feeling, the delicate position that he found himself in as he sought to renew his stay permit. The colloquium went on for over two hours. I realized, as I stood up and stepped into the courtyard, that, even on a 'quiet' day like that (as it would be described later that evening), urgency to this space is not a more or less frequent occurrence, but rather a pace of political action. For many activists, life is rhythmed by the perpetual ring of the space's loud doorbell, marking the onset of a social issue that calls for a direct and concrete intervention. To them, these practices, however demanding, hold the core of their politics, and their politics unfolds largely through these practices. Granted, this does not prevent the Ex Opg, specifically, from conducting a thorough work of political elaboration, despite the fear of many activists – as expressed during interviews – that the inevitable focus on social actions may reduce the room for ideological and theoretical reflection. Yet, among the self-managed spaces considered in this research, the Ex Opg actually stands out as one of those where the most complex and sizeable political elaboration is produced, through large, frequent and long assemblies, as well as the publication of multiple materials (blog articles, pamphlets, reports).

A thorough and constantly re-discussed understanding of the role that these practices play in its political pathway, have also allowed the Ex Opg to adopt a pragmatic stance, aimed at pooling all the resources available to pursue collective goals by cooperating with other subjectivities – based on a common aim and common causes, rather than a shared partisan affiliation. In fact, the space's openness to a large public and its progressive establishment within the social environment of the neighborhood, contributed to and were accompanied by a *network* formation dynamic. The array of actors with whom the CSA cooperated was widened and consolidated, particularly around projects for which more extensive resources and capacities were needed. Hence, a network was progressively built of civil society and political partners. Among several examples, a particularly relevant one is found in the Popular Solidarity Network (*Rete di Solidarietà Popolare*), a joint project formed with a number of local socially engaged associations and grassroots Christian organizations. Starting with the cold emergency[116] in the winter of 2016-2017, the Ex Opg sheltered forty homeless people within its space. Through that experience, activists became ever more aware of the necessity to address the questions of homelessness and poverty in a more structured and direct manner. From that realization stemmed the effort to form a bridge with other actors around the common cause of solidarity. The Popular Solidarity Network is comprised of religious actors (such as the Sant'Egidio Community), associations of healthcare professionals and lawyers providing free assistance to the homeless, and organizations traditionally engaged in the distribution of food and basic items. In February 2018, the ensemble of experiences composing the Network occupied an abandoned baroque church of the 1700s belonging to the Redemptorist fathers, the church of Sant'Antonio in Tarsia, at the core of the Montesanto neighborhood. There, the Network has set up a shelter, distributes food and organizes clothing drives. But it has also opened a 'residence desk', to support homeless

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[116] "Cold emergency" refers to a situation of hardship caused by particularly low temperatures during the winter months, threatening the lives of those experiencing housing precarity, marginalization and homelessness within the city. While instances of cold emergency are cyclically addressed by local administrations through the deployment of dedicated social service plans, the cooperation of non-institutional actors (such as volunteer associations) is typically pivotal in reaching and supporting as many people in the streets as possible.

people in the process of applying for the so-called virtual residence. When I visited the occupied church in Tarsia, in the summer of 2019, sixteen people were hosted in the structure above the church (with a few additional emergency spots being set up for situations of necessity). As I walked across the space, gazing at the frescoes on the ceiling and going around old scaffolds – placed there during the earthquake of 1980 –, the activist who was showing me around explained the genesis of the initiative, hinting at how the choice of DSAs and of expanding the repertoire of action was at the root of the Ex Opg's impulse towards consolidating a wider and heterogenous coalition network.

> The Popular Solidarity Network project, entails tackling the question of homelessness and poverty in general, first of all by managing to join together all the associations that do this – because we saw that many addressed these issues, but in a highly fragmented manner – and then, following the style of the Opg, trying to move from the social and grievance level, to the political one. […] This way, you can bring together many people who wish to cooperate, and associations who already did great work, but simply charitable, very positive but from a strength perspective it wasn't able to channel wider grievances. Thus, a variety of things were aggregated inside the network, and many people involved in volunteer work could politicize.
> (#I5SC6 activist, Ex Opg)

In turn, as part of a general mechanism of bridging brought forth by the space, this networked approach to DSAs remained tightly linked to the question of territory. That is, of providing a space for (and opened to) the general public, in accordance with the meanings and value attributed to that specific place by the local community.

> Then, we don't think we are solving the problem, just by the church – first of all it's just a patch, to accommodate the people that were being hosted, but towards the outside, it allows to say: we took a place that was abandoned and left to decay, both in social and in cultural terms, and in Naples there are so many of these places, why don't we work so that they be regenerated? Just think that this year we have entered the 'Monuments May' initiative, because we organized guided tours in here, film projections, a gospel music concert. […] Inside the church we organize events and other things, but always respecting the neighborhood, because to the neighborhood this is a very important church, there was a parish center once, then it closed in 2006-2007 and the church was totally abandoned, even though there has been a project for years to renovate the place.
> (#I5SC6 activist, Ex Opg)

Legitimization

This dynamic of bridging between the space and the surrounding city environment, paved the way for the Ex Opg's *Legitimization*.

Much as in the case of Làbas, discussed in the previous chapter, the legitimization of the Ex Opg emerged, first and foremost, from the *contentious branding* of the emerging collective identity of the experience. Here too, the process of consolidating the space's identity was widely informed by practices: by placing mutualism and the political-social pattern at the core of its action and communication, and by showcasing its interest for even the small, very local issues, as well as its openness in providing services and opportunities, the young CSA became progressively known for atypical engagement. The core of this collective identity came to lie, in light of previous struggles and of the activists' reflection on what political militancy could look like after 2011, in the idea of conflictual mutualism. The immersion in social activism, in the direct response to socioeconomic need, and in this sense solidarizing hardship, has been not only a viaticum to try and directly bring about change from within society, but also a key element in a process of construction of political conscience and self-awareness. Entering the space with a grievance, individuals hoping to find a solution to their material need or issue are involved into a broader process, come in contact with a larger struggle that

concerns many other people, grasp the potential of a collective rather than an individual response. In this respect, they are endowed with the possibility to move from a position of beneficiaries to one of actors – in other words, to politicize. The uniqueness of this approach, in a sense, was not always understood or shared by the other movement actors in the city. Yet the consolidation of the experience, one interviewee suggested, brought other social centers in Naples to see the value of such a strong focus on conflictual mutualism, and thus be contaminated by the Ex Opg 'model'.

> Truthfully, it was simultaneously opposed by all movement actors in the city, particularly those from which we came, the most antagonist ones, antagonist more in an 'esthetic' sense – in the sense that material conditions had closed the protest windows of the 2008-2011 cycle –, and they did not immediately interpret what we did as something that could open spaces. They saw it as giving up the more classically antagonist model of collective action and protest, to which we always adhered. To them, it was almost a treason, whereas to us, it was a way of opening spaces and involving people, starting to make communism happen, even in the small space of a practice, of a grievance, instead of waiting for some mythical rupture or insurrections that weren't happening. […] They hadn't understood the kind of curve we were drawing – that is, to come back through the people, to immerge ourselves in the people, to come out again in a strong political way. Then, within a few months to a year, more attentive experiences have tried to reproduce this format. […] They saw that after a year it still held, they thought maybe this actually works. And so, there were very similar occupations to ours, who also took on part of our communication style, […] so I think that not just at a Naples level, but at an Italian level, we have in a sense created a model of intervention.
> (#I1SC6 activist, Ex Opg)

The DSA approach of the Ex Opg, as this extract shows, contains a deep element of prefiguration, one that relates to the realization of communism through practices. The sustainability of social action, however, is never assured. It requires the deployment of substantial resources, including time, planning, skills, and people.

> […] Of course, the sustainability of this model is an issue. We hold strong because we are the biggest reality, but also the most politically motivated and structured one. You need a strong political unity of the group who's offering it, because social action has the shortcoming of dragging you away with it. We don't do it just because it's right, we also do it because it is part of a political project that looks beyond the contingency.
> (#I1SC6 activist, Ex Opg)

The Marxist-Leninist foundation of the Ex Opg has made it a much more structured, and less loosely linked actor, than others discussed in this work. Collective identity, therefore, has been much more negotiated within the community of militants. As recalled, the identity of the space has combined the input of previous subjectivities, with the lessons of the anti-austerity and student mobilizations during the crisis, and with a complex reflection on what the historical phase required for movements to bring about change. Contentious branding, in the trajectory of the Ex Opg, has both played an internal consolidating role, and, more so, helped to foster the identification of individuals with the unicity of the experience, and to make such a demanding social effort recognizable – not only in terms of visibility, but also in terms of political meaning and purpose. The space contentiously 'branded' its collective identity through a variety of semiotic structures, including key words, slogans, logos, stylistic and graphic elements. An example among many others, is embodied by the use of the space's name "Ex Opg – Je so' pazzo" (Ex Opg – I am crazy), in which the "I am crazy" part, derived from a popular Neapolitan song[117], has been recalled and articulated as a label all throughout

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[117] In naming their space, activists purposefully chose a distinctively popular register. In other words, a name was chosen that was not immediately ideological, but mobilized the emotional connection of the city with its popular culture and identity, and

the space's pathway. This is but one illustration of what Beraldo (2020) calls the syntax of political contention, capable of conveying more complex claims and issues through standardized tools.

As the Ex Opg gained recognizability, forming a well-rounded identity and taking root in its local environment, common citizens became invested in the future of the experience, setting off a dynamic of *public support*. Rather than from the brokering action of established subjects – as in the case of other and more networked experiences –, the opening of a dialogue between the Opg and the Municipality resulted, predominantly, from a gain of local popular consensus. Indeed, some brokering to the mayor did take place privately, on the part of sympathetic politicians, and the Opg's forming network of grassroots actors and partners was progressively involved. However, the legitimization of the Ex Opg was significantly determined by the establishment of a large citizen engagement and public support for the experience, which did not necessarily translate into brokerage – or it did in a much smaller proportion than for other self-managed experiences. In this respect, on the one hand, the signaling of the emerging support for the collective actor, occurred through much more informal channels, such as personal networks. On the other hand, the Ex Opg itself made an effort to signal citizens' favorable attitudes and its grip on the neighborhood's social fiber, through its public self-representation. Citizen support increased the Opg's recognizability as a legitimized actor and, progressively, its salience in the city debate. The local media and institutional politics started to take notice, and in turn prompted new interest and leeway for the Ex Opg. The growing relevance of the space – with its innovative nature, increasingly mediatized, and its spreading knowledge among citizens – attracted the attention of mayor De Magistris and some apical figures in the administration. The Municipality was beginning its work on urban common goods, and the mayor was in the process of shaping its purposefully 'anomalous' and autonomous vision for the city of Naples, still hardly affected by the crisis and socioeconomic needs. The popular support for – and engagement in – the mutualistic actions carried out by the Ex Opg, therefore, provided for a fertile ground for dialogue. This is how one activist recounted the very first interaction with De Magistris, about one month after the occupation, also reflecting critically on the advantages and pitfalls of the mayor's government approach, and his intuition for elements susceptible of attracting popular consensus.

> When we occupied, then, the case became so huge – hundreds of people coming in daily and so on –, that the De Magistris administration started to take interest in it, because people were saying: "How is it possible that De Magistris wants to have this place cleared out, it can't be". They themselves mobilized, through appeals to the mayor – and the mayor does come, without telling us anything, when we hold the first public assembly. After the first two-three weeks to clean up the place, we launch this public assembly, and over two hundred people come, including De Magistris. We see him and we say: let's give him the floor and see what he thinks. And he, I must say, very correctly, underlining the autonomy of our experience, said he would commit. […] There, started an interlocution with the De Magistris administration, and particularly with him, because in reality the administration is quite heterogeneous, and you find people there who are not at all aligned with our political views. Whereas in him, we found a willingness to listen and also a capacity to question, to learn from the things that are being done. Of course, he has positive and negatives sides. He is a stranger to the classical dynamic of the left, and has a great personal ambition, which makes him interested to anything that seems to work at a people's level, rather than to the old wheeling and dealing among the political elite that we have seen over the last ten years. […] He hasn't managed, in seven or eight

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specifically with the figure of songwriter Pino Daniele, amongst the most famous Neapolitan artists, who had just died in January 2015. At the same time, the song being referenced ("Je so' pazzo"), which directly recalls the former use of the building as a psychiatric hospital, is also underlyingly strongly political: it conveys a message of rebellion, claiming a voice for those that are unheard by power.

The growing interest surrounding the experience, and the consequent spotlight that was being placed on the space, fostered the expression of this consolidating public support through media outlets, in forms ranging from citizens' letters to statements by the mayor himself. Such expressions of support entailed a *certification through itemizing* of the Ex Opg. Around 2015, the experience started to be acknowledged and quoted, in the local press, as one of the most significant actors in the liberation and restitution to the community of portions of the city that were long inaccessible. In this respect, it was associated to other subjectivities deemed in the political orbit of mayor Luigi De Magistris. The underlying direct social action, in this reasoning, was then particularly the refurbishment of abandoned urban spaces, one that related to a broader debate, which had been ongoing for quite some time, on the city's common goods.

De Magistris' communities come from the thousand experiences that, for some time, have taken place in our territories. Regeneration and freeing of abandoned spaces, making socially active places that appeared as inviolable molochs, and probably appetizing structures for potential pseudo-entrepreneurial speculations. I am talking about the Ex Opg, Santa Maria della Fede liberate, the garden of Materdei, the Ex Asilo Filangieri and, last but not least, the long-running affair of Bagnoli. On these aspects Naples, and just Naples, represents in Italy a political and cultural laboratory of liberation of ideas, of men and women, of realized projects.

(P. De Stasio, "Le critiche del Pd a de Magistris". *Repubblica Napoli*, 2 September 2015)

However, the certification of the Opg operated in the public debate also had much to do with other DSAs, and with the central subject of mutualism. Particularly since the winter of 2016-2017, the local press started to address the novelty of the space, recounting its activities, from the homeless shelter, to creative and audiovisual productions, to the popular chamber of labor. The experience was certified by means of leveraging its social action, and continued gaining increasing momentum, in the media and the public debate. In this respect, the identity work conducted by the Ex Opg, laid the foundations for the branding and recognizability of the actor (in turn, pivotal for claiming credit), and was simultaneously fostered and reinforced by the public certification of the space, precisely through this leveraging of social action.

Disruption of power competition

Finally, the Ex Opg has contributed to a *Disruption of power competition* in the city's political system, in which, at an institutional level, the mayor and parts of the administration have formed new alignments on specific policy subjects.

The first dynamic to determine this, was the way in which the Ex Opg mobilized *representation*. The space leveraged its direct social actions in order to raise issues (thus placing them in the political agenda or increasing their saliency), to then pressure the administration for policy change. In this respect, the space mobilized its collective identity, consolidated around practices, and the legitimacy gained through its action, in order to impact the realm of institutional politics. Contrary to many other experiences who have indeed impacted policy, but whose contribution is challenging to retrace and pinpoint precisely, the influence of the Ex Opg on policy appears, on multiple instances and questions, quite straightforwardly. More than once, through DSAs – for one, the work of the legal and job desks –, Ex Opg activists were able to collect cases and identify compelling issues. From

there, they sought an interaction with the Municipality and escalated the matter to the institutional level. Meanwhile, raising awareness and consensus on the issue, providing both the space and the administration with further political leeway, the Ex Opg denounced the issue at stake in the media. The reproduction of this pattern, regularly retraceable through the analysis of local press contents combined with interviews, resulted in policy acts on subjects such as black work, and the establishment of inter-institutional tables and protocols. When I claim that the space leveraged direct social actions in order to produce representation, I refer particularly to its use of inquiry work – carried out within mutualistic practices and as a result of grievances emerged from, for one, the activity of the legal and migrants' desk –, as well as its approach centered around grassroots disputes (or "vertenze"). Direct Social Actions have been conceived by activists as a school for struggle. Indeed, they have allowed the Opg to convey the image of an organized and relevant force, to be identified as a trustworthy and useful reference within its urban environment, and to weave a growing network, capable of enriching struggles through collective knowledge and exchanges, and by building an awareness among different people living a shared condition. This politicization meaning of DSAs, in turn, has translated at different instances into a mobilization of the grievances emerged within mutualistic practices. Through this action framework, the Opg has represented and made visible specific issues, and thereby mobilized its collective identity – supported by an acquired capital of legitimacy and rootedness within the territory –, in order to resonate with the public opinion and pressure institutions for change. This has resulted in the need for institutional offices (the mayor, different *assessori* and other elected officials) to rapidly react to the issues that were being raised.

Second, and simultaneously, a *convergence* developed between some of the goals of the Ex Opg and those of mayor Luigi De Magistris. The convergence sub-mechanism put forth in the present dissertation, defines a nearing and concurrence, be it for a short or a continued period of time, of political goals and/or claims between different actors. Indeed, dynamics such as institutional cooperation and goal alignment have been underscored by literature as favoring the achievement of movement objectives (by political mediation theorists in particular, but also significant strands of scholarship adopting more movement-centered explanations of collective outcomes). However, a comprehensive concept is hard to find in existing literature, probably on account of the fact that different works and research focuses seek different facets of State-movement convergence. Convergence, as an encompassing label, stands for the composite dynamic embodied by the tangent overlap between a collective actor's and an institutional actor's goals, views and claims. This can entail dynamics of frame alignment (famously defined by Snow et al. 1986), as the frames and claims deployed by movement activists and organizations – their models of interpretation of reality –, can converge, not only with those of the population that they intend to mobilize, but also with institutional actors (which social sciences literature has often viewed in terms of political parties' programmatic alignment with movement claims). In this sense, movement and institutional actors (individuals, executives or segments of governmental units) can – although, to align their frames, they do not necessarily have to – share similar views of the world or of specific political issues. But the term "convergence" has also been used, in social movement scholarship, to allude to the activation of joint mobilizations between collective actors compelled by sufficient interests and motives to join forces (della Porta and Diani 2006). This second meaning also pours into a broader category of political convergence: much as in the overlapping of motivations between multiple collective actors, State and movement actors can, too, be prompted to cooperate and join forces on specific issues or in specific instances, based on aligning interests. If the sub-mechanism of convergence

mobilized in this work, then, speaks to these different layers of interaction, it is interesting to note how the convergence of aims between State and movement actors has been problematized and regarded critically in academic research. Aside from the threat of cooptation, recalled in previous chapters, critical scholarship has notably underlined the risk that changes brought about by collective action be instrumental to the interests of dominant groups. Derrick Bell's (1980) "interest-convergence" theory, positing that dominant groups will allow social change only when such change accommodates their interests, has been applied to numerous studies in critical race theory (particularly, in reference to the civil rights movement and de-segregation), as well as research on education reforms and economic development policies. I have sought to recall and maintain this ambivalent connotation through the term of "convergence", bearing in mind that, in the present work, this label does not strictly refer to interest convergence, but also to political views and claims-making. The experiences and trajectories retraced in these pages do not provide empirical ground to claim that, as a general rule, social centers' influence on institutional politics unfolds according to the interest-convergence principle.

As the unfolding of this work hopefully shows, convergences between institutional and movement actors need to be problematized, as they play a determinant role in shaping, favoring but also limiting, the modes and scope of collective action outcomes. The underlying idea being, that this dynamic can be part of a wider mechanism of disruption of the power competition in a given political system, or a relational feature in the configuration of an actor's institutionalization – in either case, fostering the formation of strategic alliances around specific struggles, but also defining the perimeters of possible and viable actions. The Ex Opg, which, in its previous configuration of different collectives had not taken active part in the electoral campaign of 2011, decided to become engaged in the consultation of 2016 and to support the reelection of De Magistris. The latter, increasingly close to the local movement communities and struggles, had been shifting his political platform away from the early frames, directly linked to his career as a prosecutor, to embrace a more inclusive discourse, centered around rights, the innovation and care of the urban space, culture, environmental sustainability, and the administrative and political autonomy of the city of Naples. De Magistris was in the process of seeking both a new network of allies – moving away from the more established ones who had accompanied him during the first campaign, and thereby gaining leeway to build a new and more autonomous power system –, and new narrative and communication elements. Brought closer by a forming relationship, by a set of shared political claims and ideas for the city, and by the common goal to prevent mainstream political forces to govern Naples, the Opg and De Magistris found themselves in a setting of relative convergence of purpose. In June 2016, De Magistris was reelected mayor of Naples with 67% of votes. Appearing on a balcony to publicly celebrate the electoral results, he wore the Opg's green t-shirt on which was marked 'Popular control'. Meanwhile, flags of the Ex Opg and Insurgencia were being waved into the sky.

> They're the first that mayor De Magistris has publicly thanked, after last Sunday's election. They're the guys of the Ex Opg in via Imbriani, occupied to make it "a place to do politics, social activities, sports, art and culture". From there, they departed Sunday at dawn, wearing the green t-shirts with the yellow writing "Popular control" to make them recognizable, in order to monitor what happened inside and outside ballots, often as list representatives. They have seen, they have watched, in a hundred they have structured the "first experience of popular control". They have faced the Digos, who has identified them twenty-one times. And finally, they have posted on Facebook their narration "From a Naples that isn't Gomorra". […] And Roberto Saviano has shared their post, providing it with an exposure potentially reaching over 2 million followers (as many followers as Saviano's Facebook page). The chronicle by the Ex Opg social

Finally, a *seizure of political space* occurred, disrupting power competition. Having established a pattern of representation for the grievances encountered through social engagement, and taking advantage of a phase of convergence with a key institutional actor[118], the Ex Opg seized a political space within the radical left and the city's political landscape. Through its peculiar model of collective action, the Opg established a method of struggle to get through to institutions more effectively and elicit a response. Such method entails the steady engagement in direct social action, simultaneous inquiry work, the organization of grievance representation and the mobilization of strategic communication to place the issue on the agenda, followed by the exerting of pressure and by cooperation with the administration in order to promote concrete change.

The strong focus of the Opg on popular control constitutes one of the ways in which this experience filled in a political space, and thereby disrupted the competition for power. Through this practice, which the space has applied to a variety of settings and issues (from, notably, the unfolding of elections, to the living conditions in migrants' reception centers, to healthcare provisions and family planning), the Ex Opg has sought to transform power relations, to challenge the dominance of established interests with a power constructed from below, through struggle. By bringing this element into their alliance, the Opg and De Magistris have both concurred to a challenge of power equilibria. While this has not always translated into policy change (often because the issues raised related to regional or national legislative prerogatives), it has produced a pervasive political narrative of discontinuity. Lastly, the Opg itself has entered the electoral competition for power through the constitution, in December 2017, of 'Potere al Popolo' (Power to the People, or PaP), the Ex Opg's national political party. Up to 2020 – that is, in the time frame considered in this research –, PaP ran in the national and regional elections of 2018 and in some municipal elections, but never in Naples[119]. In this respect, although the creation of PaP has not directly disrupted the electoral landscape of the municipal power competition, its birth has prompted relevant effects in the ways that other actors, from individuals to movement organizations, to elected officials, perceive the experience. In fact, despite its narrow electoral consensus, the impact of PaP on the Ex Opg's action is held in high consideration by activists, as a factor that has positively affected its pathway and capacity for influence. However – much like the choice of representation, but even more so –, the constitution of a political party on the part of a social center also entails some sensitive critical considerations: public perception (and the balance between prejudice and credibility), the issue of positioning oneself within the broader realm of institutional politics, and the responses of other actors, including collective ones.

> Building PaP was useful. Following the dispute of the Whirlpool workers, it made a difference to show up as PaP and not just as a social center bringing its solidarity. It gives us more strength to better interact with workers, we are more legitimized, it provides us with new tools. In the relationship with other political or institutional actors, it depends: it is a double-edged sword, it offers more credibility for people in general,

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[118] It should be noted that, later, throughout 2020 and 2021, the relationship between De Magistris and the Ex Opg would deteriorate, to the point that the space would publicly disavow the mayor's political action during the two mandates, and contest his legacy. Nonetheless, as of 2021, the Opg and other collective actors in the city have found an agreement with DemA and are running together in the municipal election.

[119] Later, in the Fall of 2021, PaP ran in the municipal election in Naples.

but at a movement level it is different. And then, we have had to confront new situations – for instance, I had practically never voted. […] We manage to move even further thanks to communication channels. We are recognized as a political subject by workers, and so we are able to propose different solutions at a political level.

(#I2SC6 activist, Ex Opg)

With the construction of PaP there has definitely been a shift. On the one hand, we live on our skin the prejudice that accompanies political organizations, because until you are the social actor, the Opg, you aren't dangerous, you are more easily accepted because people don't see any ulterior motive (even though they have trouble understanding that we take no money, that we are all volunteering… there's always some suspicion on why we are doing this). On the other hand, critically, to be imagined on the outside just as a social structure (and we had never perceived ourselves as such) – you are the boy scouts, you are the 'red' Caritas –, while it allows to penetrate the social fabric well, it also limits you on that level: sure, the desk, the service, the solidarity, but then, when the time comes to make relevant political decisions (which in this city, for the people who attend this space, translates to a vote to either De Magistris or the Five Star Movement, and a little bit of Pd), that's it. So, with the construction of PaP on the one hand there's the issue of rigidity towards you, on the other hand you are a more credible force, precisely due to your response capacity. And then, the possibility of a different national and international perspective, not so much on the practical level, but on the symbolic one. Maybe with things that we would have done regardless […], but people believe it more, you are more credible, you are more visible in the media – even though we have very little, being able to go on tv and talk about these issues makes you recognizable, makes people say 'oh, so they do exist'. With respect to a local collective, you develop a structure, a press office and so on […]. On an institutional level, we have talked several times with De Magistris about the construction of PaP, he very mildly endorsed it, but for us this was not a problem, it was a recognition of autonomy – many, at the time, even wrote that it was De Magistris' Trojan horse… We appreciated an editorial published by the comrades of Infoaut.org, when PaP was born, saying: "we won't be a part of this process, but we won't accuse you of having sold your soul to institutions, because we see this pathway as legitimate and we will see how it goes, we will be listening". This should be the attitude among people who recognize themselves on the same side of the barricade, though choosing different tactics and roads, and if advancements are achieved through different experiences this is only a good thing.

(#I3SC6activist, Ex Opg)

The political influence of the Ex Opg: change through mutualism

The political influence of the Ex Opg across the three dimensions of institutional attitudes, procedural access and policy is illustrated in *Table 6.2*. The evolution of the three dimensions, in the pathway of this actor throughout the decade, has unfolded rather simultaneously.

Policy
- *Delibera* against black work and agreement protocol between Municipality and Work Inspectorate
- *Delibere* on the property change of the space and recognition as common good
- Traffic light, 2015
Procedural access
- Easier access to meetings and dialogue over time
Attitudes
- Recognition (although contested).

Table 6.2 The political influence of the Ex Opg: dimensions and outcomes.

The *policy* dimension of the Ex Opg's pathway of political influence is a rich one. Proceeding by areas of intervention, in regards to the struggles led directly and predominantly by the Opg, a key one relates to the question of irregular work. Through the Popular

Chamber of Labor, the space came into contact with the diffusion of the issue of exploitation within the context of black work. After organizing a public assembly on the matter, in which irregular workers recounted their stories, the Opg launched an inquiry work and visible public campaign (through media diffusion and protest initiatives), while simultaneously undertaking the litigation path through its legal desk, with the first letters of formal notice being sent in October 2017. This combination of the legal struggle with a substantial media representation of the inquiry work, enabled the Ex Opg to place the issue on the local agenda. Particularly, with respect to the denounced working conditions related to the archeological site of 'Napoli Sotterranea', on the same day that the Opg's video-inquiry was published, the municipal *assessore* for work, Enrico Panini, described the video as a "punch in the stomach" and, praising the work of the Opg's chamber of labor, urged the property of Napoli Sotterranea and the competent institutions to take action to address the situation[120]. At this point, an interlocution was established with the Municipality, and, upon cooperative work on the redaction of a new provision, policy responses were obtained. A *delibera* (n. 100, 29/03/2018) was passed in the city Council against black work, providing for the possibility to deny the use of public ground to business activities found to employ workers irregularly. In the meantime, the case of Napoli Sotterranea had grown in saliency to the point of making the object of a parliamentary inquiry. After the first municipal provision, an agreement protocol against black work was obtained in February 2019 between the Municipality and the Labor Inspectorate (Ispettorato del lavoro), the authority in charge of verifying the regularity of working relationships. From individual grievances collected through the legal desk, the mobilization achieved collective outcomes. With respect to the space itself, significant policy acts were passed in the Municipality to retain and preserve the experience establishment within the locales of the Ex Opg. The most significant two are the *Delibera* of 2016, recognizing the Opg as a common good, along with other six spaces, and the *Delibera* 565 of 29 November 2019 (voted in 2020), by which the premises were transferred to the municipal patrimony and a program for their valorization was approved.

Minor policy outcomes can also be retraced, such as the intervention in 2015 on a dangerous pedestrian crossing, with the installment of a traffic light and crosswalk markings, obtained by formally taking up and bringing to the municipal *assessore* the demands of the neighborhood. Within the broad struggle of migrants and for migrants' rights that has developed within the space, activists have exerted diffused pressures on the city administration, particularly to obtain inter-institutional summits with the Municipality and other actors, such as the prefecture and the Questura. In these settings, the Opg has been able to work as a mediator on issues that are not strictly of municipal prerogative. For one, this was the case for the inter-institutional table on the question of the late issue of temporary residence permits, on which activists from the legal desk drafted a proposition, while undertaking an active mobilization and gathering the support of numerous civil society actors, was able to obtain institutional meetings and the prolonging of permits from six months to one year.

Finally, through mutualism, militants of the Ex Opg have encountered a wide spectrum of grievances and of ongoing struggles, which they have addressed in cooperation with other actors. One of them is the condition of homeless people, and the battle for the application of the norms on the attribution of a virtual residence for those who live in the streets. In engaging, alongside civil society actors, in this struggle, activists have followed a path from mutualism to policy change, and back.

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[120] Cabinet (*Giunta*) of the Municipality of Naples, press release, 30 October 2017. 'Assessore Panini su denuncia lavoratori Napoli Sotterranea', available at: https://www.comune.napoli.it/comunicatistampa?id=17146.

The people we were hosting at the Opg would tell us: "Thanks for what you are doing, but our main problem is that we do not exist as people, because we have no residence". This meant no healthcare card, no ID, no possibility to receive mail, basic rights. And so, we started the struggle for the legal residence. We found out that in the national legislation, and in the Municipality of Naples, the possibility exists to apply for the virtual residence. […] The problem was that this provision was not applied by the offices, or only by some… Therefore, we carried out a struggle through a series of protests in front of the Municipality, dinners in different squares of Naples, with 100-120 people, it was amazing – at the time, the national political debate revolved around the idea of moving deviance and poverty out of cities' historical centers, instead, we brought them there. Anyways, from there we were able to achieve the circular on virtual residency, which has settled the issue. Now you can apply for it, and we can be chosen as virtual residence. Simultaneously, we have opened a desk, equipped with a database, where we help with the application. For those in this area, we do it at the Opg, otherwise we do it across the different districts of the city. This especially matters to the migrant component, since it helps with the resident permit, and for job contracts.

(#I5SC6, activist, Ex Opg)

On account of their work, activists from the space have progressively gained *procedural access* to institutional figures and meetings, particularly on questions relates to work issues (via the Popular Chamber of Labor) and immigration (in this respect, interviewees explained, they have been able to engage in a dialogue with the competent municipal *assessore*). This, in turn, has fostered their ability to bring forward their struggles and affect institutional decision-making on key issues.

The *institutional attitudes* towards the Ex Opg have been multifaceted. Undoubtedly, the administration, and particularly the mayor, has publicly recognized the experience and its value. Overall, the debate around the Opg has been quite polarized, and its saliency high (the space has also been amongst the most mediatized, not just locally). During the debate on the acquisition of the Ex Opg's locales on the part of the Municipality, elected officials from the majority stressed the importance of this opportunity of urban regeneration, transforming a space of suffering (the former psychiatric hospital) into a space for the community, a freed (and not an occupied) space, also highlighting the social actions carried out inside the Opg. Among the oppositions, the right pointed to the illegality of the occupation and attacked the administration's approach to the management of public spaces, while the Five Star Movement announced its abstention on the provision, stressing the alleged lack of management and control of the activities held within the space.

What emerges from interviews, is that local elected officials perceive the Opg as a highly politicized social center. For some, this is a problematic feature, either because it implies an ideological and thereby exclusionary character (in this sense, undermining the idea of a space open to the broader local public) or, in relation to the constitution of Potere al Popolo, because they disagree with the entrusting of a 'common good' to a political party. Yet, the space's social engagement has come to be transversally acknowledged, even by elected officials whose main interpretive lens on spaces remains legality (and who, therefore, disagree with the administration's management) or who are less familiar with self-managed experiences across the city. This goes to show the pervasiveness of the Opg's messages in the local political debate.

6.3 Villa Medusa

Villa Medusa, an abandoned structure for the provision of services to the elderly, was occupied in 2013 by a heterogeneous community of local citizens and activists, who decided to inhabit it and give it back to the neighborhood. Among its core subjectivities, is the

communist political collective Iskra; Villa Medusa – Casa del Popolo (People's House) can be ascribed to the Marxist-Leninist branch of social antagonism. However, its political dimension is articulated primarily through social and territorial engagement, and Villa Medusa as a whole is an encompassing actor. Its multiple contaminations and its openness to various segments of society have made Villa Medusa into a territorial hub for aggregation and social initiatives, as well as local struggles. The space's managing assembly holds weekly and open meetings.

The trajectory of Villa Medusa (*Table 6.3*) offers a good example of how a Bridging dynamic, triggered by the choice of DSAs, can combine with a Partitioning between movement and institutional actors, producing a territorial social station. Through a deep territorialization of collective action, and the weaving of a large network of attendees and partners, the space has built a wide and diverse social environment. At the same time, Villa Medusa has experienced a dynamic of Partitioning from institutions, acting as an autonomous aggregating hub, providing opportunities for the neighborhood and carrying out both contentious and non-contentious actions. This experience's main outcome vis-à-vis institutional politics has been the safeguard of Villa Medusa as a social space, and its recognition as a common good by the Municipality in 2016.

Table 6.3 Pathway of Villa Medusa: mechanisms, sub-mechanisms and dimensions of political influence.

Collective Actor	Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms		Political Influence
Villa Medusa	**Bridging** Territorialization; Network.	**Partitioning** Double tracking; Normalization.	(Procedural) (Policy)

Bridging

The occupation of Villa Medusa, a historical villa on the seaside in the area of Bagnoli, occurred on 19 January 2013, with the appropriation of the space by a community of activists, local residents, students and political collectives. Villa Medusa is located in the peripheral area of Bagnoli, at the border between the Municipality of Naples and that of Pozzuoli. As a territory, Bagnoli has a history of high social capital, active citizenship and bottom-up initiatives, trade unionism and political participation (see Galasso and Allum 1978 and, more recently, Bull and Jones 2006). In fact, this area of the city was the seat of a vast industrial complex throughout the 20th century; the Italsider steel plant of Bagnoli reached its maximum extension by the end of the 1970s, and the factory – active until 1989 – employed thousands of workers. The industrial working class was therefore numerous and active in Bagnoli, and several local struggles emerged, aimed at bettering the quality of life of residents; this also prompted the formation of several volunteer associations linked to the Italsider struggles (Bull and Jones 2006).

Villa Medusa, once a private property, had been left to the Municipality through a bequest, with the provision that the facility shall be used to offer services for the elderly. Indeed, for some time, the Villa had become a service center[121] for the 10th *Municipalità* (Bagnoli Fuorigrotta). However, due to neglect and to the financial cuts derived from austerity measures, in 2008 the space had been declared unfit for use, and abandoned. The occupation was aimed at preserving the property, which at that point had been closed and had remained

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[121] In Italian, a "social center for the elderly", intended not as a CSA, but as a public service center, without any political connotation.

in need of refurbishing for years[122], and that the Municipality was attempting to sell. The self-management experience of Villa Medusa was thus born after – and much as a consequence of – the onset of the crisis. Among the subjectivities that took part in the occupation, was the 'Political Laboratory Iskra', a local communist youth collective born in the early 2000s, closely tied to the struggles of the surrounding Bagnoli territory – particularly, the decontamination and regeneration of the former Italsider industrial area –, but also involved in broader contestations, such as the student and anti-austerity mobilizations between 2009 and 2012. To this day, Iskra maintains its seat inside Villa Medusa, and is among the key animating actors of the space.

The pathway of Villa Medusa is also peculiar, in that the vast majority of the space's life lies in Direct Social Actions. Since the initial occupation, Villa Medusa has known a dynamic of *Bridging* that is, in itself, inherent to the nature of this self-managed experience. The naming of Villa Medusa as a "People's House" instead of a social center, is telling, with respect to what the space as a whole intends to be, and how different subjectivities can inhabit it. The underlying idea was never to constitute a hub for different groups and activities to meet, but rather to embody an alternative mode of socialization and community-building, to be translated into the shaping of the urban environment.

A first element resides in the *territorialization* of collective action operated by Villa Medusa through DSAs. Squatters, organized in an internal assembly, immediately started to provide services and opportunities to the local community, beyond more strictly political initiatives (although seminars and debates have remained, they are not the exclusive core of the space's activity). In this very perspective, the group of occupants who appropriated Villa Medusa has since then engaged in different social practices, from popular sports activities and mutual aid desks, to a variety of activities for the elderly, workshops, language classes for migrants, the provision of study rooms and a library, different solidarity initiatives (centered both around local and international issues), AA meetings, a children's afterschool, a community garden. Classes are offered ranging from Chinese boxing to yoga, to woodworking workshops. Theatre courses, music performances, film screenings and debates are also organized. Card games groups and the dancing group "La Medusa" meet up inside the space. In time, different mutual aid desks have been established. There are the steady ones, such as the one offering support against black work and workers' exploitation; the territorial desk of the Unemployed Movement "7 November", dedicated to the unemployed and the organization of their struggles; the psychological desk "ReciprocaMente" (opened at the beginning of 2020), engaged in providing direct support and in redirecting cases to the mandated social services structures. In addition, temporary mutual aid desks have been set up for specific needs and emergencies.

A second constitutive dynamic of Villa Medusa's bridging mechanism can be retraced in its *network* formation, in turn directly intertwined with the deep territorialization of its action. The inhabitants of Villa Medusa have aimed, since the early start of the experience, at making the most out the potential of the physical location of the space, in order to cooperate with different local actors (political actors, individuals, sports and cultural associations) and thus build a broad space of aggregation. The Villa holds weekly programming meetings of the managing assembly, open to anyone wishing to participate, make suggestions, propose new activities or simply help out with the daily work. In addition, over the years Villa Medusa has organized downright open days, for people to come and visit the facility and get to know the space, as well as numerous initiatives and get-togethers for local residents, such as

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[122] Despite the allocation of the necessary funds on the part of the Municipality, the renovation had never begun, also due to administrative and bureaucratic issues related to the entrusting of the works.

neighborhood parties and dinners. Its networking with other actors in the city, such as associations, has allowed some activities of the Villa (like sports and performances) to be hosted by other facilities, when Villa Medusa was closed for a year due to renovation works (to be reopened in the summer of 2019). The pathway of Villa Medusa, also in relation to DSA, presents relevant differences in its features, with respect to experiences strictly pertaining to one political subjectivity or collective. In these very aspects, the territorialization and network elements meet ways. While the input of political collectives (such as Iskra) is strong within Villa Medusa, DSAs – from the works for the regeneration of the space itself, to the mutualistic and solidarity initiatives – are practiced by a heterogeneous set of actors. Hundreds of elderly people, according to Villa Medusa inhabitants' accounts, have adhered to the association that caters to the self-organization of seniors' activities inside the space. Moreover, local residents put in their skills and time, to offer language courses and initiatives for children; a group of students has refurbished some locales inside the Villa to create a free study room and a library. Local professionals offer their time and competences for the mutual aid desks. Indeed, the space maintains a strong political connotation and, to its activists, a broad social environment in which DSAs are practiced from a varied group of participants, is intended as a way to structure political consciences and politicize individuals. Thanks to the broad spectrum of its activities and its openness to a variety of different subjectivities, Villa Medusa is among the most heterogeneous experiences in Naples, also in generational terms (the ages of participants ranging from young students to senior citizens).

Partitioning

The bridging mechanism in Villa Medusa's trajectory has entailed the shaping of a territorialized and networked collective action. However, at the same time, this dynamic has not been accompanied by a full-on motion linking societal consensus to institutional relevance of the experience. Rather, this bridging dynamic, entrenching Villa Medusa's action inside a varied and heterogeneous social environment, has gone hand in hand with a *Partitioning* between the space and institutional politics. With the exception of the initial, more contentious instances of interaction between the Villa's inhabitants and the Municipality, after the negotiations for the recognition of the space as a common good, Villa Medusa has followed a strongly autonomous and separated course from municipal politics.

The community of Villa Medusa has carried out its action in a form of *double-tracking*, which, through its plurality, has fostered the identity of an autonomous space. Indeed, Villa Medusa has offered a wide range of services, either outright replacing or complementing the lacking welfare provided by the public actor in the neighborhood. It has engaged in cooperative actions with the Municipality, with respect to the renovation projects for the facility and to the signing of the charter on the city's common goods. Simultaneously, in time, the Villa has been home to different actors engaged in the struggle for the requalification of the Bagnoli area, such as the Popular Observatory for the decontamination and converting of the Bagnoli-Coroglio site, and the popular assembly of residents 'Free Bagnoli', in addition to the Political Laboratory Iskra, and the district's student collective 'Coordinamento Studenti Flegrei'. Over the decade, the inhabitants of Villa Medusa have taken part in a variety of protests and riots, such as in the struggles of Naples' unemployed movement (from the early 2010s up to 2019); student[123] protests; and the mobilizations around the issues of the territory of Bagnoli (from the shortcomings of public services such as healthcare and transports, to the

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[123] It is interesting to note how the representation of Iskra in the local conservative newspaper *Il Mattino*, albeit rare, was informed by a sentiment of suspicion, and by a portrayal of the collective as a dangerous actor, infiltrating student mobilizations and provoking riots.

repurposing of the former industrial area). In 2017, the space took part with other social centers in the local political formation NDO (Napoli Direzione Opposta), which came to an end less than two years later. In 2018, Villa Medusa was involved in the launch of Potere al Popolo, the political party formed by the Ex Opg. However, Iskra or Villa Medusa themselves, have never run for office.

In addition, Villa Medusa has been subjected to a dynamic of *normalization* in the city debate. From a media perspective, the discussion around the regulation of urban commons has not involved a problematization of Villa Medusa's situation. At most, the space's name was seldom mentioned in the list of occupied spaces to be regulated. More generally, Villa Medusa has never attained actual saliency in the local mainstream media, neither in light of its social practices, nor by virtue of its more contentious actions (only rarely mentioned, in reference to large demonstrations involving a plurality of collective actors). A similar approach has characterized the institutional political debate, where the rare mentions of the space have involved either the necessity of restarting the renovation of the facility as such, or the inclusion of the experience among the recognized urban commons. Broadly speaking, Villa Medusa is perceived as territorially localized to a specific area of the city, which in turn has made it a reliable reference as far as local questions go, but also as a less recognizable political actor, due to its heterogeneity and plural identities. These elements have reduced the perception of its disruptive potential towards municipal politics. Despite its role in contentious and protest actions, Villa Medusa has thus stayed out of the city spotlight. All in all, the bridged social environment of Villa Medusa has contributed to conveying an image of the experience as a well-integrated space of welfare and of aggregation, whose confrontational component does not raise as much consensus-sensitive questions as other self-managed spaces in the city.

The political influence of Villa Medusa: gaining recognition for a welfare-providing, self-organized community

The overarching idea at the core of the experience of Villa Medusa, was to collectively build forms of social cooperation and management of spaces, overcoming market competition, profit and privatization logics. In the pursuit of such aim, Villa Medusa has brought together a varied ensemble of actors, and claimed the right not so much to 'be assigned' a public space, but rather to achieve institutional recognition as a community capable of self-organizing and producing positive changes in society through grassroots work. Even further, Villa Medusa's set mission, as a People's House, has been to contribute to shaping a model of mutual aid, to be progressively disseminated in every corner of the urban space. Since the beginning, occupants called for institutional responses, asking that Villa Medusa be removed from the list of municipal spaces for sale, that clarifications be provided on the renovation of the facility, and that the Villa return to serve its function as a senior center and a provider of social services for the local community. In doing so, the inhabitants of Villa Medusa adopted a variety of strategies, from public initiatives and assemblies, to lobbying through formal and informal channels, to street demonstrations and protest actions, such as the occupation of the municipal offices in charge of public works.

After an initial period of contentious interactions, the community of the Villa was involved in the Municipality's process of regulation of common goods, with the recognition of several spaces as urban commons of the city of Naples. Based on the model provided by the regulation written by the Asilo Filangieri (the first, among self-managed spaces, to be declared an urban common good), Villa Medusa's inhabitants took part in a cooperative process of redaction of the space's regulation protocol along with the Municipality. The community of inhabitants worked to achieve the redaction of a regulation that would codify the practices and

management forms of the Villa. In this sense, the experience influenced a *policy* act, which placed the Villa under the category of the civic use of a public space, thereby acknowledging the role of Villa Medusa in fostering welfare and social actions in the neighborhood and entrusting the physical locales to the internal managing assembly – that is, the self-organized plural group of actors catering to the functioning of the space. Following the recognition, Villa Medusa underwent its long-awaited renovation works, aimed at refurbishing and securing the facility. This process also saw the active cooperation of the local institutions, Municipality and Neighborhood, with the residents and the space's inhabitants – as also recalled by the official municipal statements on the matter and by the local media.

> « Thanks to the participatory process carried out by the municipal administration – reads the statement released by Palazzo San Giacomo – the facility was first removed from the list of alienable assets, and then, having averted the selling, its renovation has been decided. A process that has seen the protagonism of the 10th *Municipio* of Naples and of the social and civic movements. A space of aggregation open to the entire community of the neighborhood, in which social and inclusive activities take place. »
> (*Il Mattino*, Un milione di euro per Villa Medusa: «Spazi aggregazione comunità», 1 September 2017)

In *procedural access* terms, then, the space gained access to institutions during the interlocution on the recognition of Villa Medusa as a common good, and more so since the passing of the provision, which effectively formalized the self-management of the experience and provided for a legal and straightforward communications channel. During the renovation, the space's inhabitants kept visiting the facility and checking on the advancement of the works, perceiving themselves as trustees of the public process that had prompted the institutional unlocking of the situation. This seeking of access progressively loosened as the renovation was completed and Villa Medusa resumed its activity – to activists, the target of collective action went back to being first and foremost the surrounding city community. In this respect, a potential for access indeed opened up, but the core focus of Villa Medusa's action has remained directed elsewhere for the timespan considered. However, it should be noted that, on a Neighborhood level, Villa Medusa has supported the candidacy of the current president of the *Municipalità* – an activist from the groups of Bagnoli that initially occupied the space –, and in that, has acquired a new extent of access to local decision-making, in addition to an institutional ally.

What is interesting to note, in terms of Villa Medusa's impact on *institutional attitudes*, is how this experience is often associated to the Ex Opg, and discursively contrasted to other Neapolitan experiences such as Insurgencia. Several respondents, among the elected officials I interviewed, knew Villa Medusa (although often less in detail than other experiences), and in discussing it legitimized it by making explicit reference to its social action, and to its dynamic role in the deprived area of Bagnoli. This was especially true for opposition members from the center-left and the Five Star Movement, who opposed the 'complexity' of experiences engaged in DSAs, such as the Opg and Villa Medusa, to more problematic and, in their eyes, less valuable social center experiences. To support such view, different elected officials cited the generational heterogeneity of the more DSAs-centered spaces, particularly Villa Medusa. As for the municipal majority, the Administration has, as recalled, recognized the space as an urban common good. During an interview, a former cabinet member from the De Magistris administration defined Villa Medusa as an "authentic experience of territory". An incumbent cabinet member told me about their initial encounter with the experience, and explained the broader political framework upon which the administration grounded its subsequent management of the situation. Overall, more than other self-managed experiences in Naples,

Villa Medusa has been perceived as a case of reappropriation of social space by a local community.

> When collectivities identify places (it is the case of Villa Medusa) as references, they do not identify ten thousand places, they identify some, very precisely. It is not without reason, that we talk about *delibere* involving eight spaces. People identify places where they live some projections: Villa Medusa, for one, was a private property, left to the Municipality of Naples, but with the provision that it should be an elderly home, a space of aggregation for the community, where the seniors could spend time in a free and happy way. Now, if instead the Municipality interprets this as one of its assets among 62.000, in other words feels entitled to its assets as if it were a housing stock, and wants to conduct a commercial politics, therefore put it up for sale, it completely betrays the requirement with which the Villa was donated. […] Then, for whom should administrators administer? If the Municipality that administers for the collectivity betrays this mandate, a relationship is broken. Hence, if among 62.000 assets, there are some like these, there are stories with a value, they must be recognized in legal terms too, and brought forward […]. I can say that I struggled a lot, when, not knowing about this situation and this requirement, we knew that Villa Medusa had been occupied, and went there to discuss with the collectivity. Well, seeing a villa occupied in quotation marks – I say this because we need to understand each other on the occupation –, more so, a villa reappropriated by that collectivity…
> We thought we would find an occupation; we went there to see how it was and decide how to act accordingly. But we discovered that there were more than 150 elderly people, and it was not a youth squatting, but senior citizens reclaiming their right – and reminding us, of a right that is guaranteed by the Constitution: whose property is that place? The Municipality or a collectivity? That is the question.
> (#IE12, cabinet member, city administration)

6.4 Insurgencia

The 'Laboratorio politico Insurgencia' is a political collective born in the early 2000s. Part of the post-Autonomous political area, Insurgencia has played a unique role in Naples' recent history. Since 2004, the collective has animated the homonymous social center Insurgencia, in the Capodimonte neighborhood, seat to the collective's political activity; since 2012, Insurgencia activists have occupied a second space, called Mezzocannone Occupato. What is peculiar about this actor's pathway is that, during the crisis decade, Insurgencia made the choice to bring its struggle into the realm of institutional politics and thereby became part of Naples' municipal administration.

The pathway of this actor is displayed in *Table 6.4*. Insurgencia has first and foremost experienced a bridging dynamic, through the territorialization of its action, the consolidation of a network of allies particularly linked to Naples' environmental struggles, and the shaping of a resonating narrative. Insurgencia was the first social center that decided, already in the 2011 election (then, again in 2016), to support the run of Luigi De Magistris, contributing to the disruption of the municipal competition for power. The affirmation of that political operation, and the increasing integration of Insurgencia into municipal institutions (paired with a segregation of conflict to specific targets on the part of the collective actor), have resulted in a double-edged institutionalization of the experience. However, in more recent years, the increasing polarization of the local institutional debate, and the progressive isolation of Insurgencia from both institutional and movement actors, have encapsulated this collective actor in a narrow social environment.

On the one hand, Insurgencia appears to have influenced policy on some specific questions. On the other hand, in terms of procedural access and institutional attitudes, this stands out as one of the most influential collective actors in Naples across the decade.

Table 6.4 Pathway of Insurgencia: mechanisms, sub-mechanisms and dimensions of political influence.

Collective Actor	Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms				Political Influence
Insurgencia	**Bridging** Territorialization; Network; Narrative.	**Disruption of power competition** Convergence; Seizure of political space.	**Double-edged institutionalization** Integration; Conflict segregation.	**Encapsulation** Polarization; Isolation.	Policy Procedural Attitudes

Bridging

The experience of Insurgencia saw the light in 2004, with the occupation of a former abandoned municipal school, in via Vecchia San Rocco in the Capodimonte district, on the part of a group of Disobedient activists. After the wave of intense contestations of the early 2000s, while collective mobilization faced a phase of relative fatigue, Naples experienced a resurge of social centers' occupations – at the same time as Officina99 was being threatened of eviction –, almost in a bottom-up motion of reigniting the antagonistic movement that started from neighborhoods, through the appropriation of space. Insurgencia was one these newly born experiences. In such a context, starting already in the years immediately antecedent to the crisis, and increasingly since its onset, the first key mechanism in Insurgencia's pathway of influence was *Bridging*.

First, a *territorialization* of Insurgencia's collective action was prompted, on the one hand, by the choice of the experience to engage in direct social actions. Quite early compared to other movement actors, Insurgencia developed a rich repertoire of DSAs. Already in 2005, in via vecchia San Rocco, along with the organization of debates, cultural and political initiatives, and aggregation opportunities, were active an observatory on abandonment, working with marginalized psychiatric patients, and a support desk centered around income and social inclusion. This line of action progressed to the point that in 2010, the space was equipped with a popular gym, cultural and artistic laboratories, and a fiscal assistance and welfare desk. While these projects have progressively waned with time, mutualistic forms of action have contributed significantly, during the emergence and consolidation of Insurgencia, to its engagement with its surrounding territory and neighborhood, as the collective opened itself to the opportunity of producing territory within its physical and social location. On the other hand, the territorialization of Insurgencia's action has stemmed from its definition of specific physical sites of collective struggle, and to the defense of certain territories. During the late 2000s, and then the 2010s, the collective took active part in numerous environmental mobilizations and conflicts of the city. These range from smaller initiatives, such as the committee for the defense of the Vallone of San Rocco (born in March 2007, against the intention of the Municipality to install a waste collection site in the green area of the Northern hills of Naples), to the massive and years-long mobilization against the landfill of Chiaiano. Prominent activists from Insurgencia also come from the Northern area of the city, from districts such as Marano, Mugnano and Chiaiano. From this biographical embeddedness into the territory have derived, among other elements, the awareness and ties to the environmental struggles that have mobilized the city, and some districts in particular, in recent years, and the willingness to extend Insurgencia's political action to those realms.

This territorial character of Insurgencia's collective action has translated into the consolidation of a *network* of allied actors. Since 2008-2009, Insurgencia was part of the composite formation of protest actors of Chiaiano. Around 2012, a strong presence of Insurgencia activists can be retraced in the 'Rete Commons' network (gathering the committees of Naples and its surrounding area) and campaigns such as the one contesting the incinerator of Giugliano. Later, starting in 2013-2014, Insurgencia has been on the forefront of the 'Stop Biocide' coalition, a network of collective and social actors engaged in the struggle against the dire conditions of environmental pollution and deterioration in the Campania region[124]. Across these mobilizations, the collective came into relation with several committees, associations and civil society actors.

One other relevant example is the participation in the mobilization against the landfill in Scampia, in 2011, through which Insurgencia militants intersected the action of several citizen committees and struggles they would then carry into their institutional experience. In Scampia, Insurgencia met the Vele Committee, an established organization of residents struggling for the regeneration of the area of the 'Vele' (literally, the 'sails'), the residential complex often depicted as a symbol of Naples' organized crime and degradation. There, in 2016, activists, students and citizens created the space 'Cantiere 167', a community aimed at providing aggregation and education initiatives for the residents, but also at exercising a critical oversight on the massive regeneration project financed for the neighborhood by the newly signed governmental Pact for Naples (for a total amount of 307 million euros destined to the city), against the dangers of criminal infiltrations and speculation. The Vele Committee also formally supported Insurgencia's candidates in the local elections.

The combination of these elements contributed to the consolidation of a *narrative* around Insurgencia, both in the media as well as in the overall definition of its identity – more in reference to Insurgencia as a political collective, than as a social center or physical and social space. Around the years in which the crisis hit, particularly, Insurgencia engaged in disruptive forms of protest and became known for its radical antagonistic approach. As tensions rose around the landfill struggle of Chiaiano, for one, the press associated citizens and collective actors taking part in the mobilization to guerrilla, violence, and blockades. At the same time, around 2009, the local media started to increasingly cover Insurgencia as a collective, also devoting space to names and statements of some of its most prominent activists, questioned about salient current environmental conflicts brought forth together with civil society organizations.

The engagement of the space of via Vecchia San Rocco in mutualistic practices, such as popular sports, added in to this consolidation of the space's image, though it was covered less frequently than more unequivocally contentious actions. With the crisis, Insurgencia was also actively involved in the 2008-2012 anti-austerity mobilizations. As some its activists suffered legal repercussions as a result of riots, and demonstrations were held in solidarity with their situation. Throughout this process, the contested public image of Insurgencia, often linked to riots, legal charges and imprisonments, sparked conflicts around the occupation of the space. The institutional forces on the left, however, released declarations to the press sanctioning in part the experience, as opposed to the occupations and violent actions of the radical right. Furthermore, this was more the case as attacks and acts of violence against the space of via Vecchia San Rocco started to occur, with the onset of the 2010s. The narrative of what

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[124] The platform was particularly born to contest the severe repercussions of the situation of waste disposal on public health, and the shortcomings of institutions in addressing such a pressing matter. The first signatory actors of Stop Biocidio were the Coordination of the committees from the Terra dei Fuochi, La Fenice Vulcanica associations, the Project of Campania citizens for an alternative waste plan, the Rete Commons network, Laboratorio Insurgencia, grassroots union USB Campania, and the Coordination of precarious journalists.

Insurgencia was, as an experience, expanded as the collective embraced new struggles and became increasingly visible in city mobilizations. For one, through popular sports, Insurgencia also organized initiatives aimed at the inclusion and socialization of migrants, thereby coming in direct contact with their grievances. The collective took part in migrants' struggles since their early beginnings, denouncing the discriminatory and unjust conditions that migrants experienced in Naples, particularly with respect to work issues.

Overall, Insurgencia and its forefront activists gained significant visibility in the local press and the political debate. This construction of a narrative around the Laboratorio stretched to encompass the array of its different struggles, the territorial connotation of many of those mobilizations, and prompted a depiction of Insurgencia as increasingly present and significant in multiple collective action settings.

Disruption of power competition

The second mechanism shaping Insurgencia's pathway was the *Disruption of power competition*.

This dynamic resulted, first, from a *convergence* of goals and political vision between Insurgencia and the platform built by Luigi De Magistris. Already since the election of 2011, which marked the affirmation of Luigi De Magistris and disrupted the municipal competition for power, Insurgencia became part of the coalition of subjectivities that gathered under the emblem of the so-called "orange revolution" promised by De Magistris – from leaders of the Naples Social Forum, to citizens' committees against landfills in the Northern periphery of the city, to social centers' activists, to radical left party forces, to volunteer organizations and professionals from the social sector. On the one hand, the convergence of these actors, and particularly the support of Insurgencia to the emergent political platform, had to do with the willingness of producing a rupture with past administrative experiences, and with the inefficiencies and clientelist ways of the local political system. On the other hand, convergence was the result of the individuation of a platform that put forth distinct claims and programmatic objectives, ranging from environmental justice to administrative transparency and urban regeneration.

Sharing such objectives, Insurgencia participated in the *seizure of political space* carried out by the conglomerate of forces supporting Magistris, starting with the 2011 election and again in the municipal election of 2016, where the contribution and engagement of Insurgencia grew stronger. On the one hand, this seizure of political space involved grasping the window of opportunity left open by the mainstream left parties, whose consensus in Naples had eroded in the years leading up to 2011. At the same time, De Magistris and his political formation have provided a response to a growing demand for 'popular' political representation, one that by many observers has been referred to as populist. Indeed, the trajectory of the populist vote in Naples, and particularly of the evolution of the consensus for the Five Star Movement, yields some insightful suggestions. Particularly, a significant detachment can be noted between the consensus trend of the M5S in all levels of consultations, from national, to regional, to European elections, and the votes obtained by the M5S in the city elections, already in 2011 but especially in 2016 (after the party fully expressed its potential with the exploit of the 2013 national election). Brancaccio and Fruncillo (2019) have argued that, while specific established dynamics of exchange and clientelism of the city's political system may be responsible in part for this phenomenon, they do not suffice to explain it. In fact, the rates of preference voting for candidates in M5S lists in Naples are considerably lower than those for candidates from other lists (attesting to a diverging degree of territorial rootedness and potential to concentrate consensus on single figures) – however, while this is true for both city, regional and European

elections, the overall consensus obtained in regional and European consultations by the Five Star Movement remains significantly higher than that obtained in municipal elections. The main argument that Brancaccio and Fruncillo have put forth, is that the poor performance of the M5S at a municipal level can be indeed attributed to conjunctural factors of the party itself (such as shortcomings of the local political personnel, tactical mistakes, the campaign's strategy and communication management), but also, and largely so, to the presence in the electoral competition of a figure, De Magistris, who anticipated the themes and rhetoric later deployed by the Movimento (*ibid.*). In this respect, De Magistris and his composite political formation carved a space of political representation, interpreting of a set of grievances and demands, ranging from the disappointed expectations of left-wing leaning electors, to the widespread anti-elite and populist sentiment. Progressively throughout the first mandate, the mayor shaped its formation by marginalizing and eliminating party components, to the benefit of old and new actors, from traditional figures of the institutional radical left, to movements and social centers, to civic lists and white collars. Within a highly localized dimension, De Magistris' political project has occupied a political space holding together a new combination of interests. Insurgencia played a significant part in this process. Its choice of pursuing electoral politics was motivated, on the one hand, by the necessity to create a radical rupture with the consolidated landscape and dynamics of Naples' political representation, by bringing the struggles of the city's grassroots mobilizations into institutions. As Insurgencia later explained it, leading up to its even greater engagement in the elections of 2016, the choice of running for office in 2011 was spurred by

> the necessity of piercing the asphyctic landscape of city political representation, with the voice of one of the movements (the one contesting landfills and incinerators) that to this day we deem among the most radical and constituent that the city has known over the past years.

On the other hand, the political platform put forth by De Magistris aimed at moving beyond the perimeter of the traditional and mainstream left, and to respond to a demand of discontinuity. This framework was combined, in Insurgencia's choice on whether to engage in electoral politics, with a reflection of how movement actors and collective struggles were reshaping the public arena in that historical phase (around 2010-2011).

> […] the candidacy of De Magistris within a national movement of candidates to the govern of cities, who positioned themselves as discontinuous and not ascribable to the logics of clientelist partitocracy. This, in Naples, meant concretely rejecting any space of interlocution with that center-left that had ripped apart the city for over twenty years. […] In addition, the candidacy of the current mayor of Naples emerged precisely as an indignant choice of discontinuity, after the obscene spectacle given by the center-left […]. Thus, the choice, entirely subjective, of 2011, was made based on an assessment, first and inevitably, deeply linked to the conjuncture. There was, in the country, an unprecedented availability for mobilization, which took the most varied forms and strongly looked, regardless of the positionings of movement structures, for spaces of connection and revitalization. These could, possibly, also entail a social questioning of the field of political representation: it was the season that came out of the most relevant student movement of recent history, the summer of the committees for public water, of the occupation of theaters and places of culture, of the new public voice of movements for environmental justice.
> Insurgencia, *"Zapatismo partenopeo"* (2016)

Double-edged institutionalization

The following mechanism in Insurgencia's trajectory was thus a dynamic of *Double-edged institutionalization*. As a collective actor, Insurgencia has fully entered the arena of institutional politics, and has worked within institutions through local political representation.

While other self-managed spaces and movement actors had decided to remain outside De Magistris' first electoral competition, Insurgencia was amongst those who bet on the challenge and presented Pietro Rinaldi, an historical figure of the space, as a candidate for Council in the list 'Napoli è tua' supporting Luigi De Magistris. Rinaldi was elected with 617 votes, resulting the fourth most voted candidate in the City Council for the list. But after the first mandate, the space was confronted with the choice of what to do next. In reflecting upon the upcoming legislature, Insurgencia reflected on the so-called 'Neapolitan anomaly', looking back at the five years of the unusual De Magistris' government and ahead, to how Naples could be transformed into a national laboratory precisely through the contribution of movement struggles to local institutional politics.

> An anomaly that can be analyzed with honesty and balance only by starting from 2011, and looking at the past five years with the intent to highlight the merits and shortcomings of a government experience that, we believe, has been an experiment, overall a positive one, but that has gone through a myriad of difficulties. This is the only possible analytical starting point for those, like us, who five years ago chose – subjectively but in full synergy with the environmental committees heir to the struggle against the landfill of Chiaiano – to explicitly support the candidacy of Luigi De Magistris, and to express a city councilor and a candidate for the presidency of a *municipalità* as crucial ad the Eighth, both internal to the structures and recognized by the activists of the committees. […] This "extremity" of local institutions makes them interesting, as real articulation nodes of abstract diktats: it is in the regional and city deliberations, that the diktats of the Troika are materially incarnated, that austerity stops being an economic theory to impact the lives and territories of thousands of people. These areas of application of European governance, therefore, can also become areas of resistance. This was already true five years ago, and it is ever truer today. […] The Neapolitan anomaly can play, in such a framework, a decisive game, to become the most advanced political laboratory in the country. One that is distant from the alternance of traditional parties, and able to integrate a majority vocation without having to refer to the large union and political actors that orient consensus (and keep conflict at bay) in our territory. […] Far from the mold of parties that, while they illegitimately occupied the field of the left, sold every right obtained by lower classes in a century of struggles. Away from politicism. Away, nonetheless, also from the mere desire of self-preservation of the so-called radical left, content with its unviolated purity, reduced to inventing a reality that doesn't exist in order to justify its daily effort for survival at all cost. We want to bet, with those that have something to lose, but even more with those who do not settle, and have never given up on the idea of reversing the course of a destiny of austerity and poverty, servitude and pillaging.
>
> Insurgencia, *"Zapatismo partenopeo"* (2016)

The choice to run, even more convincingly, in 2016, has resulted in the expansion of Insurgencia's institutionalization dynamic, in a progressive *integration* into the institutional realm. As a result of the 2016 election, the presence of Insurgencia within local institutions has grown, both in numeric terms and power distribution, to encompass multiple administrative levels. With an overwhelming majority, candidate Ivo Poggiani was elected president of the Third *Municipalità* (a large administrative city district). Rosario Andreozzi was elected to the city Council along with Eleonora De Majo, the second most voted councilor in De Magistris' 'DemA' list (with 1957 votes), who was later appointed *assessore* in the cabinet. Another Insurgencia candidate and renowned figure of the organization, Egidio Giordano, became *assessore* for social policy and culture in the Third District in 2019. Finally, after seven years as city councilor in the majority grouping of DemA, Pietro Rinaldi was appointed chief of staff for Luigi De Magistris in the Metropolitan City administrative unit.

Insurgencia's institutionalization was, nonetheless, a double-edged mechanism. Indeed, the experience and its activists maintained a strongly conflictual and antagonistic element. Certainly, Insurgencia kept taking the streets and participating in protest and disruptive actions. The choices of some of its prominent figures to engage in contentious actions or make radical statements, actually caused more than one controversy in the realm of city institutional

politics, and often provided grounds or pretexts for new attacks on the administration and the mayor by Council oppositions. However, in light of its institutional collocation, Insurgencia was also brought to adopt a *conflict segregation* approach, limiting its disruptive actions to the contestation of specific institutional actors (other than the city administration) and to specific issues or battles.

In this respect, while the experience has remained widely perceived as contentious, its position as an actor fully and increasingly integrated within institutions, and as part of administrative majority, has prompted a dissonant image of Insurgencia, in the vast majority media and political portrayals. During the first mandate of the De Magistris' administration, Insurgencia appeared as the radical goad, trying to bring the mayor towards more assertive stances and choices. In this respect, on some occasions the space also directly criticized De Magistris' choices, or publicly pressured him to take action on specific subjects. Later, as Insurgencia became more pervasively present in the institutional setting, and De Magistris' position evolved with respect to the initial configuration of his allies, the line between the two dimensions – the square and the State – was increasingly blurred. Insurgencia activists have kept taking part in protest actions, also in their institutional capacities – and, often times, alongside the mayor himself. For a few years, particularly during the second mandate, some of the Municipality's most prominent figures projected the image of the 'rebel city', also through their unexpected participation to protest initiatives, particularly contesting the government and national policies (among others, on immigration and taxes). However, Insurgencia's ambivalent alignment, coupled with the growing challenges of the De Magistris administration, has strongly challenged the experience.

Encapsulation

In fact, particularly during the second half of the decade, a mechanism set off of *Encapsulation*. This is to be intended as the enclosing of Insurgencia within the boundaries of a delimited social environment, in a narrow leeway of action and configuration of allies. In fact, the bridging dynamic of the experience has worked well in the early stages of its consolidation, and taken good root in the landscape of local social struggles. In entering its institutional pathway, Insurgencia has been strengthened by the support of its network of grassroots actors, and has indeed followed up on some of those mobilizations. Nonetheless, the bridging motion was halted with the expansion of Insurgencia's institutional presence and integration.

In fact, during De Magistris' second term, a *polarization* dynamic played out, within an intensifying city political debate. In the already highly polarized discussion around the mayor and his administration, contrasts grew starker by the first half of the second De Magistris' mandate, both within and outside the majority. In such a setting, the conduct of the Insurgencia component of DemA was increasingly leveraged to attack the administration, particularly in media outlets and by political opponents. The analysis of the extent of press coverage of Insurgencia, as portrayed by *Figure 6.1*, shows a dramatic increase in mentions of the social center since 2016.

Figure 6.1 Insurgencia, local press coverage (2004-2019).
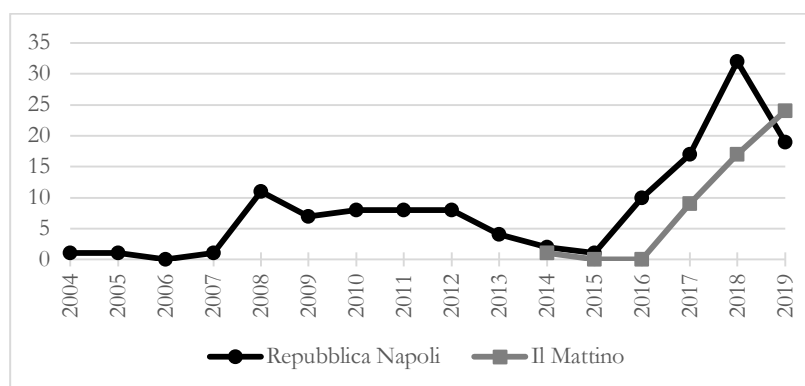
Source: manual selection for the automated search results of the articles available in each newspaper's online archives[125].

The experience was criticized and singled out by institutional political actors in reference to their participation to protests and riots, their radical gestures and stances in institutional contexts, but most of all in reference to their impact and role in allegedly orienting the actions of the mayor. The idea was expressed, that the decisionism of De Magistris was a result of his somehow taking up of a radical, non-dialoguing approach, attributed to Insurgencia[126]. This was but one element of a broader debate ignited during the mayor's second mandate, whose continuation was threatened several times, and even further, about his legacy and succession. Since shortly after the beginning of the 2016-2021 mandate, the majority of De Magistris in the city Council, and the executive cabinet, underwent many changes and replacements, which increased in number over time and reflected the constantly evolving composition of the political forces supporting the mayor. What is more, to many political actors in the city, the experiment of DemA (which, in itself, has suffered from several divisions and breakages) has appeared throughout the decade as strictly conditional upon the political pathway of De Magistris himself. This adds to the explanation of why the debate polarization has increased dramatically in the last few years, leading up to the 2021 election (where De Magistris won't be able to run again).

As a consequence, Insurgencia was cornered into an ever-narrower environment. In this respect, the experience has known a dynamic of *isolation*, intended as the deterioration of ties with ally actors and progressive distancing from them, in a context where the forming of new alliances appears unlikely or difficult for the time being. Insurgencia's difficulty in consolidating alliances within the Municipality – already strong, due to its peculiar position in Naples' institutional politics and the harsh competition inside the majority – has increased with the growing polarizing image of the experience, contributing to an overall encapsulation of its elected officials, and of the experience of Insurgencia overall, within its institutional setting and role. As the mayor and the administration came under growing strain, Insurgencia has been placed under the crossfire of multiple actors, both within and outside the Municipality, while also increasingly distant from De Magistris. The appointment, at the end of 2019, of Insurgencia councilor Eleonora De Majo to the municipal cabinet, with the prerogative of cultural policy, was read by some as a last appeasement move on the part of the mayor[127]. In turn, it spurred a new wave of critiques towards both the mayor himself and

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[125] Article leads, previews and summary columns are counted as part of the main article to which they refer.
[126] This narrative, strongly present in the representation of the administration offered by the media and institutional actors' public statements and recollections, was also often referenced in the interviews I conducted with elected officials.
[127] Eleonora De Majo later resigned from the post of *assessore*, in March 2021.

Insurgencia. The underlying progressive distancing, at the same time, paved the way for a deep fracture between Insurgencia and De Magistris.

Adding to the isolation of the Insurgencia component of DemA from the rest of the Council and from the administration, the contrasts between Insurgencia and different other movement actors and self-managed spaces in the city progressively widened, and conflicts were publicly exposed. This distancing from other collective actors, in addition to attesting to the deepening of contrasts between diverging movement pathways and to the crystallization of Insurgencia's difficult position, further contributed to the narrowing of Insurgencia's social environment.

The political influence of Insurgencia: what impact for a collective actor in power?

The dynamics described above have shaped a pathway of high political influence for Insurgencia (*Table 6.5*). The first dimension of influence to evolve during the decade was procedural access, followed by policy; both of these dimensions have proved mutually impactful with respect to the dimension of institutional attitudes.

| **Procedural access** |
| - Strong institutional presence |
| **Policy** |
| - Tearing down of 'le Vele' in Scampia
- Work within the administration |
| **Attitudes** |
| - Recognition, considered as highly influential on an institutional level (but the physical spaces are considered illegitimate). |

Table 6.5 The political influence of Insurgencia: dimensions and outcomes.

It goes almost without saying that, in light of its significant presence inside institutions, particularly since 2016, Insurgencia has gained a wide and steady *procedural access* to institutional decision-making, at a variety of levels and through activists working in multiple capacities, from staff positions to elected official roles.

Given Insurgencia's peculiar institutional position, the tracing of its *policy* outcomes is complicated by the need to disentangle specific battles (attributable to Insurgencia's elected officials) from the daily administrative activity of the massive and composite municipal machine of Naples. A consideration of the district level, namely of Insurgencia's years of government of the city's Third *Municipalità*, is beyond the main scope of the present work. Certainly, among the significant interventions across the district, the regeneration over the past decade of the Sanità neighborhood, in the historical part of this vast *Municipalità*, has been an extensive process, one that has required huge financing and research, and the patient weaving of social ties through aggregation, education, and urban planning. While an entire dissertation could be dedicated just to the regeneration of the Sanità[128], this quote from an activist's interview sums up the composite nature of the work that this governmental position has entailed for Insurgencia since 2016.

> From a management perspective, it was a difficult challenge. In addition, the Third *Municipalità* has a unique internal heterogeneity, compared to the rest of the city – probably also due to its central location. You

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[128] For more on civic engagement and the regeneration of the Sanità district, see Flora (2020).

have the hilly area near the Vomero, the Colli Aminei, which is a residential area, populated by the petite bourgeoisie. There is peripheral area, Capodichino and Rione Amicizia, way more similar to the popular neighborhoods in the Northern part of the city, such as Scampia. But above all, the most interesting challenge has been the regeneration of a segment of the historical center, the Sanità. […] Ivo Poggiani was elected president of the *Municipalità*, and we built this practice across the territory, of listening, discussing, with all that fabric of local associations active in the neighborhood. This has produced results on the administrative level, probably the most successful experiment of the entire De Magistris experience, is the regeneration and modeling of the Third *Municipalità*.

(#I1SC8, activist, Insurgencia)

However, focusing on the municipal level, the crossing of activists' accounts, municipal documents, and interviews to elected officials, seems to suggest that the range of action of Insurgencia have remained mostly within the boundaries of previous committees' struggles, fostering existing relationships and following up with some of the grassroots mobilizations, but also limiting Insurgencia's range of influence, maintaining it fairly enclosed (in terms of areas of intervention), despite its favorable position of access within the Municipality. To compile a thorough tracing of the policies more strongly claimed by Insurgencia's elected officials on a municipal level, I have combined interview materials with a mapping of contents shared on social media on this subject. The accordance emerging from the different sources allows to identify some key policy changes brought about by Insurgencia's presence in the Municipality. It should be borne in mind that this is likely not an exhaustive recollection, but one that pinpoints the policies most directly and unambiguously attributable to the action of Insurgencia and its cooperation with other actors.

The main one concerns the obtainment of the provision for the demolition of the Vele – 'the Sails' – residential complex[129] on the outskirts of Naples (the first of the two Sails having been torn down in February 2020, the tearing down of the second is foreseen for 2022) and the regeneration of the area, with the construction of new housing structures. After three decades of work by local Vele citizens' committee, the struggle came to be represented inside the Municipality by Insurgencia itself. The Administration, the Vele committee, and the University of Naples worked together at a new planning project for the area. Insurgencia's elected officials, as candidates 'of the committee'[130], worked alongside the committee itself and the administration in the management of the process, particularly in navigating the complexities of housing transfers and public tenders. The project, from which stemmed a series of local tenders, as well as a call for tender on peripheral areas approved by the Italian government, was a pivotal part in the demonstration, to the local and national public, of the 'anomalous' approach to planning advocated by the De Magistris' administration.

It is, for example, the case of the *Vele*, where politics had been absent. What I mean here, is not that it did not have projects for that area, but they were entirely top-down projects – not just that they weren't "discussed" with the collectivity (which is basically how everyone interprets the role of participatory democracy), it is not enough to discuss with the collectivity, the point is to plan together, think together, share a vision. Which, on the one hand, entails rebuilding a relationship between the collectivity and institutions, a relationship that – we see this all across Italy, but also abroad – had been severed. On the other hand, it entails building shared projects, so that the collectivity is actually and truly the author of a project. Not in a fake or formal manner, but in a real way. […] To achieve this, there is a method that you establish, but you establish it every time and together with the collectivity. The public assemblies held at the foot the

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[129] Originally composed of seven buildings, the estate complex has long been known as one of the key locations of Naples' Camorra clan wars and activity. The Sails are featured, among others, in the renowned book by Roberto Saviano, *Gomorrah*, as well as its TV and movie adaptations, and for decades have been associated in the public debate with urban degradation and the absence of the State.
[130] As activists of the committee have defined them.

> Vele, for one, in a neighborhood where politics had an enormous difficulty going, have been over fifty. It was necessary to place at the center precisely that rage of the collectivity. […] The institution was welcomed as an actor there to preserve that project and perspective, and therefore from then on, went back to being a friendly institution for people, and to us that was a pivotal principle.
>
> (#IE12, cabinet member, city administration)

Within the more day-to-day administrative activity, one other intervention particularly worth mentioning has to do with the question of housing rights. It is the approval, in 2019, of an amendment to the Single Programming Document (*Documento unico di programmazione*), presented by Insurgencia city councilors Eleonora De Majo and Rosario Andreozzi, providing for the possibility for individuals in situations of documented poverty to receive income and housing benefits from third party organizations, regardless of the regularity of the status of their tax payments. Granted, as part of the administration majority (and later of the cabinet), and of the political platform of DemA, Insurgencia activists have actively contributed to many political battles and stances brought forth by Luigi De Magistris, from the welcoming of migrants, to the contestation of the governmental *commissariamento* (compulsory administration) of the former industrial area of Bagnoli, to the battle against the debt of Municipalities (an issue that has been weighing heavily on Southern local administrations across the decade)[131].

Interestingly, what emerges from the analysis of interviews and statements, is that through procedural access and policy influence Insurgencia has gained recognition, in terms of *institutional attitudes*, as a legitimate (and highly influential) interlocutor. Its electoral performance, and the obtainment of several prominent roles within the institutional realm of municipal politics, providing broad political and administrative access to decision-making, have placed a new spotlight on the experience, bringing many elected officials to, only then, fully reckon the significance and political influence of Insurgencia. Amongst the interviewees I interacted with, everyone perceives Insurgencia as undoubtedly the most influential and relevant movement actor in the current Neapolitan political landscape. At the same time, the highly polarizing nature of the experience, and particularly its link to the mayor, also emerged evidently in interviewees' accounts (mainly from the opposition), and were often deployed as a tool for criticism to both Insurgencia and the administration.

> Inside institutions, they didn't do all too bad, if I must say. Then, some of their methods I don't like, but they know this too. […] Insurgencia has literally influenced the aggressive attitude of the mayor, that feeling of being alone against the worlds. This isolationist politics, this was inspired by their way of being and of acting, up to a certain point it worked, today it is revealing itself a terrible boomerang. But they have inspired him in all sectors, precisely in this approach to political negotiation, the "mayor of the streets", so many closings to a dialogue with the oppositions.
>
> (#IE6, elected official, opposition)

The distinction also tends to be made, by many elected officials, between Insurgencia as an institutional actor (and its activist in institutional roles), and Insurgencia's physical spaces (namely, Insurgencia's premise in via vecchia San Rocco, and even more Mezzocannone Occupato, a space occupied since 2012 by the collective, inside a former canteen of the University Federico II). While the collective Insurgencia is legitimized as a political actor, regardless of the political value judgments expressed by interviewees, its self-managed

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[131] The battle on debt, specifically, resulted in a *delibera* approved by the municipal executive, n. 117 of 24/04/2020 against the unjust debt of Municipalities. However, the document alarmed the Municipality's bank creditors, which has more recently resulted in the administration downplaying the administrative nature of the act (reassuring the public that the debt of Naples' municipal institution shall be paid back), and highlighting its political value instead.

experiences are not. Institutional attitudes towards these spaces are largely informed by citizens' complaints about the difficult coexistence with these realities (due to parties' noise, most frequently), as well as by the overall squatting situation, with respect to which activists have refused to enter into any recognition process.

> Insurgencia, for example, has never wanted to be recognized as an urban common, it said "no, we are no urban common, we are something else, a political battle". Perfect. But, if there are people who are willing to engage in politics – which is a wonderful thing – if they don't have the resources to finance themselves, you can understand it, but […] democracy has its costs, and needs to be accessible in an equal way for everyone, so if any political party needs a space, a rent, and through the offices that it holds it has the possibility to cover that cost, it needs to cover it, it cannot squat.
> (#IE11, elected official, opposition)

> There's the reality of the Ex-Opg, which in practice provides services to the community, so you have the medical clinic, language courses for foreigners […]. Then, you have other spaces – I am thinking of Insurgencia, which has its seat, its social center, that has become organic to the administration, or Mezzocannone Occupato – where it is difficult to trace those experiences back to a good for the collectivity. […] It is not ok: when a common good is in the hands of someone holding a public office, and they do whatever they please with that common good… and depriving that territory in need, of a space, which gets used for other things.
> (#IE7, elected official, opposition)

From a general standpoint of political influence, the dimension of Insurgencia as a social center, a physical space of collective action, has lost part of its centrality during the decade. In fact, as retraced throughout this section, the policy outcomes obtained by Insurgencia, its gained access to decision-making, and the recognition of the institutional elite, have largely (and increasingly) related to Insurgencia as a political collective and as an institutional actor.

6.5 *L'Asilo*

Born within the crisis, from a struggle of cultural workers, the Ex Asilo Filangieri has become the epicenter of Naples' struggle for urban commons. This peculiar self-managed space, located in a former convent in the city center, was initially occupied and later recognized as a common good by the Municipality, following a process of legal innovation led, among others, by the Asilo itself.

From its early start, the community of inhabitants of the Asilo Filangieri is fluid and diverse, and encompasses among others numerous artists and cultural operators, jurists and researchers, and activists. The self-rule of the space is based on a weekly Management Assembly (*Assemblea di gestione*), which deliberates through the consensus method and is in charge of ordinary management and planning of activities; a bi-monthly Steering Assembly (*Assemblea di indirizzo*) that discusses general guidelines and specific issues; working tables on specific areas of action and projects; and the Committee of Guarantors, which acts as a last resort guarantee[132]. The political posture of the Asilo is not directly ascribable to a specific area of social antagonism. Its engagement unfolds primarily through a method of relation (horizontalist, cooperative, anti-racist, anti-sexist, plural, creative), applied to the self-management of a reappropriated space. The Ex Asilo Filangieri is part of the national network of emerging commons (Rete nazionale dei beni comuni emergenti), as well as of Naples' commons platform 'Commons Napoli'.

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[132] See further G. Micciarelli (2021) "Path For New Institutions And Urban Commons - Legal and political acts for the recognition of urban civic and collective use starting from Naples". Report available at: https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/path_for_new_institutions_and_urban_commons_-_giuseppe_micciarelli.pdf.

Table 6.6 illustrates the pathway of the Asilo. The unlocking of the space's perimeter – particularly to encompass an innovative focus of action on law and entailing a highly porose nature –, combined with the territorialization of its action and the establishment of a diverse network, have bridged the experience of the Asilo with a broad social environment. As a consequence, the actor has known a mechanism of societal legitimization, through the brokerage of prominent figures and groups, and the increasing public certification of parts of its action. Finally, a double-edged institutionalization of the space has been prompted by the convergence of mayor De Magistris' political goals with those of the Asilo on the subject of urban commons, while allowing for the dissemination of the Asilo's institutional outcomes to other collective actors. In fact, in addition to gaining high procedural access to decision-making, and the recognition of local institutional actors, the Asilo was able to influence a municipal regulation formalizing its status as a common good (thereby entrusting the space to the community of its inhabitants, through the tool of 'civic use' of public spaces), subsequently extended to seven other self-managed experiences in the city.

Table 6.6 Pathway of the Asilo: mechanisms, sub-mechanisms and dimensions of political influence.

Collective Actor	Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms			Political Influence
Ex Asilo Filangieri	**Bridging** Perimeter unlocking; Territorialization; Network.	**Legitimization** Brokerage; Certification through itemizing.	**Double-edged institutionalization** Convergence; Dissemination.	Policy Procedural Attitudes

Bridging

On 8 May 2010, the former 'Asilo Filangieri' of via Maffei (the seat of Naples' 'Universal Forum of Cultures 2013' Foundation), was first occupied by a coordination of movement actors – named "Forum2013? N' ata palla!", or "Forum2013? Another bullshit story!" –, that aimed at opening a critical discussion on the 'Forum of Cultures' large event planned for 2013, and at reflecting on the needs of the Neapolitan territory as a whole. The historical palace, located in the central San Lorenzo neighborhood, was used as a boarding school for orphans and underprivileged youth in the afterwar period, and had been abandoned following Naples' earthquake of 1980. After several forced eviction attempts, and a dialogue with the Municipality, the occupant group was allowed the use of the space for one day of the week (on Wednesdays) to carry out its activity. Meanwhile, in the city, the public debate progressed on the failing governance of the Forum. In December 2011, a public assembly about the Forum was called in the space of via Maffei by the forum La Rete, a grassroots organization of artists and cultural workers of Naples. The assembly was based on a manifesto, centered around four key points: urban planning and city transformations; cultural programming and the contents of the Forum; administrative transparency; participation forms for the city's cultural world.

On 2 March 2012, collective 'la Balena' (the Whale) entered the Asilo. The collective had been active for a while in Naples, spurred by the mobilization of the Valle Theatre in Rome. Its assemblies, initially hosted by the self-managed space Lo Ska, included activists from university collectives, Marxists-Leninists and various Autonomous groups. The struggle brought forth by the Balena revolved around the crisis of cultural work due to austerity policies, and the issue of common goods. The mobilization was marked by the predominant

feeling of an underlying necessity, to imagine new management practices than the ones enforced in institutional settings. The struggle, then, was significantly focused on rethinking modes and forms above all else – for instance, to depatriarchalize practices[133] in the daily arenas of social and professional life. The approach of the Balena was one of questioning, rather than providing straight-up answers, but also needed a space to experiment alternative solutions. The collective organized a peaceful protest at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Naples, which lasted a few hours and gathered around a hundred people for an assembly on site. Soon afterwards, the group decided to enter a building that symbolically evoked the detrimental system of value extraction in the cultural field: the Asilo Fiangieri, seat of the Forum of Cultures. Immaterial and entertainment workers joined forces with theater workers from the Valle Theatre in Rome and the Coppola Theatre in Catania, as well as cultural and social movement activists. For three days, events were held inside the space on the situation of cultural policies, welfare and the job crisis in Italy and in Naples. The city's *assessore* for Culture, Antonella Di Nocera, was also present, and asked occupants about how they envisaged to interact with city institutions, particularly the incumbent Administration.

> «Given that what you talk about, are the very contents and subjects of this Administration, how do you plan to interact with institutions, with this Administration?», asks the *assessore*. «This is the movement of shared participation. Ours may be an ambitious project, but the objective is to initiate a reasoning on the participation of experts and citizens, and on self-government», is the answer of the Balena.
> (C. Zagaria, "'La Balena' occupa gli spazi del Forum delle culture". *Repubblica Napoli*, 3 March 2012)

Within the kermesse, an assembly was organized on the subject of commons, which saw over three hundred participants. The Balena decided to rename the space of via Maffei 'Asilo della conoscenza e della creatività' (the Asylum of knowledge and creativity), and transformed it into a cultural and artistic production laboratory. The occupants' wish, was to create a space in which to question the forms of cultural policies and practices, including their governance, and the deep meaning and potential of common goods. The occupation was initially intended to only last those three days – instead, a new path was inaugurated, and the Asilo is currently sstill active in via Maffei.

From the beginning of its history, the trajectory of the Asilo Filangieri has experienced a *Bridging* mechanism.

In fact, the space's action, even in its early stages, was marked by a purposeful *perimeter unlocking*. This dynamic has particularly related to the Asilo's focus of action as a self-managed and collective experience. Born well within the crisis, the Asilo saw the light with the contestation led by cultural workers, but from there, opened up an unprecedented space of experimentation and elaboration on the question of self-government and common goods. Drawing upon previous movement struggles in the city, and attracting technical and intellectual resources into its experience, the Ex Asilo Filangieri has extended its contestation to a wider struggle around urban space and the protagonism of local communities in its regeneration and management. Secondly, the unlocking of the Asilo's perimeter has been determined by the innovative nature of its action. As recalled, the actors contesting public policies and power structures during the initial stages of the Asilo belonged to a specific professional category, and came from backgrounds other than political activism. Occupants' grievances stemmed from the crisis, but also turned the spotlight onto a sector – that of entertainment and cultural workers – which, up to the experience of Teatro Valle in 2011, had been very little represented in Italian collective struggles. This peculiar configuration resulted

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[133] In this respect, one activist explained during an interview, the input of the Roman feminist activists, with whom the Balena got in close contact, was pivotal.

in a highly experimental approach. Indeed, self-managed spaces are by definition laboratories: of social aggregation, innovative practices, construction of identities. However, one element in particular that was crucial to this heterogeneous, crisis-ridden, permeable experience since its very start, and that put the central spin on its innovative character, was its focus on the law, on turning what started as an occupation into a new model of normative regulation for urban spaces. In the words of an Asilo inhabitant:

> The grammar of struggles, over the last years, has changed on two levels: one is that of law, and the other is that of mutualism. The way I see it, the two proceed hand in hand […]. While for other generations, the most important thing was the content, here the most important thing was the container, but this, for a political reason. The element of governance tools was crucial, because activists knew that the main problem was precisely the management of cultural institutions (discriminations, oligarchic structures, clientelist public funds…). […] When we entered the Asilo, we said: we can imagine that this space be managed directly by people through a regulation governing the use of the space, a form of regulation that could replace a subject and trigger a new process.
> (#I2SC10 activist, L'Asilo)

The novelty of the Asilo's experimentation around the law and its categories, and especially in the redefinition of the concept of 'commons', and its effective deployment in the public debate, have contributed to a key policy change for the space itself, while setting the ground for the inclusion of a galaxy of self-managed spaces in Naples. In this respect, the Asilo reached outside the traditional toolbox of urban occupations and self-managed spaces, opening the perimeter of its experience to transform an apparent contradiction (a collective carrying out an illegal occupation, and at the same time preoccupied with matters of law and regulations) into a compelling cooperative work with institutional politics.

A second dynamic involved the *territorialization* of the Asilo's collective action. On the one hand, the space has engaged in practices ascribable to direct social action. As the experience was born to contest the condition of entertainment workers, its first focus was on supporting those workers, opening the Asilo Filangieri to the rehearsals of hundreds of small productions in the city that were in need of a space to use for free. Among its core activities, the Asilo has organized numerous cultural and artistic laboratories and initiatives. Beyond the cultural and artistic sphere, a few smaller projects have also been carried out, such as an urban garden and a woodwork workshop. These practices have allowed the space to encounter a broad public, and allowed for the weaving of social ties and the shaping of a wide and diverse community. Yet, even more, the territorialization of the Asilo's action has stemmed from its engagement around the question of common goods. The reappropriation and claiming of an urban space as a common good, can be understood, in a sense, as a peculiar form of DSA. In directly addressing the core meanings of urban space, in both its physical-material and relational dimension, the struggle for commons provides for the production of territory through collective practices within a localized environment (self-governing, care and use of a space). At the same time, however, in the case of the Asilo, the struggle for commons was also a combat for the recognition of that very territory and its community into a formalized framework, in ways capable of reflecting its identity and its value to the city as a system. In this respect, the Asilo's struggle for commons almost immediately targeted institutions and power-holders as well.

Partly as a consequence of the Asilo's heterogeneity with respect to the collective actors' landscape of the city, as well as of the combination of political sensibilities that came to inhabit the space, and partly as a result of the its territorialization of collective action, a *network* sub-mechanism took place in the trajectory of the Asilo Filangieri. This can also be described – drawing upon field notes and interactions with dwellers of the space – as the shaping of the

intensely porose nature of the Asilo. Differently put, a high degree of permeability and accessibility of the space, a context in which little to no barriers stand in the way of individuals and groups willing to enter into dialogue or interaction with the space. A framework that has been maintained as one of the pillars of the space's identity.

> We, as a ground rule, do everything: fascism, racism and sexism are the limits, but beyond those – and organizational issues that may arise (maybe a room is already being used) –, we do everything. Even we disagree, we say yes to everyone, but you need to listen to all voices. Which is not a liberal approach, it is a dialectic approach. […] A traversability that at times has been mistaken for an impolitic nature.
> (#I2SC10 activist, L'Asilo)

This porose setting also prompted the Asilo to seek external contributions: intellectuals, experts, activists, in a process of rich network consolidation. This element of technical expertise and the intellectual connotation of the space, well explained by one interviewee who arrived to the Asilo from academia, have been pivotal both in the space's internal inputs and its external image. On the one hand, it has informed the following steps of elaboration within the space's community, calling for the re-discussion of different theoretical concepts and tools in a back-and-forth between theory and practice. On the other hand, the high alphabetization level and social position of some of its representative interlocutors, has contributed to smoothening the interaction of the Asilo with municipal politics, while also determining the overall positive institutional perception of the Asilo.

> External people were called, who didn't come from that history, and this made it so that, two weeks after the occupation of the Asilo, some people were called, who – like myself – had not been a part of the initial occupation, including people from more traditional movements (environmental struggles and so on), who started to imagine some forms, each bringing their own contribution.
> (#I2SC10 activist, L'Asilo)

Legitimization

This shaping of a wide and open social environment, through the establishment of an innovative action focus and the involvement of a diverse conglomerate of people, including prominent experts endowed with significant personal and professional networks, has prompted a mechanism of *Legitimization* of the Asilo.

First, this dynamic emerged from the increasing *brokerage* operated in the public debate on behalf of the experience. Already since 2012, the local press, particularly the progressive one, began to host the appeals and reflections of university professors, intellectuals, established figures from the cultural world, brokering to the Administration on behalf of the Asilo. Throughout 2012 and 2013 the debate intensified, both in the local press and within the Municipality, about the Forum and the fate of via Maffei's space. The experience of the Asilo began to receive growing public expressions of support, making the matter increasingly consensus-sensitive. Among others, workers union CGIL's local branch manifested their support and, around the same time, a substantial petition of support against the threat of eviction of the Balena, was signed by several prominent culture and entertainment figures. Notably, the petition in question criticized the Administration's approach to cultural production spaces, accusing the Municipality of hiding behind bureaucratic obstacles and of siding with the conservation of privileges in the cultural arena, and called for institutional support to innovative models of management. Petitioners included, among many others, jurist and philosopher Gerardo Marotta, historian Salvatore Settis, philosopher and editor Maurizio Zanardi, writers' collective Wu Ming, film producer Angelo Curti.

At the same time, even amidst critical voices, a *certification through itemizing* of the experience took root in the city debate. Certification statements, from both institutional and civil society actors, leveraged the regeneration of neglected city spaces, and the filling of urban voids. Progressive newspaper Repubblica, in particular, praised the role of the Asilo as an incubator of cultural and artistic experimentations, as well as a provider of aggregation opportunities for the local youth. Two functions traditionally fulfilled by social centers, now also incarnated by this new form of self-managed experience. While opponents of the Asilo's occupation lamented in particular the illegitimate nature of some portions of the space's activity (the unsolved situation of the occupation, the unauthorized administration of food and beverages…), a simultaneous certification was carried out, of the dynamicity of the Asilo as a producer of cultural initiatives and artistic activities, and as a catalyst of highly qualified expert contributions, against the background of institutional immobility and the social desertification of urban voids.

Lastly, the certification of the Asilo did not only occur in the media and political debate strictly speaking, but also emerged from the growing academic interest in the Ex Asilo Filangieri's experiment. In fact, scientific publications on the subject have flourished in the second half of the 2010s, addressing the social innovation features and juridical instruments developed as a result of the Asilo's self-management experience and elaborations. Several works have been authored by scholars participating in, or close to, the space's pathway, contributing to the diffusion of knowledge of the Asilo Filangieri in the academic realm, and prompting the interest of other scholars in investigating and discussing the experience.

Double-edged institutionalization

The Asilo has then known a mechanism of *Double-edged institutionalization*. On the one hand, the institutionalization of the Asilo was affected by a growing pressure towards the definition of self-managed experiences. In this respect, it has resulted from a convergence of interests between the city administration (particularly in terms of narrative) and the space, within a largely consensus-sensitive discussion. Nonetheless, this double-edged mechanism of institutionalization has also allowed the Asilo to claim the lead of a highly influential change, entering into the institutional realm and working to shape the regulation of urban commons from within, while providing enhanced citizenship rights to self-managed spaces.

Soon after the occupation, as the new experience took shape, the municipal administration and the space engaged in a dialogue. This was due, first and foremost, to a *convergence* between the experience and the De Magistris' administration. The subject of common goods had been among the key issues that the mayor had built his campaign around (a composite discussion had been ongoing in the city for some years), and most importantly was willing to build his legacy on. The development of the 'common goods' concept within the De Magistris administration had started in 2011 with Alberto Lucarelli, professor of constitutional law at the University of Naples, appointed by the mayor to the newly created role of Councilor (*assessore*) for Common Goods. In a city ravaged by the economic crisis, ineffective public management and staggering debt, the administration launched the experiment of "Acqua Bene Comune" (Water Common Good), a public enterprise in charge of water management, and the Executive included for the first time the institutionalized concept of "common goods" in the Municipality's Statute (art. 1 c. 2). A participatory initiative was also launched, the "Laboratorio Napoli per una Costituente dei beni comuni" (Naples Laboratory for a Constituent of Common Goods), but after the enthusiasm of the first assemblies, the laboratory progressively lost grip. However, in such a setting, the existence and claims of the Asilo Filangieri presented the De Magistris administration with the opportunity to move

forward on the question of commons, and to further substantiate its political arguments. An Executive act was first passed (signed by Alberto Lucarelli), the *Delibera* 400 of 25 May 2012, recognizing and including the locales of the former Asilo Filangieri

> in the culture places destined to collective enjoyment and civic initiative.
> (Municipality of Naples. *Delibera 400/2012*)

However, the process was not a smooth one. In December 2012, a report on the allegedly bad management of the former Asilo Filangieri was compiled by Francesco Maid, head of the Heritage Department of the Municipality (whose Councilor, *assessore* Tuccillo, was openly contesting the occupation of the Asilo), hinting at a forced eviction. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of the Asilo drafted a set of rules for the civic use of the complex, establishing rights and duties of participation and an ensemble of self-governing bodies (two assemblies, one of management and one of direction, thematic groups, an operative committee, and an observatory on regulations).

In 2013, the controversy around the Asilo escalated. The locales at the third floor of the building were confiscated by law enforcement and the space itself raised the tone of the dispute. This was matched, according to local news reports, by strong support online, and by the solidarity of the Councilor for Culture, *assessore* Antonella Di Nocera. Rapidly, the Municipality called for a meeting with the space, the inhabitants of the Asilo enacted a symbolic protest by placing door seals to offices of the Municipality, the Region and the Province, and a few days later removed the seals from the doors of the Asilo, reappropriating the space. The city administration, internally divided, was confronted with the choice of whether to see this spaces' management change all the way through. Following the Council act n.7 of 2014, which recognized the value of ongoing experiences in the municipal territory, carried out by groups and committees of citizens "according to logics of self-government and experimentation of the direct management of public spaces", the Executive *Delibera* 893 of 29 December 2015 recognized the former Asilo Filangieri among the public properties qualified as common goods. As the space and the Municipality's bureaucracy and executive interacted on the technical contents of the provision, politically this step provided the Asilo with the full reception of their novel proposition, and (along with the following *delibera*) allowed De Magistris' to exit the impasse of his divided majority and act as the upholder of a significant policy and juridical innovation. The formal recognition of the self-management system put in place over the years in the space, according to the statement released in January 2016 by *assessore* Carmine Piscopo to the local press, did not 'formalize' or recognize an occupation, but rather

> from a situation of initial conflict, a demand from the collectivity is recognized, along with a pathway of civic use of a space that produces culture, and that, starting today, belongs to everyone, because some rules have been established.
> (C. Zagaria, "Il Filangieri diventa 'Asilo della cultura'". *Repubblica Napoli*, 3 January 2016)

In 2015, the Prosecutor's Office of the Court of Auditors opened an investigation on the 'illegitimate allotments' of public property to not-for-profit organizations, which did not result in any convictions. Proving the highly consensus-sensitive nature of this discussion, the debate on self-managed spaces resurged during the months leading up to the 2016 municipal elections where De Magistris was about to run for a second mandate. Interestingly, out of the 868 articles mentioning the "Asilo Filangieri" on local newspaper La Repubblica – Naples, while the vast majority are listings of cultural events held within the space, the rest are concentrated

around either 2013 (focusing mainly on the debate about the spaces' management and the Forum legacy) or 2016, with almost no chronicle pieces after De Magistris' reelection. The analysis of local press contents during that time, yields numerous back-and-forths between elected officials and law experts (notably, the experience of the Asilo obtained among others the support of Paolo Maddalena, vice-president emeritus of the Constitutional Court). Controversies among different city actors around the Asilo were exposed on a regular basis, as the space grew as a contested and relevant space in the urban environment. Among others, the cultural center 'La città del sole' (The city of the sun) – seat of a historical publishing house of the city – received an order of eviction from its locales, situated inside the building of via Maffei. The center's head, renowned leftist editor Sergio Manes, expressed his critical reading of the Asilo to the press, stressing what he considered to be some close ties of the experience with mayor De Magistris and his political project.

> The collective is a pilot project on the management of common goods, that the mayor has completed in order to make a manifesto out of it.
> ("Il Comune sgombera Città del sole dall'ex Asilo, resisteremo". *Repubblica Napoli,* 22 April 2016)

Amidst these contradictions, once the recognition of the space as a common good was reached, the Asilo became a model for urban space management, as a result of its anomalous experimentation around legal categories and the concept 'commons', and the significant institutional response to its claims. The institutionalization of the Ex Asilo Filangieri, in other words, was also the means by which a dynamic of *dissemination* of institutional change could be ignited. In October 2015, a platform was born, under the name of Massa Critica ('critical mass'), reuniting an array of local organizations, from associations and committees to movement actors (Gargiuolo and Cirulli 2017). Its purpose was to engage in a dialogue with the Municipality, to support extension of the model of civic participation on commons formed with the Asilo Filangieri to a wider set of self-managed spaces. The platform later became the Table of Common Goods or Public Assembly of Freed Spaces (Tavolo dei beni comuni or Assemblea pubblica degli spazi 211iberate), comprised of representatives from the seven spaces that would later be included in the municipal regulation, along with representatives from the Asilo.

Indeed, such a large win risked generating imbalances (and thus, tensions) among movement organizations in the city. Instead, the Asilo was presented with the opportunity to claim the lead of a broader process of change. The space decided to engage in a larger struggle and attempt to make the same recognition possible for other experiences.

> We understood that our conquest of the *delibera* risked becoming a problem (you know, they tell you: 'Oh, you obtained it and the others didn't, you struck a deal with De Magistris'), when really, we had carried out this struggle publicly, but no one had given us any credit back then. And so, we said to ourselves: let's help others to obtain the same. We worked for a year (with a negative effect on the Asilo, because we dispersed our forces to do this), even with some conflicts with the Administration […]. And it was nice, because I found myself with those who, at eighteen, even though I was not a part of Officina, I knew as militants of Officina: Mario, Alfonso… all demonstrating together, thinking the same things then, even though we came from different stories.
> (#I2SC10 activist, L'Asilo)

At the same time, this effort fit well into the overarching political platform of the De Magistris administration, and the fostering of its narrative on the codification of urban commons. In this respect, the convergence between movement and institutional actors' goals also allowed for such dissemination of outcomes to a broader range of self-managed

experiences. In fact, following De Magistris' reelection as mayor in June 2016, after a campaign largely centered around the myth of the 'rebel' city of commons, with the *Delibera* n. 446/2016 seven self-managed spaces in the city were formally recognized as common goods: Villa Medusa, the former 'Lido Pola' in Bagnoli, the Ex Opg (OPG Je so' pazzo), the 'Giardino Liberato', the former Conservatory of Santa Fede Liberata, the former juvenile prison Filangieri (now 'Scugnizzo Liberato') and the fomer 'Schipa' school.

The political influence of the Asilo: building commons by law

The pathway of the Asilo sheds a fascinating light on the question of commons as social movement outcomes, a subject that has only recently started to be addressed (in works such as that of Varvarousis et al. 2020) and has yet to be thoroughly comprehended by academic literature. *Table 6.7* summarizes the evolution of the Asilo's dimensions of political influence, all tightly related to the struggle for commons and its progressive incorporation into the institutional realm.

Procedural access - *Osservatorio cittadino permanente sui beni comuni della città di Napoli* - Institutionalized framework for urban commons
Policy - *delibere* (2012, 2014, 2015) recognizing L'Asilo as a 'common good' - *delibera* (2016) applying the same framework to 7 spaces
Attitudes - Recognition.

Table 6.7 The political influence of the Asilo: dimensions and outcomes.

Since 2012, institutional acts emanated by the municipal Executive in Naples have specified the definition of the concept of urban commons, which has come to represent more than an administrative tool – rather, a paradigm of collective participation and a political reference of city identity.

At the core of the Asilo's internal elaboration, was the tool of 'civic use' of public goods perceived as commons by the collectivity. The experimentation on civic uses began with the *delibera* of 2012, which engaged the Municipality to guarantee a form of use of the space of the Ex Asilo Filangieri, so as to foster the consolidation of the practice of civic use of common goods by the Asilo's community of cultural workers. In this first provision, the space's assembly and roundtables only held a consultive role, while decision-making power rested formally with cabinet members. Three years of discussions, meetings, and studying of viable solutions, allowed the cooperation between the Asilo and the Administration to transform this early experimentation into a new regulation framework, recognizing civic uses as a new form of direct management of public assets (Micciarelli 2017).

In 2013, the Observatory on Common Goods was born, at first under the presidency of *assessore* Lucarelli – who would later be substituted by academic and inhabitant of the Asilo, Giuseppe Micciarelli. Always in 2013, Naples formally adopted the Charter of Public Space, elaborated by the Public Space *Biennale* initiative, held in Rome the previous May. Later, as Lucarelli came in conflict with De Magistris and denounced the stalemate and hypocrisy of the common goods process, the mayor inaugurated a phase of expansion of the concept and of its material implications. The functions of the Observatory were in fact modified by the

mayor's Decree n. 55 of 8 March 2018. Today, the Observatory is a consulting body, appointed by the mayor through a public tender aimed at recruiting competent figures who are also on the frontline of the participatory processes on commons within local communities. The organism is comprised of eleven members, and is charged of mapping abandoned spaces that could be included in participatory processes, supporting the communities of common goods and the public dialogue amongst social actors and with institutions as the declarations of civic use are being drafted, formulating assessments on the municipal Executive's proposals regarding common goods and participatory democracy, and overall producing and diffusing knowledge, research and best practices on the management of common goods and horizontal processes of participation and self-regulation.

In 2014, the Executive passed the *Delibera* of 24 April, providing that abandoned estate assets (falling under public property)

> that the collectivity perceives as "common goods", as potentially idoneous for a collective fruition and the fulfilment of general interests,

be entrusted to the management of subjects identified through public notices, and subordinated to the the approval of a "management plan" (*'piano di gestione'*),

> taking into account experiences for the governance of common goods, already existing on the territory of the city.
> (Municipality of Naples, *Delibera* of the Cabinet, n. 258, 24/04/2014)

In 2015, the Asilo itself was fully recognized as a common good by the *Delibera* 893 of 29 January 2015. Notably, the *Delibera* 893 adopted the declaration of civic and collective urban use, redacted by the community of the Asilo, as a regulatory framework for the access, functioning and management of public space. The provision also referenced the concept of 'civic profitability', as in the economic and social advantages generated for the urban environment by the self-organizations of local communities.

Then, in order to extend the possibility of a similar regulatory framework to other experiences across the city, amendments written by activists were passed in the City Council, adding to the provisions of 2015 an explicit reference to civic use regulations and self-organization forms for urban commons, to be recognized through specific collective conventions.

> We modified the *delibera* of 2015, bringing amendments to city councilors who had never done anything for urban commons, with a complex juridical move. In addition to the overarching framework, there were two amendments that read: "Alternatively, conventions for the civic use and urban collective use can be adopted". It passes, we have the City Council *delibera* as a support, and we continue the process, getting to the *delibera* on the seven spaces, with some who had followed the process since the beginning, and others who had joined in even at the last moment.
> (#I2SC10 activist, L'Asilo)

As a consequence, the Municipality activated a mapping of the spaces in the city, that would ascribable to the common goods' category. This entailed a reporting effort of the spaces' action, through the acquisition of each experience's file, comprised of the activities and outputs produced up to that moment and the forms of management developed by occupants. Finally, the seven self-managed spaces recalled above were recognized as "emergent common goods, perceived by citizenry as spaces of civic development and, thereby, strategic" by the municipal *Delibera* 446/2016.

In this respect, the political influence of the Asilo touched upon multiple dimensions. Under the longer impetus of the collective struggle for commons carried out in Naples since the Forum, the question of common goods, already present in the initial phase of the De Magistris' administration[134], was placed firmly on the political agenda and developed. This element is particularly reflected in the program of De Magistris' campaign of 2016, in which common goods (and the active participation of citizens in the related processes) are listed among the top priorities for the upcoming mandate. After having being placed on the agenda, common goods were progressively regulated through the identification of several spaces across the city and their entrusting to the local communities of inhabitants, as well as through the establishment of the municipal Observatory on commons. Through a significant *policy* change, then, on a very specific issue but granting rights and legitimacy to a plurality of actors and experiences, the regulation of commons also ensured a new extent of *procedural access* to institutional decision-making for a number of self-managed spaces. Even more, it could be argued that is has set the foundation for further potential developments in the recognition of CSAs. The grounds upon which these significant changes rest, however, are both legal and political: it is their sturdiness that will determine future trajectories.

In terms of *institutional attitudes*, the ex Asilo Filangieri has indeed been recognized by the city administration, first among self-managed experiences, as a common good of the city. As recalled, the process was a conflictual one among the local institutional elite. However, since the end of the debate on the provisions on commons, among elected officials, also outside of the municipal majority, the Asilo is held in high consideration and recognized as a valuable and innovative experience, increasing the prestige of Naples outside the city. This results, as an outcome of the trajectory, in an uncontested recognition of the space as a legitimate interlocutor. It is also worth noting how, based on all the empirical material gathered throughout this research, the Asilo is probably the self-managed experience of which institutional actors are more widely aware: even the more critical interviewees from the center-right were able to list a variety of activities taking place inside the space. The Asilo's qualified contribution to administrative innovation was also widely recognized by many institutional interviewees (regardless of political affiliation), in addition to its capacity to integrate well with the surrounding territory.

> The former Asilo Filangieri, where action becomes a little more sophisticated, for the subjects that have interpreted that work – which is not just the 'we go there to do things, activities and such', but there was actually born the elaboration, the codification of common spaces, of common goods, which has also been borrowed outside of the city of Naples, with some very interesting works […]. The noble side, I would argue, of freed spaces, obviously it's not that there are less noble sides, but I believe that the codification and use is often left to improvisation.
> (#IE9, elected official, majority)

> It suffices to just talk to people: if you talk to people that live next to the Asilo Filangieri, they're happy about it – if you talk to people living next to other situations that have become something else, they're not happy.
> (#IE11, elected official, opposition)

Naturally, this does not entirely shield the space from the preying of different economic interests, always on the lookout for viable buildings, particularly in the historical city center. One interview, conducted with a center-right elected official, was especially illustrative in this respect.

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[134] Notably, with a dedicated municipal division (*assessorato*) and an initial work around the question of commons.

The Asilo Filangieri – it is wonderful what they do. Theatre workshops, concerts, discussions, roundtables. But do you realize, the Asilo Filangieri, is a perfect hotel, ready, in the city center. Imagine how many jobs that would create […]. I am in no way questioning what they do, I am saying that unfortunately, in my opinion, at the Asilo Filangieri we need to create a hotel. But not because I am against those who occupy the Asilo Filangieri, I would like this to be clear. They could move to a different facility, provided for free with utilities and all.

(#IE6, elected official, opposition)

6.6 Officina99

The pathway of Naples' Officina99 (detailed by *Table 6.8*), closely resembles that of another old-generation social center discussed in the empirical chapter on Bologna, namely Vag61. A classical CSA, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s Officina99 played a pivotal role in the urban and national social centers' scene. The 2000s were marked by the acquisition of the space's occupied locales by the Municipality and their formal assigning to Officina, as well as the questioning process of many self-managed experiences, confronted with mutating social and political conditions that affected the prospects of collective action. With the bust of the crisis, Officina's trajectory was characterized by a mechanism of focus shift, as the social center embraced increasingly localized interactions and struggles within its surrounding territory. At the same time, throughout the decade, the space has been among the very few self-managed experiences that have chosen to remain fully autonomous and separated from institutional politics (Officina has purposefully remained outside of the common goods recognition process, and encourages electoral abstentionism), maintaining a combination of contentious and non-contentious actions. In these respects, the space's trajectory has been characterized by a dynamic of partitioning between space and municipal actors, with a significant normalization of Officina99 in the public debate. While the influence of the social center in terms of municipal policy and procedural access has been low across the post-crisis decade, the rather transversal recognition of Officina on the part of local elected officials yields some interesting insights into the formation of attitudes towards collective actors.

Table 6.8 Pathway of Officina99: mechanisms, sub-mechanisms and dimensions of political influence.

Collective Actor	Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms		Political Influence
Officina99	**Focus shift** Territorialization; Network.	**Partitioning** Normalization; Double tracking.	(Policy) Attitudes (moderate)

Focus Shift

Among the pillars of the golden era of Italian social centers together with the Leoncavallo in Milan (Dines 1999; Cavaliere 2013), for over a decade Officina99 served as an effervescent laboratory of musical, political and artistic development. The experience shaped the very imagery of the city of Naples, all in opening the way for a number of other occupations and collective experimentations (Cavaliere 2013).

Already since the 2000s, the local press of Naples has reported the mobilizations carried out by Officina99 for the rights of migrants, as well as its participation in the struggles of the unemployed, in housing protests and different occupations.

Officina99 was born with the occupation of a building in the periphery of Naples, in via Gianturco, on 1 May 1991, carried out by a generation of activists who had taken part in the student movement, together with the Neapolitan Communist collective. This social center was a crucial actor of the Italian 'No Global' mobilization and, on many levels, has influenced several generations of movement activists. In the words of a historical figure of the space:

[…] located a bit outside of the historical city center, Officina99 shows from the very beginning the peculiarity of being a city social center, a political laboratory, rather than a properly 'territorial' social center as we conceive them today – also with respect to these new urban commons, who have more of a territorial nature. Officina has been a workshop, for one or two decades, for the whole body of the militants of the various collective actors of Naples. From the Opg, to the Bagnoli area, the organized collectives… All of these comrades, at least the older ones, have come in contact with Officina (in addition to demonstrations and initiatives, also through the *Adunata Sediziosa[135]* parties). Everything would get to a synthesis, together with other social actors, […] with the objective of always making the movement grow, keeping it open, and increasing its radicality. During the season of the contestation of globalization, of international counter-summits, Naples brought to a synthesis that work of decades by writing an important page of the city's history, the Global Forum of Naples in 2001, which would come immediately before Genoa and constitute, for both the movement and its counterpart, a sort of general trial.
(#I1SC9 activist, Officina99)

In order to properly grasp the trajectory of Officina99, it is useful to go back in its recollection, to a few years before the onset of the crisis, when the social center's illegal situation became a national affair, and the Municipality stepped in, establishing a significant precedent in the legalization of self-managed and occupied spaces. In 2004, following a lawsuit brought about by the owner of Officina's occupied locales of via Gianturco (namely, entrepreneur Maurizio Casanova), the space was threatened of eviction and investigated. The electricity provider cut the social center's illegal connection. Forty-eight hours later, the Municipality publicly sided with Officina99.

Officina99 can't be touched, sends word Palazzo San Giacomo. More precisely, as explained to Repubblica by *assessore* Raffaele Tecce: «The Municipality of Naples must defend and safeguard an experience that, beyond its political connotation, stands out for its aggregative and pacifist value, and its undeniable cultural meaningfulness».
(C. Sannino, "Tecce si schiera con Officina 99 'Il centro sociale non si tocca'". *Repubblica Napoli*, 14 February 2004)

Prominent names from the arts and cultural world, union leaders, jurists and politicians (mostly from left-wing parties, including the more statalist and institutional ones) also expressed their solidarity, contributing to the extraordinary media resonance of the issue. The case of Officina99 was even escalated to the Justice Minister, Roberto Castelli, who addressed it on television during the "Punto e a capo" tv broadcast in November 2004. Locally, the starker opposition to Officina came from representatives of the far-right party Alleanza Nazionale. The Municipality administration, led by mayor Rosa Russo Iervolino (center-left), engaged in a negotiation for the purchase of the building.

A mediation of excellence for Officina99. The Municipality, via the *assessore* for social policy Raffaele Tecce, has asked prefect Renato Profili to represent institutions during the negotiation with the owner of the facility in Gianturco, that the antagonists have occupied illegitimately since 1991. «Within the amount of 700

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[135] For about a decade, «Adunata Sediziosa» (Riotous Assembly) was a popular festival of antagonist organizations, grassroot movements, social centers, involving several days of independent and alternative music, theater, exhibitions, movies, debates, food and drinks. The festival was long hosted by Officina99, space that had been at the root of much musical experimentation and countercultural production over the years.

thousand euros, Tecce explains, the Municipality is prepared to acquire the property to entrust it to the management of a group referring to Offiicina. Of course, it will be necessary to study some legal instruments of guarantee». News that arrives the day after the public discussion on the social center. In favor of Officina, has mobilized a representation of civil society, «because the social center in Gianturco is a richness for the city and must be safeguarded». A solidarity committee that has signed a petition, calling on institutions to solve the dispute between the occupants and the owner.
("Per l'acquisto di Officina 99 media il prefetto". *Repubblica Napoli*, 24 December 2004)

In the end, in August 2005, the Municipality purchased Officina's locales for 1.200.000 euros. The debate that followed mostly concerned the management and assignation of the space: the right attacked the administration; the left was divided. In August 2006 the municipal Executive approved an act assigning to 'Officina99' the building, in the form of a loan for use and under the supervision of a board of trustees composed of several prominent figures (writers, artists, doctors).

Then, since 2007-2008, and increasingly after the burst of the economic crisis, a mechanism of *Focus shift* took place.

On the one hand, this shift of focus emerged through the *territorialization* of the space's action: contrary to spaces discussed earlier, however, this sub-mechanism in the case of Officina99 has little to do with the practice of DSAs, weakly present in the space's repertoire. Instead, the territorialization element of Officina's action worked through the engagement in local issues' mobilizations and the rooting in its neighborhood, a process that had not taken place during earlier stages of the CSA (Cavaliere 2013), and that was extensively explained to me by an activist during our interview.

Surely, that broader city vocation I was talking about, in time and with the emergence of so many other spaces and the different turns of events involving collectives and organizations… Officina started to progressively lose that weight as a political laboratory, and rather, to reconnect with the territory where it was located, which, meanwhile, as the rest of the city, had undergone significant processes of transformation (from urban planning, but not only that). The Eastern area, where Officina is (therefore, San Giovannni, where there was the former industrial pole of the refineries), for several years has made the object of a process of urban transformation and development. And in that, Officina over the last years has tried, with its activists, to regain a sense of action and territorial connection, with a series of struggles directly related to the territory, to waste management, the redevelopment of the area, criticizing and researching the forms through which this transformation was – and is – taking place.
(#I1SC9 activist, Officina99)

This territorialization aspect of Officina's trajectory is also confirmed by, and has shaped on some level, some of the attitudes of institutional actors towards the experience, as discussed later in this chapter.

The shift of focus emerged, then, from a second element – namely, a *network* dynamic. Progressively localizing its action, Officina99 engaged more and more in the struggles of local committees, particularly on environmental issues and specific urban sites. In 2008, the CSA stood with citizens opposing the construction of a waste disposal site in the 'former Manifattura Tabacchi' area. In that and several following mobilizations, activists Officina99 has increasingly blended with militants of the civic networks and associations who claimed health and environmental rights, thereby coming into growing contact with local communities in struggle, and shifting the configuration of its cooperation with other actors. In the pathway of Insurgencia discussed earlier, focusing on territorial struggles helped fostering the initial construction of a specific identity, that was later brought into the realm of institutional politics – the same can be said for the weaving of Insurgencia's network of allies in its early stages, which was also instrumental to the affirmation of the experience inside municipal institutions.

Conversely, for the long-established, slowly fading laboratory of Officina99, these evolutions have resulted from a shifting take on its pathway and role as a collective actor in a changing environment after decades of 'traditional' CSA activity. Officina has thus moved its core focus from broader (city and national) claims and protests, to highly localized mobilizations and a new network of local allied actors, communities that are often unheard. Contrary to Insurgencia, with whom Officina99 shares a proximity to grassroots environmental struggles (albeit different ones), Officina has not sought to mediatize its participation in these mobilizations, nor has it stood out from the crowd of actors engaged in those struggles through particularly disruptive actions. Rather, for Officina99, the refocus on territorial action and the intertwining with local civic actors has entailed moving further away from the center of the political space.

Partitioning

In turn, this shift in focus has determined a second mechanism at work in this CSA's pathway – that is, *Partitioning*. Officina99, by its core configuration, has maintained consistent distance and distinction between its movement experience and the level of institutional politics.

> We have always maintained what for us is a ground element of coherence, which can look ideological, but it isn't: the distance from the electoral level. Officina99, together with the Ska (that is part of the same history), from their birth to this day, are among the few spaces and collective that have kept conducting abstentionist campaigns. Because they don't believe in the realm of delegation, they call for the promotion of forms of direct democracy in the territories, and therefore pursue this objective through the construction of moments and tools of democracy from below, popular, lived during times of intense territorial mobilization, and to which we try to give some continuity, greater duration and pervasiveness. […] So much so, that also in the face of this new dynamic of urban commons – we are talking of about ten freed, occupied, spaces, who fall under the municipal *delibere* – despite the proposition on the part of institutions to become a part of this dynamic, fully or partly, these spaces maintain their choice of remaining out of it.
>
> (#I1SC9 activist, Officina99)

Beyond the 'institutional legality' of its situation, Officina99 has thus been determined to keep its action fully separated from the dynamics of electoral and institutional politics. This choice has been made with the awareness of its potential consequences: such an approach, also according to activists, can contribute to a waning of institutional interest for a self-managed experience. It seems reasonable that representative politics would tend to be less drawn to experiences purposefully rejecting and distancing themselves from the level of democratic delegation. Surely, this can be the result of strategic considerations (as in these experiences' inability or unwillingness to channel electoral consensus), but is all the truer for legalized spaces such as Officina, as they do not represent urgent instances of occupation to be addressed by the Administration (under the pressures of resonating media coverage and political opposition).

> Institutional politics surely perceives this as an autonomous space, not subsumable into electoralist dynamics, or exchanges of any kind. Clearly, it is not considered – although, and it could not happen otherwise, its historical and cultural value is recognized – as one of the spaces with which to have a strong interlocution. This, however, is also based on concrete contrasts – to name a relevant one, our contrast with the Administration on waste management.
>
> (#I1SC9 activist, Officina99)

This separation from the institutional arena has played out, on the one hand, through a sub-mechanism of *double tracking*, as Officina99 has engaged in both contentious and non-

disruptive actions. Particularly, as its focus shifted to a more territorial vocation, over the past few years Officina has seen a strong presence of local youth, engaging, among others, in hip-hop and in sports practices. Tens and hundreds of young people (belonging to what an activist described as the youth proletariat) have found in Officina a space of aggregation alternative to the streets, one that is able to welcome their dreams and needs, offering an occasion of socialization. At the same time, the CSA has kept engaging in contentious and protest actions, particularly around environmental struggles (with, particularly, the contestation of landfill constructions and waste management issues), and during the mobilizations against austerity.

In time, the centrality of Officina99 progressively faded and, overall, the space has undergone a dynamic of *normalization* in the public and political debate, which also emerges rather clearly in the interviews as part of the attitudes of elected officials towards Officina. One episode of stark controversy with institutions took place in 2010, when, after a raid by the Guardia di Finanza inside the space and the confiscation of some marijuana plants, the political debate sparked once again on the future of the space: Pietro Diodato, right-wing regional councilor from Pdl, invoked the closure of Officina, while the Democratic Party and other left-wing forces expressed solidarity and appreciation for the experience. Episodes of dispute involving the space virtually stopped afterwards.

Certainly, the burst of the crisis saw the emergence of many new subjectivities and mobilizations in Naples – some of which, highly contentious, polarizing, and new. This phenomenon contributes to explaining why Officina99 is very seldom mentioned in the newspaper representation of the 2008-2012 protest cycle in Naples, in which it was nonetheless highly active, and almost entirely absent from the local press after that. In this respect, the rare representation of Officina99 after 2011-2012 has then been limited to its cultural and musical activity, while the space has only been sometimes mentioned, as an example of legalization, in the context of the broader political debate around occupied self-managed spaces through the 2010s. The same legalized setting which has allowed Officina to maintain its partitioned relationship to institutional politics, has also reduced the media interest around the space. Occupied, more novel, more polarizing experiences, deemed more newsworthy, have increasingly been covered instead.

The political influence of Officina99: a pillar of movement history against the contradictions of post-crisis politics

The experience of Officina99 has undeniably made the history of Naples' CSAs, and contributed to the pathway of social movements in the city (and in Italy). The impact of Officina in having transformed the 'emergent' phenomenon of social centers into an identity marker of Naples' political landscape, is well recalled by Cavaliere (2013, p. 48).

> One concrete example is provided by the Leoncavallo social center of Milan, another, by Officina99 in Naples. Both give a strong and continuous impulse to movements acting in the city, and have ended up characterizing the city itself. These are marginal aspects, unknown to many, but that have a relevance within the urban habitat and define an image of citizens in certain circumstances. During national or international demonstrations, "Napoli is arriving" or "Milan is arriving" were, for a long time, abbreviations used to refer to the arrival of protestors from, respectively, the social centers Officina99 or Leoncavallo. In Naples, it is probably also thanks to the resistance of the experience of Officina99, that decisions were made to occupy other spaces: spreading, this way, the awareness that similar phenomena are possible.

Indeed, as also suggested throughout my research process by many interviewees from different spaces, movement activism in Naples, and by extension the current landscape of collective action in the city, has been deeply impacted by the experience of Officina. Insurgencia, for one, emerged from the division of the antagonist area of Officina and lo Ska,

after the Global Forum of Naples and the G8 in Genova. Younger generations of activists, who has given birth to subjectivities such as the Ex Opg, acknowledge a great debt of recognition to what was learned from the generation of Officina99.

With the emergence, around the years of the global crisis, of new visible actors and the normalization of a once-polarizing experience, and in light of the overall positioning of Officina (distant from representative politics, but increasingly situated into a territorial setting), the experience has been increasingly less discussed also by institutional actors. The latter, nonetheless, is well aware of Officina99, and tends to have positive *attitudes* towards it. These are, however, often conflicting and rather heterogeneous, compared to institutional perceptions of other experiences.

It was particularly interesting, during the research, to seek out the perception and the recognition extent of an experience such as Officina99, in its evolution across the post-crisis decade, and the lenses through which they can be filtered. All of the institutional actors I interviewed had personally witnessed both the expansion and the fading phase of the space. However, for the former, they had been exposed to a bulk of information, encounters, feedbacks and discussions about Officina, its political messages, its legalization process and its role as an artistic incubator. Conversely, for the latter – that is, for the post-crisis years, their information was scarcer and fragmented, mostly derived from secondary sources. The saliency of the experience has faded, and with that, its depiction has become misty and at times contradictory, while new first-hand and copious information is being received and processed on other experiences, more salient in the city debate. The historical value of Officina99 is transversally acknowledged, perhaps also as a result of a distinctive trait of the Neapolitan culture, in which the epicenter of such relevant and well-known musical phenomena cannot be discarded as an insignificant experience. However, among the institutional interviewees I talked to, Officina is cognitively interpreted as an acquired and normal reality, a non-threatening experience, even a 'thing of the past' to some. There is a perception of Officina99 as a lowly politicized actor, on the one hand, which collects the approval of some elected officials (who make sense of Officina as more of a territorial foothold, culture- and aggregation-focused). On the other hand, some elected officials view this experience as a 'merely political' (a phrase often used to mean 'ideological'), and therefore expressed their critiques, contesting the sanctioned use of a public space by a subjectivity who does not "offer" as much to the general public as other experiences, involved in mutualistic practices, do. Interestingly, these diverging camps extended beyond partisanships and even generational characteristics, which points to the key question of how politicization and depoliticization, two pivotal phenomena extensively explored by literature, are construed and interpreted by actors (in this case, by what could be defined as interested observers) in the post-crisis era. It also suggests that, in this respect, a significant role is played by the configuration of the political space, and the evolving relative positions of different collective actors across that space.

As far as the *policy* dimension of influence goes, across the decade Officina has generally not pursued or targeted institutional policy change. Not only was this not an aim that the space set for itself, but Officina99 made it a political priority to not engage with representative politics as such. However, in the recollection of an activist, one case of failed outcomes has to do with the broader struggle on waste management.

> This Administration, after having adhered to the necessity – through deliberations, the *delibera* "zero waste" and so on – of focusing on the recovery of materials, unfortunately has continued in some cases (such as in Eastern Naples) to act differently, and to open a conflict with the residents of that territory, including Officina. I am talking about the plan – today, it would seem, abandoned, but… – to install a waste biodigestion plant in the Eastern area, near Officina, and about the constant use, in periods of crisis, of some

warehouses in that area to dispose of waste. In particular, I point this out to you because it has seen a strong opposition by the territory – an already battered territory –, the Administration got to a rather advanced stage (with a tender…), to build a maxi industrial plant to treat waste and recover materials, we are talking about around 60 thousand tons, a sort of facility that we contest also against the Administration, because they are dangerous […]. I am telling you this, because it is not a random topic, it was the first point of that alternative that De Magistris promised to incarnate in the city.

(#I1SC9 activist, Officina99)

At the same time, Officina has decided to remain outside of process of common goods regulation, but that does entail that the space was not (or does not continue to be) a part of that struggle. Spaces' inhabitants, it must be noted, are far from monoliths: experiences are often interconnected, different pathways and occupied places can cross. For one, the activist from interview [#I1SC9], is both a militant from Officina, and an inhabitant of the Giardino Liberato.

The very dynamic […] of urban commons, is a dynamic that, despite having seen Officina as such as external, has seen several comrades coming from that experience and who, consistently, keep bringing it forth, trying to give it weight and relevance, but also keeping a degree of independence from the institutional level, of influencing it while remaining independent and distant from it. Because the aim remains, today more than ever, to build institutions – we would have called them once – 'of counter-power on the territories', popular assemblies, a new growing society.

(#I1SC9 activist, Officina99)

Similarly, in terms of *procedural access*, activists of Officina reckon that since the affirmation of De Magistris, new attention and sensitivity have been devoted by the city administration to self-managed experiences and the use of urban space. In this sense, they argue, new opportunities have opened for movement actors to have a voice and engage with institutional politics. Officina99, however, on account of its core political approach, has decided to walk a different path, and has looked through a critical lens at the experience of integration of movement claims and subjectivities within municipal institutions.

6.7 The great laboratory: ten years of experimentation against the crisis

Naples				
Collective Actors	*Mechanisms and Sub-Mechanisms*			*Political Influence*
Ex OPG - Je so' Pazzo	**Bridging** Perimeter unlocking; Territorialization; Network.	**Legitimization** Contentious branding; Public support; Certification through Itemizing.	**Disruption of power competition** Representation; Convergence; Seizure of political space.	Attitudes, Procedural, Policy
Villa Medusa	**Bridging** Territorialization; Network.		**Partitioning** Double tracking; Normalization.	(Procedural) (Policy)

Insurgencia	**Bridging** Territorialization; Network; Narrative.	**Disruption of power competition** Convergence; Seizure of political space.	**Double-edged institutionalization** Integration; Conflict segregation.	**Encapsulation** Polarization; Isolation.	Procedural, Policy, Attitudes
Ex Asilo Filangieri	**Bridging** Perimeter unlocking; Territorialization; Network.	**Legitimization** Brokerage; Certification through itemizing.	**Double-edged institutionalization** Convergence; Dissemination.		Procedural, Policy, Attitudes
Officina99	**Focus shift** Territorialization; Network.		**Partitioning** Normalization; Double tracking.		(Policy) Attitudes (moderate)

Table 6.9 Social centers' pathways of influence in Naples.

As recalled at the beginning of this chapter, the analysis of the city case of Naples bears a certain degree of complexity. Naples, as opposed to Bologna, is a metropolis, and, at the same time, is endowed with a unique series of specificities, which need to be carefully disentangled in the research process (and freed from the shadow of stereotypical representations). It follows that an in-depth study like this one, despite attempts at grasping as much nuance as possible and making selections based on criteria of representativeness, will only capture a part of the picture. While these premises make Naples a more difficult case in a comparative sense, they also speak to its analytical richness.

Indeed, in Naples, the decade following the onset of the crisis has constituted a particularly lively phase of transformations for collective action and political influence (*Table 6.9*). From a general perspective of observation, the evolution of the municipal environment of collective action appears rather evident. The city has experienced a significant shift, from a situation of low repression of self-managed social centers and a substantial divarication between institutional and movement politics, to the shaping of a unique compenetrating model.

The "Neapolitan laboratory", as many commentators have defined it, has often been equated in the public debate with the era of the De Magistris' administration. However, the distinctiveness and innovativeness of Naples' experimentation lies in the complex configuration of interactions between institutional politics and social forces, particularly movements, citizens' organizations and grassroots activism. After an initial phase, more legalistic and confrontational, Naples has known a season of dialogue and open interactions between mayor De Magistris and collective actors. The very political coalition that disrupted the municipal competition for power after the crisis, in the 2011 election, and the alliance that was confirmed at the government of the city in 2016, were shaped by the cooperation of diverse social and political actors, which saw a crucial role of urban collectives and social centers. Some CSAs have chosen to enter the path of electoral representation: Insurgencia, on the one hand, has participated in DemA, the political platform led by De Magistris, and held prominent positions in the city government; the Ex Opg, on the other hand, has embarked in the construction of its own national political party, *Potere al Popolo*, with the contribution of other political experiences, including local collectives such as Iskra (among the subjectivities animating the social center Villa Medusa). Regardless of their choices to

participate or not in electoral politics, the large majority of self-managed experiences in the city have engaged in some extent of dialogue with the Administration during the decade. The decade has seen social centers in the city influence policy, hold government positions and publicly cooperate with the administration, contribute to new regulatory forms for the management of public spaces and the recognition of urban common goods.

There is no denying that, throughout the decade, social centers have also been affected by economic hardship: the consequences of the crisis and its effects on occupation have forced many young activists to leave their militancy and/or their city; and the financial situation of the Municipality has generated the fear that public properties, including those inhabited by social centers, would be sold to retrieve resources.

Nevertheless, CSAs in the city remain numerous and their attendance and participation is, on average, significantly higher than elsewhere in Italy. For some spaces in particular, this is immediately evident as one enters them for the first time. Beyond numeric terms, the modes of social centers' action have also changed. Collective action has known an increasing development of management skills, for what concerns the managing of physical spaces and their use for a variety of activities, but also in shifting approaches to external relations, and, for the most part, the integration with local and neighborhood communities. The territorialization of collective action – which, throughout this dissertation, is shown as a fairly universal trend for social centers across the decade –, has been particularly strong for some Neapolitan experiences, from a long-established social center such as Officina99, to spaces born well within the crisis.

With respect to Direct Social Action, it is safe to say that the crisis decade has been a unique laboratory for DSAs among Neapolitan social centers.

Mutualism has been among Naples' key words of the past few years. During an interview, an activist talked about the "flags of mutualism", to refer to the ways that mutualistic action can be mobilized by social centers as a political rhetoric and pivot of collective identity. Surely, for an experience such as the Ex Opg, for which this kind of action has been pervasive and predominant, mutualism has assumed a high identity value, more so than for other spaces. This involves both the ways in which activists make sense of their collective engagement, and the ways in which this identity is mobilized politically and discursively. In this respect, the label of mutualism has come to be a part, among other dynamics, of the contentious branding of the social center. Even further, however, this notion has come to describe one of the pillars of collective action in Naples in the crisis decade, and more broadly of the Neapolitan experiment. Precisely through its nature of Direct Social Action – unmediated, targeting society, territorializing collective action and repositioning individuals within social networks –, mutualism has shaped this political phase of social centers mobilization, for a large portion of Neapolitan experiences. Indeed, the practices identified in the local debate under the label of mutualism, have assumed a variety of forms. Villa Medusa, regenerated by a community of residents and activists, has (re-)placed mutualistic initiatives at the core of its action. To the Ex Opg, mutualism has meant anything from a popular health clinic, to legal and work desks, to sports and arts courses. The Asilo has practiced mutualism by granting spaces to entertainment workers, and by organizing classes. An experience that was not included among the ones investigated in this dissertation, the Scugnizzo, has departed from the original idea of mutual aid, to specialize and shape a laboratory of collective productions. Among the many actors practicing mutualism in its most varied forms, a shared idea exists, that these practices affect not only the material level, but also multiple relational dynamics, both within social centers and in the interaction with society and institutions.

Still, as recalled in previous sections, mutualism remains an intensely demanding endeavor, especially in a city like Naples: it requires abundant resources (human capital, skills, room, time) and unavoidably reshapes the focus of a space's engagement, diverting energies, time and priorities. For these reasons, it is not always sustainable, which is why some more politically connoted experiences have ended up scaling back their mutualistic practices, after an initial engagement. Beyond these limitations, a discussion on the ten years after the crisis also prompts some questions on the future of mutualism, and the models and forms that collective action could adopt. During an interview, an activist from Villa Medusa shared how they found that mutualism, if carried out as an end in itself, inevitably loses its propelling strength over time. In this respect, they found compelling the model proposed by the Ex Opg, which locates mutualism as part of a wider political platform and bearing a vertical tension in its goals (engaging with the dynamics of representation), carried out within a network of People's Houses and beyond the single city dimension.

Of course, while the label of mutualism has been popular in the city debate of the past decade, behind it is a wide array of Direct Social Actions. Only for the collective actors investigated in this dissertation, these practices range from mutual aid and alternative economic initiatives, to solidarity and emergency relief actions, to welfare and healthcare from below[136].

Several self-managed experiences and collective subjectivities were born in Naples with, and as a consequence of, the crisis. Some of them, such as the Ex Opg and the Asilo Filangieri, have been highly influential. Trajectories of social centers' political influence are diverse within the city landscape. However, some common constitutive dynamics can be retraced.

One mechanism that recurs, in the pathways of almost all of the social centers under scrutiny, is the bridging of CSAs' social environments. For some spaces – namely, the ones whose emergence was more politically connoted by specific struggles – this has entailed an unlocking of their perimeter, and an opening towards wider targets and publics. This has been the case for the Ex Opg, which since its birth has worked to overcome the traditional boundaries of social centers as enclaves, and the Asilo Filangieri, occupied within a specific protest led by cultural workers, which was able to expand the radius of its action to encompass long-term claims and a broad public. In both cases, this dynamic has gone through the channel of Direct Social Action, though in different ways. In the Marxist-Leninist approach of the Opg, the political line was first negotiated and discussed, reflecting on the changing context in which collective action was to unfold after the crisis and the end of the 2008-2011 protest cycle. Practices and forms of engagement stemmed from the approach that the group adopted as a result – although, as activists explained during our interviews, the definition of political action is a constantly negotiated process, and informs the internal organization of the Opg (among others, the frequent and regular holding of both the general and project-specific assemblies of the space). As discussed in earlier sections, this has resulted in a core focus on mutualistic practices, through which the space has also been able to expand its network and territorialize its action. For the Asilo, the resort to DSAs was not as pervasive or frequent (some examples are the urban garden and the opening of the space to the needs of artists in need of a place for rehearsals), but was also a part of this

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[136] The array of DSAs across the broader movement landscape in Naples is, of course, much vaster. One initiative worth mentioning, among others, is the diffused campaign for housing rights "Magnammece 'o pesone" (literally, "let's eat the rent"), which has given birth to a scattered series of housing occupations. Compared to previous waves of housing struggles in Naples, this campaign, while less significant in the number of participants, has focused much more on the city center, and on claiming the right to the city, contesting the phenomenon of urban voids, in addition to material deprivation (De Falco and Punziano 2020).

dynamic of perimeter unlocking, as well as of the territorialization of collective action. However, the bridging of the Asilo's social environment was mostly determined by the opening of its doors to a heterogeneous public and a variety of external contributions, as the space unlocked its perimeter with respect to the initial struggle, establishing itself as a hub for cultural exchange and placing the focus of on the far-reaching question of urban commons. For Insurgencia, bridging was mainly channeled through the focalization of expanded spaces and networks of struggle, and the consolidation of a public image of the collective and its prominent activists. For Villa Medusa, as a heterogeneous community of inhabitants reappropriating a space for the neighborhood, whose repertoire of action is comprised predominantly of DSAs, bridging was not so much about unlocking the perimeter of a highly politicized experience (as for the Ex Opg), but rather, about territorializing collective action and consolidating a large network of allies. With respect to bridging, the only exception among the spaces investigated, is represented by historical social center Officina99, that has chosen to redirect its action towards a more localized, territorial scope. In this respect, Officina's social environment has not especially changed in expansive nor in narrowing terms, but its trajectory has known a mechanism of focus shift in the societal arena, as a result of this refocusing of action. It is also interesting to note how, in Naples like in Bologna, a dynamic of territorialization can be retraced in the pathways of all the experiences considered. In Naples, too, throughout the decade territorialization has occurred both within mechanisms of bridging of the social environment, and mechanisms of focus shift in the societal arena. Moreover, territorialization was often a product of direct social actions, but not always, and also resulted from a rallying of social centers around localized struggles and communities in the urban territory.

Looking at the concatenation of mechanisms (as summarized in *Table 6.9*), the pathways retraced suggest that social centers that were highly influential over institutional politics are those that, after bridging their social environment, have intercepted the local competition for power, and/or have institutionalized. Three examples are offered by the Ex Opg, Insurgencia, and the Asilo. For the Asilo and the Ex Opg, the years immediately following their birth have coincided with a progressive legitimization. These spaces, born within the crisis, enlarged their social environments to broadened publics of participants, and towards the formation of coalitions and cooperation with established city actors. As a result, as they made their action known, ally actors brokered on their behalf, and their experiences were gradually certified in the public debate. It was this dynamic of societal legitimization that, then, allowed the Opg and the Asilo to disrupt the competition for power and institutionalize, respectively. The Opg, more informed by a contentious and politicized identity, leveraged in particular its unique modes of social action, favored by a convergence of political goals with the mayor. The Asilo, now endowed with a network of high-profile ties and a capital of public consensus, also found a convergence with the Administration around the question of urban commons, and experienced a dynamic of double-edged institutionalization. The experience of Insurgencia, conversely, started in the early 2000s. As recalled, the bridging of Insurgencia's social environment was linked to its participation, with the onset of the crisis, in a series of local struggles, some of which highly contentious and mediatized, often at the sides of citizens' committees. The main difference in Insurgencia's pathway, compared to other influential trajectories, relates to its anticipation of the administrative developments of the decade. In fact, while fully maintaining its political collective identity and action outlook, Insurgencia was the social center that first decided to support, and more significantly invest in, the electoral bet of Luigi De Magistris. In this, Insurgencia participated in the disruption of the local power competition brought about by

the 2011 election. Insurgencia has thus experienced a mechanism of institutionalization and an increasing institutional presence, also investing even more significantly and directly in electoral representation during the 2016 consultation.

In terms of policy, the change prompted by CSAs has ranged from the municipal provisions against black work, following a campaign led by the Ex Opg who also contributed to writing the provision; to the impact of Insurgencia's elected officials in different roles of the municipal government; to the regulations recognizing eight self-managed spaces as common goods, obtained thanks to a long struggle led by the city's movement actors and finally prompted by the action of the Ex Asilo Filangieri.

As for procedural access, most collective actors in Naples have managed to obtain increased access to institutions, across the decade, through the establishment of ties or interlocutions with elected officials and figures from the city administration executive, including – and notably – mayor Luigi De Magistris himself. The Ex Opg, the Asilo Filangieri and Insurgencia, in particular, had regular interlocutions with the mayor and allied elected officials. Informal channels of access, in this respect, have been more open than ever before. However, the person of the mayor has often acted as the gatekeeper of access. In this respect, the procedural access to bureaucracy, in Naples, has been more limited, and always widely contingent on the political level of dialogue. For instance, when the administration chose to pursue a given policy change, taking up movement claims and demands, collective actors were involved in the technical process of drafting the bill. As a general rule, however, interlocutions, even on technical matters, occurred at the political level.

Moreover, for social centers that have decided to pursue electoral representation, either directly or through the institutional participation of some of its activists, access to decision-making has been granted by the presence in local institutional positions. During the crisis decade, this has occurred more than ever before for Neapolitan collective actors. Among the experiences considered in this work, this has been notably the case for Insurgencia (at a district, at a City Council and a Cabinet level), and for Villa Medusa at a district level. Finally, some self-managed spaces and communities in Naples have also gained access to institutional decision-making thanks to the common goods framework developed at the municipal level. First, through the establishment of a municipal consulting body, the Observatory on Common Goods, appointed by the mayor through a tender aimed at recruiting figures involved in grassroots participatory processes. The Observatory, in charge of consulting on participatory processes and matters related to urban commons, and of fostering the dialogue between the Municipality and local communities, has provided for a novel and dedicated space of access and a mode of intervention in decision-making processes.

Second, aside from the Observatory itself, the overarching regulatory framework of urban commons has opened new points of institutional access. In fact, the recognition of self-managed spaces as common goods and their entrusting the communities of inhabitants – prompted by the city's collective struggles –, has established a channel of formal access to institutions. In fact, in Italian municipal systems, the entrusting of a public space to collective actors is usually provided through either collaboration pacts with the Municipality, or direct assignments. These, however, entail the establishment of a legal relationship with subjects such as associations (often created ad hoc by activists), or a board of trustees. Such forms are not always adapted to, or accepted by, collective actors, many of whom tend to be comprised of informal networks and evolving publics of participants, which in turn can translate into an issue of lacking or partial representation from institutional interactions. Instead, the instrument of 'civic uses', identified in Naples' regulation, has defined a new

kind of use of public spaces, other than the ones typically formalized by city institutions. These instruments, promoted by the city's collective actors and particularly by the more recent work of the Asilo Filangeri, have been introduced within a broader work on commons conducted by the De Magistris administration since its establishment. In fact, the encompassing of eight recognized common goods in the Urban Plan of the Municipality, resonates with an organic perspective as to the administration's vision for urban assets. As one cabinet member explained during an interview, this entailed a normative and political rethinking of responsibility and management models.

> We all identify with the notion of common goods as long as we talk about the right to the landscape, to water, to housing, or the right to the city. Yet, the entire constitutional arch takes issue when it is time to say: all right, if this is a common good, who is in charge of managing it? The real struggle arises when we tackle managing models. […] With respect to those that say that we entrusted them to a collective, no: our *delibere* are clear, it is an entrusting to the collectivity. And this was the hardest part in juridical terms, including with our administrative executives, with the accounting divisions, the general secretariats… because entrusting something to the collectivity is an enormous challenge from a legal standpoint. What does it mean, that no one is responsible? It means that the entire collectivity is responsible. It's the same model as for a public park. Now, if that collectivity decides to adopt a civic use regulation, it establishes a model for that space: the collectivity will change over time, it's a given, people with whom we deal won't be the same. Generations and people will change, but things will go on according to this model. The property remains of the Municipality, but that property is recognized as a common good – that is, a good of everyone – and its activity will be managed by the collectivity that meets up every week and discusses programs and timetables.
> (#IE12, cabinet member, city administration)

Overall, the extent of available institutional access across the decade, has marked an unprecedented phase in the history of Naples. At the same time, the investigation of these different modes of procedural access, shows the gap that has emerged between self-managed experiences. In fact, a significant divide has formed between the actors that have chosen to interact with the institutional realm, and have gained access to decision-making through any of these channels, and those that have chosen to stay at a distance. Some social centers, in this respect, have become highly connected (enjoying multiple levels and forms of institutional access), while some others have remained outsiders. At the same time, this has not generated rivalries between connected and outsider social centers – which speaks to the purposefulness of some actors' choice to remain autonomous from institutional politics. On the contrary, disagreements have more frequently arisen between institutionally connected experiences. This being said, regardless of their relationships to institutional politics and internal controversies, the city's social centers have kept joining forces on many occasions around common struggles.

Lastly, the *attitudes* of municipal institutional actors towards social centers have been rather heterogeneous throughout the decade. From a general standpoint, there is certainly a widespread perception that social centers have been more influential than ever before. Nonetheless, this notion has also often been instrumental to political contrapositions and critiques of the De Magistris administration. Overall, social centers in the city have been recognized as legitimate interlocutors. This has clearly been the case for the administrative majority, but also emerges from the interviews to City Councilors, across the political spectrum. This is not to say that some elected officials are not strongly opposed to these experiences in ideological terms – among right-wing politicians, in particular, dissent is strong, and stark critics can be found in other political forces. However, while contesting CSAs actions, or their right to a specific space, these elected officials do not tend to imply an exclusion of these experiences as outsiders of the polity. At the same time, the social connotation of their activism (as in DSAs) is broadly acknowledged as prevalent.

Acknowledging the important history of Neapolitan CSAs, some elected officials from left-wing forces have drawn comparisons with the last decade of self-managed experiences. They expressed a general perception that collective actors and activists have decreased in number with respect to the past. At the same time, interviewees highlighted a uniqueness in the extent of influence and the variety of contemporary social centers. These experiences, one elected official claimed, have evolved so much within the contradictions and challenges of the crisis, that they can no longer be excluded by and from city governments.

If these elements are valid in general terms, institutional interviewees have provided significant distinctions in their attitudes towards social centers. The main discursive categories mobilized in their accounts (*Table 6.10*) were the social value of spaces; their degree of politicization; and questions relating to the profitability of self-managed properties.

Table 6.10 Coding the main discursive categories in institutional attitudes' configurations, Naples.

Social value	Degree of politicization	Profitability
Aggregation	Radical	Civic profitability
New economies	Exclusionary	Assets
Social value	Markedly political	Economic value
Mutualism	Party / party activity	Speculative interests
Vulnerabilities	Elections	Real estate
Territory	Political vs. social	Market
Crisis		Insolvency
Culture		Court of Auditors

Source: review of responses to open-ended questions asking institutional interviewees to describe self-managed experiences in Naples, and inductive categorization after automated content analysis.

As for social value, elected officials talked about CSAs' capacity of producing aggregation and culture, of integrating (for the most part) with the local territory, and of providing support to vulnerable and marginalized sectors of the urban society. In this respect, DSAs were virtually always the first elements to be mentioned during interviews, and very often associated with the context of the crisis and socioeconomic hardship. Overall, the social value of social centers coincided with DSAs in elected officials' accounts (often via the label of mutualism). From more moderate and conservative interviewees, to more left-leaning ones, the perception emerged that spaces practicing DSAs appear closer and more reassuring to average citizens, than social centers did in the past: more rooted, more engaged, more present, carrying out practices that ten or fifteen years ago were imagined as the prerogative of civic actors and volunteer associations. The precipitation of human relations and of urban life, as one councilor phrased it, has made it so that social centers now play a different role.

Societal grip (gained through a broad social environment and public legitimization), combined with the interception of the local power competition and/or institutionalization, are the dynamics that bring elected officials to consider most influential experiences such as Insurgencia, the Ex Opg, and the Asilo Filangieri. However, it is interesting to note how the interception of power competition, on the part of Insurgencia and the Ex Opg, also acts as a negative element in the configuration of some elected officials' attitudes. In fact, a second category that was frequently mobilized during interviews, is the degree of politicization of self-managed experiences. For some elected officials, the marked political connotation of some social centers has produced an exclusionary and discouraging effect on external observers and average citizens. Others, from different political affiliations, took issue with the fact that occupied spaces, and even more so, spaces recognized as urban commons, be used as the headquarters of political parties and lists, or electoral committees for local

candidates. Their main argument was that these uses contradict the idea of a common good, which should be managed in the interest of the city and not of a specific political group. If a collective decides to engage in electoral politics, they argued, they should do so in a condition of equality with the other political actors, such as parties, that sustain their own expenses. Both these lines of reasoning oppose the social and the political character of CSAs, framing them as mutually exclusive elements. This speaks to an element that is further discussed in the final chapter, namely the difficulty of institutional actors to grasp the contentious nature of DSAs. Still, multiple elected officials from the left suggested that the social centers of the 2010s have filled the relational void left by political parties, especially in the realm of the radical left. Today's social centers, one interviewee contended, are almost the political parties of a disgregated society – and this, regardless of their actual structuring in an electoral formation or a party organization.

A third point worth underlining is the presence, in elected officials' statements, of the economic element. In fact, much of the discourse on social centers in Naples has revolved around the value and profitability of urban real estate assets. The discussion, in a Municipality threatened by financial insolvency, has often focused on the economic and market value of CSAs physical spaces – a perspective to which the De Magistris administration has sought to oppose the idea of 'civic' (social, non-economic) profitability. Speculative interests and private investments, expectedly, have also played a part in the debate. However, as an elected official explained, this idea of economic profitability has not only resulted from bad faith. And indeed, it has repeatedly been recalled during interviews, also by elected officials who are overall supportive of self-managed experiences.

> In the past, there was a 'decency' or moral stigma on social centers […]. In time, it has become a patrimonial scruple concerning real estate, with the idea that properties that could be sold were being withheld from public interest. Twenty years ago, no one would have contested the value of use of a property, whereas today it is a monetarist discussion. And this critique is fairly transversal, because no one actually has any alternatives to offer – not for the use of spaces, nor on the possibilities of settling the debt of a public institution.
> (#IE10, elected official, majority)

A final consideration should be devoted to the linkage between social centers' influence and political interest. Undeniably, the decade of the Neapolitan laboratory has been made possible by the presence and interactions of some very specific actors – in other words, by a unique political conjuncture. As portrayed by the trajectories retraced throughout this chapter, the political influence of CSAs has often been shaped by dynamics of convergence between collective actors and the administration of Luigi De Magistris, with its goals, narratives, constituencies. Indeed, many interviewees – both among social centers activists and, perhaps more so, among elected officials – have reflected critically on the administrative action of the past two legislatures. While acknowledging the unprecedent influence achieved by social centers throughout the decade, these interviewees have emphasized contradictions and inconsequentialities in the actual administrative action, with respect to the claims and objectives of Naples' collective actors, and the promises and narratives offered by De Magistris. Without wishing to downplay these contradictions (or simply, the weight of political propaganda and negotiations), it is safe to argue that, at least from an ideational and discursive standpoint, the decade of the Neapolitan laboratory has brought a new horizon of political vision in the city administration.

After diving into the pathways of influence of social centers in the city, a question that remains is how the Neapolitan laboratory, having been also partly contingent upon a unique

political interlocking, will develop as the players in its arenas shift. In September 2020, I interviewed a cabinet member from the De Magistris administration. Their words were full of hope and confidence, as to how the urbanity of Naples could be governed differently than in the past – and as to how the city's political forces, net of their natural contrapositions, were contributing together to this rupture.

> We know that when you enter a City Council room, and you have not provided for a given number of new constructions, and a series of other things that move the infamous darker sides of urban planning – when you haven't done that, the Council will reject your plan. Well, in Naples this hasn't happened. It means that there is a conscience among political forces. That it isn't true, that if you act along coordinates other than land rent, things get stuck. It is a big lie. And it isn't true that you cannot talk about common goods, as a model of redistribution to the collectivity of resources that rightfully belong to that collectivity.
> (#IE12, cabinet member, city administration)

As this dissertation is being finalized, the municipal election of 2021 has inaugurated a new administrative phase. The new mayor of Naples, Gaetano Manfredi, was elected with the support of a large coalition, encompassing the Democratic Party, the Five Star Movement, and numerous other lists, from conservatives to the radical left. Several prominent figures of the past two De Magistris administrations also joined the political platform in support of Manfredi. Conversely, the candidacy of Alessandra Clemente[137], supported by De Magistris and by Potere al Popolo, obtained a little over 5% of the votes. Thus, new equilibria and interplays will shape the trajectories of social centers and their political influence in the city.

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[137] As recalled, the choice of Clemente as the candidate for De Magistris' succession, was also amongst a series of disagreements that finalized the political parting between Insurgencia and the mayor.

Chapter 7. Comparing Pathways of Influence and Contribution to the Field

This final chapter of the dissertation discusses the findings of the empirical analysis. First, pathways and mechanisms of political influence are compared across the two city cases, as well as the modes of Direct Social Action. A second part of the chapter addresses the thesis' contribution to the literature on the Italian case and particularly on the evolution of self-managed social centers and their relevance. Finally, the chapter draws some conclusions on the role of DSAs in shaping political influence during the crisis decade, and suggests pathways for future research.

7.1 Bologna and Naples: political influence across cases

In both Bologna and Naples, the landscape of social centers has been radically transformed by the Great Recession. Relevant new experiences have been born out of the crisis, while the influence of longer-established CSAs has significantly shifted.

In Bologna, self-managed social centers have decreased in number with the crisis decade, and all occupied spaces have been either legalized or evicted. At the same time, while CSAs had been long considered as outsiders of the polity, new room has opened up for some of these collective actors to influence institutional politics, rising to the core of the local debate. In general terms, procedural access has increased significantly for social centers; CSAs have been able to impact policy on different issues and in multiple stages of decision-making; some experiences have gained institutional recognition, though part of them remain politically contested, while others have not. The courses of action chosen by the five collective actors investigated, and the interplay with the local society and institutional actors, have redesigned the map of social centers' influence. Among the self-managed experiences currently active, the crisis has notably prompted the emergence of Làbas, a CSA whose trajectory (shaped by a series of novel interactions) has shifted the paradigms of social centers' influence in the city. While the political influence of Làbas has been the result of a joint effort with another actor, the TPO (the historical Bolognese CSA from which Làbas was born), it is too soon to tell to what extent the innovations introduced by these highly influential pathways will foster the political influence of social centers as a whole in the future. A conclusion that can be drawn, nonetheless, from the retracing of these actors' trajectories throughout the decade, is that the way in which they have mobilized Direct Social Actions has played a crucial role in their political influence.

In Naples, self-managed spaces have remained numerous and highly diverse in the city. At the same time, the dialectic between institutional politics and social centers, and overall, the political influence of CSAs, have radically changed. This shift was linked to a novel political conjuncture – the establishment of the city administration led by Luigi De Magistris, increasingly close to local collective actors – and to the emergence of new significant social centers' experimentations. Some CSAs in particular have dominated the scene of institutional influence, from Insurgencia's role within the administration, to the Ex Opg's mutualism model and policy struggles, to the Asilo Filangieri's legal battle for commons. Procedural access to institutional decision-making has increased for Naples' social centers as a whole – though to varying degrees –, also through formal channels, such as introduction of the "urban commons" framework on the part of the Municipality and the creation of specific municipal bodies, as well as activists' institutional presence. While institutional recognition has been

obtained by most social centers, the contested attitudes of elected officials towards these experiences have been strongly informed by their DSA component and their perceived degree of politicization.

In comparing the two city cases of Bologna and Naples, some key nodes stand out as eminently relevant.

7.1.1 Direct Social Action across cases

A first element relates to the modes of Direct Social Action. In the two cities investigated throughout this research, Direct Social Action has assumed a vast spectrum of forms (as *Table 7.1* illustrates). For one, in Bologna and Naples, the structuring of practices in response to the crisis has occurred against significantly different backgrounds of socioeconomic hardship. In Naples, the crisis has insisted on pre-existing challenges, deepening endemic fractures and marginalities. On the one hand, this has confronted collective actors with stronger and more widespread hardship, and prompted, within the vast city landscape, a unique richness of social activism experimentations. On the other hand, in Bologna the crisis has marked a more visible fracture between the before and the after, which has called for a radical reinvention of collective forms of action within a more limited landscape of spaces. The political mark left by the crisis is also attested by the fact that DSAs in Bologna have not only remained, but have been further developed, even after the reabsorption of most of the effects of the recession, as the local economy started to grow again.

Table 7.1 Practices of Direct Social Action: an overview of the crisis decade in Bologna and Naples.

	solidarity initiatives	education, sports	welfare, healthcare, work and legal desks	alternative finance and consumer-producer initiatives	housing squats
Bologna					
	homelessness (sheltering and localized projects)	Italian language school	health center afterschool	farmers markets network	network of housing occupations
		popular gym and sports courses	work desk	community/urban garden	housing desks (search, negotiations)
	migrants	professional workshops	housing desk	self-production (food and drinks)	'social condos' and cohousing
	emergency relief		legal and migrants' desk	craftmanship	
				bicycle repair shop	
Naples					
	homelessness (sheltering and solidarity networks)	Italian language school	health center legal advice and migrants' desk	community/urban garden	political occupations for housing/shelter purposes
		popular gym and sports courses		craftmanship	
	migrants		work desk		organized network of housing squats*[138]

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[138] This form of DSA is the only initiative in the table that does not refer directly to social centers' action, but rather to the housing struggle network active in Naples in recent years, as recalled in chapter 6. Though "Magnammece o Pesone" is an

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	professional		mutual aid and
emergency relief	workshops	housing and residence desk	resistance funds
		social services and marginalities desk	

Practices in the two cities, as displayed in *Table 7.1*, have been overall very similar. At the same time, approaches to DSA have been heterogeneous across cases. The adoption of DSAs has ranged from being part of a territorialization and shifting focus of collective action (as in the case of Vag61 in Bologna, but also, though in a small proportion, of Officina99 in Naples), to being one among many other forms of action in a space's repertoire, to being the core of spaces' action and identities. For some social centers highly engaged in DSAs, direct social action is contentious and political, but not in a classical sense. For a space like Villa Medusa in Naples, the territorial dimension is predominant, as DSA is first and foremost a way to mobilize for and with the local community. For Xm24 in Bologna, DSAs, through the expressions of the many subjectivities crossing the space, have most importantly been modes to experiment alternative social relations. For other social centers, DSA has come to shape a paradigm – albeit with significant differences and specificities – of highly politicized and defined collective identities, which have turned into political platforms or organizations.

It is also interesting to note the contamination effects in the deployment of DSAs in the two cities. The Ex Opg in Naples, for one, building on the Italian mutualistic tradition and exchanging with other contemporary grassroots experiences in Southern Europe, has shaped its action as a new political subject by developing a vast repertoire of practices. Some of these practices, in turn, have been adopted by other social centers. In Naples, some self-managed experiences have attempted to replicate the Opg model, though with some difficulty. However, practices were adopted, diffused and reimagined – not only among Neapolitan experiences, but also in other contexts. For one, the Neapolitan context has seen a development of healthcare-centered solidaristic and mutualistic initiatives and a strong contamination between different experiences, from civic and volunteer associations (such as Emergency) to the 'Presidio di salute solidale' (Solidaristic health center) installed inside the self-managed space of Santa Fede Liberata. Elements of the 'popular health desk' established by the Opg, in turn, can be found in the "Laboratorio di salute popolare" inaugurated by Làbas in Bologna, in 2019. The two initiatives are obviously different: the Opg's desk, after years of activity, now offers assistance and examinations in fourteen different medical specialties, in addition to social and psychological support; Làbas' laboratory, conversely, has primarily focused on psychological support and general medicine (and, since the onset of the pandemic, on infection prevention and solidarity initiatives). These distinctions have their root in a multiplicity of factors: timelines, courses of action, differing ideological approaches. The Opg's has sought to provide some sort of alternative to the dramatically inefficient (and often difficult to access) provision of healthcare services in Naples and in particular in the Materdei neighborhood. Conversely, Làbas' effort has especially been to provide proximity healthcare to marginalized groups (e.g., migrants and homeless people). Even so, a circular diffusion of DSAs as contentious practices has occurred.

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autonomous network, numerous social centers' activists participate in it, and some social centers in the city have hosted its support desks inside their spaces.

7.1.2 Trajectories of political influence

A second aspect of comparison concerns the mechanisms and pathways of social centers' political influence.

The dissertation has retraced how social centers have influenced institutional politics during the crisis decade, highlighting some key mechanisms that have shaped the then trajectories of the CSAs under scrutiny.

To better comprehend the general picture of political influence dynamics during the decade, it might be useful to take a step back and address mechanisms' sequences across arenas of interaction. With respect to how relational dynamics unfold across arenas, the tracing of the ten CSAs trajectories throughout the decade yields some relevant distinctions. As the reader will have noticed, mechanisms have not been identified in every arena for each CSA trajectory. This is because, in the heterogeneity of social centers' pathways, new or distinct relational dynamics have not always unfolded in those arenas of interaction, thereby shaping pathways of influence. In fact, while relational dynamics have of course played out between – for example – CSAs and their social environments, not for all CSAs social environment mechanisms have occurred during the crisis decade. Similarly, the occurrence of the same mechanisms in one arena, has not always equated the occurring of a consequential dynamic in the societal arena. To go with an extreme example, Crash! in Bologna is the only experience for which mechanisms are retraced that only refer to the social environment arena. This is because, during the crisis decade, these mechanisms capture the dynamic evolution in this actor's trajectory. Other dynamics may follow in the future, for instance in the societal arena, in the configuration of Crash's relationship to institutions, or its role in the local power competition. Currently, however, a societal legitimization of this actor has not occurred. Similarly, despite some openings in the interaction between Crash and the Municipality, the configuration of their relationship has yet to evolve.

Let us now move to the core of the discussion. Spaces that have been highly influential on city institutional politics (*Figure 7.1*) are those whose pathway has known a Bridging mechanism – that is, an opening of the spaces' struggles to broader societal and territorial demands, alliances, and contaminations –, combined with a mechanism of Disruption of the competition for power and/or a mechanism of Institutionalization. In this respect, what evidence appear to suggest is that social centers that have most influenced local institutional politics, across the decade, are those that have been able to bridge their action by enlarging their environment (furthering their struggles with and within society, beyond the traditional perimeter of CSAs, and by weaving large and transversal connections in their territories), and to intercept the institutional competition for power. In the pathways of some social centers, this has taken the form of a direct participation in the disruption of the power competition; for some, it has (also) entailed an institutionalization dynamic, spurred by a convergence of movement goals and claims with those of specific dominant institutional actors.

The sequential unfolding of these mechanisms is not the same in each influential trajectory. Bridging being the starting dynamic for each pathway, successive mechanisms can vary. For the TPO in Bologna, a double-edged institutionalization has followed, as the TPO's engagement in DSAs within an expanded environment has prompted (against the background of the already legalized and formalized condition of the space) an institutionalization dynamic. Next, the TPO has contributed, from its unique position, to disrupting the local competition for power by taking part in the electoral platform of the Coalizione Civica alongside Làbas. Conversely, in the trajectory of Insurgencia, in Naples, bridging was followed directly by the
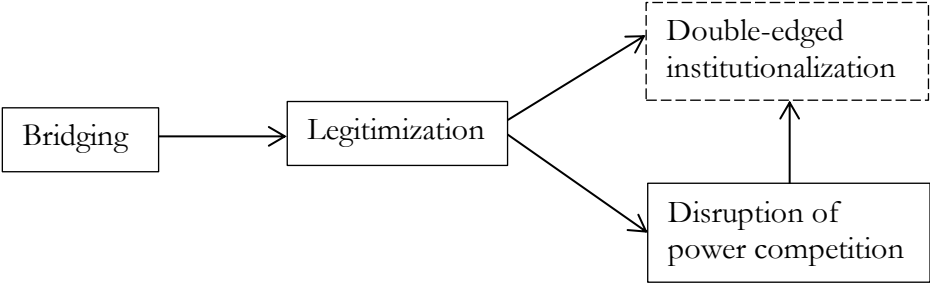
disruption of power competition, as the collective took part in Luigi De Magistris' electoral affirmation, and experienced a double-edged institutionalization dynamic as a result.

Figure 7.1 Mechanisms and pathways of high influence across city cases.
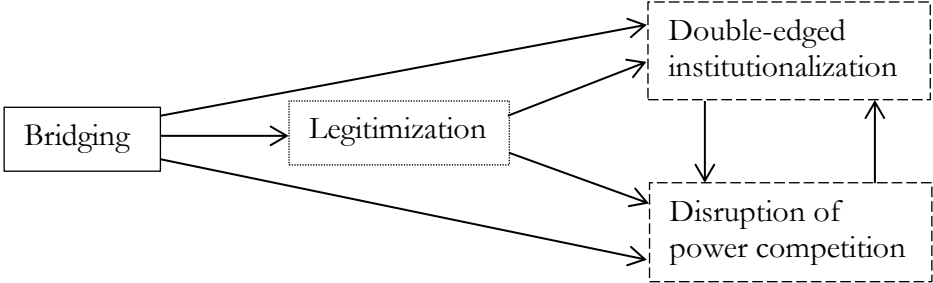
The actors just recalled are long-established. Conversely, for influential experiences born within the crisis, trajectories are similar, but present an additional mechanism of Legitimization. Once again, this is retraced across city cases. As new actors, often bearing innovative political practices and approaches, during the decade these CSAs sought to gain grip in the societal realm. Then, their pathways (as displayed in *Figure 7.2*) were shaped by the Bridging of their social environments, Legitimization, and either a Disruption of the power competition (as for the Ex Opg) or a Double-edged Institutionalization (as in the case of the Asilo Filangieri), or a succession of Disruption of power competition followed by Double-edged Institutionalization (as in the trajectory of Làbas).

Figure 7.2 Pathways of high influence for social centers born within the crisis.

Across cities, some trajectories appear closely similar. Parallel pathways can be retraced for Làbas and the Ex Opg (Bridging → Legitimization → Disruption of power competition), as well as Vag61 and Officina99 (Focus Shift → Partitioning). Concerning the former, it is interesting to note how these actors, significantly different in their backgrounds and ideational approaches, have followed such similar influence paths, also by carrying out similar DSAs. At the same time, some differences can be highlighted. The first is the institutionalization dynamic undergone by Làbas, which the Ex Opg, within the time frame of this research, did not experience. Second, by looking closer at sub-mechanisms, it can be reckoned that different dynamics have determined the emergence of the same mechanisms in the two trajectories. In both, these was significantly informed by actors' engagement in DSAs. Legitimization was shaped, among other corresponding dynamics, by the brokering effort of established city

actors in the case of Làbas, and by the gathering of popular consensus within the neighborhood for the Ex Opg. The difference between these two dynamics is subtle, but significant, and helps explaining the modes of these actors' legitimization. In Bologna, established third sector associations and groups have played a pivotal role in connecting Làbas and the Municipality (much as, in Naples, the brokering action of a well-connected network of allies has contributed to the legitimization of the Asilo Filangieri). For the Ex Opg, the response of the neighborhood and increasing resonance of its collective action spurred the interest of institutional actors and the progressive certification of the experience.

Overall, the mechanisms of political influence retraced are the same across city cases. One small distinction, nonetheless, can be drawn with respect to institutionalization. In fact, in the Bolognese case, institutionalization appears as an inevitable element to achieve high political influence, whereas in Naples, influential spaces have undergone a dynamic of double-edged institutionalization (albeit through different modes), except for the Ex Opg. This being said, the possibility that the Ex Opg institutionalizes in the near future cannot be discarded – particularly as its electoral experience continues[139]. However, it must be noted that the Ex Opg became highly influential without entering the Municipality or being elected into office, and started to affect policy and to gain access and recognition before entering the realm of electoral politics with the constitution of Potere al Popolo in 2018 (although, as discussed earlier, the foundation of the party has contributed to the influence of the Opg). This difference goes to show the distinct nature of institutionalization as a mechanism of influence in the two cities. In Bologna, political influence has systematically had to go through the mold of institutionalization, also due to the configuration of the local political system, characterized by a dominant Democratic Party. This added up to the necessity of legalization for self-managed spaces, which, as addressed in previous chapters, during the decade became an unavoidable step for CSAs in the city, and a necessary but insufficient condition for political influence[140].

The role of institutionalization, though manifestly relevant, cannot be as straightforwardly claimed in the case of Naples. Moreover, the individuation of an institutional regulatory framework for self-managed spaces, through their recognition of some of them as urban common goods, cannot in itself be equated to an institutionalization of those experiences. In fact, the urban commons framework in Naples has legalized a number of occupations, thereby attributing a degree of recognition to the experiences carried out by activists within those spaces. However, this has not entailed that all those social centers and communities have come to act *within* institutions (that is, that they have institutionalized). Furthermore, only some of the spaces recognized as commons have been highly influential (in terms of policy, access and attitudes), and at the same time the legalization of occupied spaces has not constituted a necessary condition for political influence.

7.1.3 Forms and dimensions of influence

What configurations has political influence assumed, then, for social centers in Bologna and Naples?

Regarding policy, the processual analysis of the two city cases points to some key areas of impact, which include urban planning and environmental issues, regulations on the self-management of urban spaces and common goods, and welfare and work-related policies. In

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[139] The Ex Opg's political party, Potere al Popolo, has just taken part in Naples' 2021 local election.
[140] In fact, while legalization and institutionalization are in no way interchangeable – but rather, legalization can be a part of a broader institutionalization dynamic –, in the case of Bologna these dynamics have been combined in highly influential CSA trajectories.

each city, CSAs have been influential in areas that were particularly pressing in the local administrative debate during the post-crisis years. In Bologna, this has particularly involved urban planning projects, whereas in Naples changes have related more to the socioeconomic dimension and the management of municipal property assets. Policy impact was mostly cross-issue, with the notable exception of the Asilo Filangieri in Naples – whose policy influence, nonetheless, has allowed for a dissemination of outcomes among self-managed spaces. The scope of policy changes has often been narrow (relating to specific provisions or projects), but also wide, as in the case of shifting municipal regulations.

As for procedural access, various channels of influence over municipal decision-making have been obtained by CSAs, from informal access to politicians and bureaucracies, to formalized means of influence. *Table 7.2* synthesizes the forms of procedural access for social centers in the two cities across the decade. In Naples, access has more largely occurred at the political level and has mostly involved interactions with sympathetic elected officials or the mayor himself, with whom social centers have found convergences throughout the decade. Conversely, in Bologna, access has more frequently involved the municipal bureaucracy than in Naples (particularly around social projects related to DSAs, but also around management matters related to social centers themselves). Concerning formalized access, in both Bologna and Naples some social centers have been able to leverage the institutional positions of their activists (in the city council, executive cabinet, or neighborhood/district institutions). Moreover, in Bologna, formalized access has often entailed the participation of social centers to bottom-up processes such as the participatory budget and municipal laboratories on urban planning.

Table 7.2 Modes of procedural access for social centers in Bologna and Naples.

Bologna	Naples
informal channels	*informal channels*
access to municipal executive	access to municipal executive
access to elected officials	access to elected officials
access to bureaucracy	(access to bureaucracy)
formal channels	*formal channels*
institutional presence in office	institutional presence in office
municipal planning laboratories	establishment of municipal body (Observatory)
participatory budget	

The analysis of institutional attitudes has shown that, while a majority of social centers have been recognized as legitimate interlocutors, this was more easily the case in Naples than in Bologna. Empirical evidence from Naples yields a widespread institutional acceptance of the informality of movement actors. Conversely, in Bologna, this is met with a much stronger cultural rigidity. In that, the history of the two cities, and the different developments of political culture and cleavages in the relationship between parties and movements, have shaped significantly the ways in which institutional actors have understood and approached the transformations of social centers during the crisis decade. In Bologna, full recognition

was more difficult, across the political spectrum[141]. In fact, the attitudes of institutional actors in Bologna were strongly informed by notions of legality and of coexistence between actors within the polity, construed as criteria for the citizenship of CSAs. Combined with widespread negative perceptions towards disruptive forms of action, this confirms a city environment marked by strong pressures towards the legalization and formalization of self-managed experiences – which, for more critical elected officials, tends to equate normalization. In Naples, conversely, these categories were less central; rather, institutional attitudes were ambivalently related to the degree of politicization of social centers, as well as to arguments on the economic and civic profitability of urban spaces. Overall, in Naples institutional attitudes truly reflected a debate around common goods. On the one hand, the extent to which the use of urban spaces (from occupation to regeneration) can overlap with political and party activity without being exclusionary or preemptive vis-à-vis the city – and what forms of management can be shaped between urban collectivities and institutions. On the other hand, the question of how different uses of urban spaces relate to economic and social profitability, against the background of the crisis but also of the city's longer governmental and socioeconomic challenges.

Within the analysis of institutional attitudes in the two cases, then, the role of Direct Social Actions in shaping attitudes is particularly relevant. Regardless of the value judgment of elected officials on a specific social center, or their perspective as to how that actor should be approached at an institutional level, DSAs were systematically mentioned by institutional figures, both during interviews and in public statements. Be it to acknowledge the value of social activism, or to discursively counter it from a political perspective, the element of DSA has significantly informed institutional attitudes and has been widely present in the discourse on social centers. In Naples, the social value of self-managed spaces has been broadly reckoned, and mostly coincides with DSAs in elected officials' accounts. Compared to the past, DSAs have shaped an image of Naples' social centers as more territorially rooted and engaged within the current socioeconomic context – in a sense, more "present" in their time of history, and consequently also an integral part of it. In Bologna, the debate around social centers was more intensely polarized throughout the decade. As a result, even with respect to DSAs, a strong cleavage has remained between accepted and unaccepted experiences. Overall, the engagement of social centers in DSAs has insisted on a political culture that traditionally values grassroots welfare and solidarity initiatives, and, thus, has been largely interpreted as such. A "moral" connotation of social action (associated with practices perceived as scarcely contentious), has played a relevant role in shaping institutional attitudes towards social centers.

Looking at the three dimensions of political influence, as singled out in the dissertation's theoretical framework, it appears that institutional recognition, procedural access and policy outcomes can at times emerge independently from each another. Overall, recognition and increased procedural access have been more frequently achieved than policy change. For some collective actors, institutional recognition or increased procedural access capture an expansion in their citizenship rights within the local system, one that has not resulted in policy change. At the same time, the three dimensions of influence are tightly linked to one another, and mutually enabling and impactful. Across city cases, however, continuities and differences emerge as to how they relate in the trajectories of different actors.

In Bologna, the long-established social center TPO has, first, come to enjoy a wider procedural access to institutional decision-making (by means of its legalized position and its increasing interactions with municipal social services). Through those interactions,

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[141] While overall rarer, active rejection or dismissal of specific social centers as interlocutors, on the part of a significant portion of the institutional elite, has also occurred.

institutional attitudes towards the space have progressively shifted and improved. From there, as a result of following relational dynamics, policy changes have also been achieved. For a younger actor such as Làbas, born with the crisis and having squatted illegally for several years after that, it was instead the progressive shift in institutional attitudes towards the experience (directly related to its predominant adoption of DSAs) that prompted procedural access leeway. In fact, the increasing acknowledgment of the social center on the part of institutional actors (and the recognition of its social engagement, as well as consensus-sensitive nature), spurred a series of informal interlocutions, and the activation of some elected officials and the city administration to provide Làbas with formalized channels of access to decision-making. A similar and opposite pattern has emerged from instances in which, across the decade, institutional attitudes towards a self-managed space have worsened, as in the case of Xm24, depressing the space's potential for influence on the other dimensions. All in all, the trajectories of influence from the case of Bologna suggest that the *access* and *attitudes* dimensions have acted as gatekeepers for the *policy* dimension.

This element can also be retraced for the case of Naples. Nonetheless, the pathways of collective actors in Naples also show additional possibilities. Most notably, as in an iterative process, the attitudes of municipal institutional actors have at times been reshaped by the policy outcomes achieved by CSAs. It is, for example, the case of the Ex Opg and even more of the Asilo Filangieri, whose ability to set the agenda and directly influence specific policy changes, has also resulted in a wider recognition as representative interlocutors on the part of institutional actors, in the macrocosm of Naples' self-managed spaces and composite political landscape. A similar dynamic can be highlighted for the procedural access dimension: the access gained by Insurgencia through its entry into electoral politics, has brought local elected officials to view this actor as a representative interlocutor, while also allowing Insurgencia to impact policy.

Finally, in both city systems, increased procedural access has also been granted to collective actors by policy changes (thus, the two dimensions have been simultaneously at play and mutually impactful).

Across cases, policy change does not appear to have ever been obtained without an impact on attitudes and/or procedural access, whereas access and recognition have not always resulted in policy change. At the same time, the acquisition of recognition on the part of previously de-legitimized actors, or the gaining of enhanced channels of access to decision-making, signal a relevant gain of influence beyond policy-making itself. In fact, some spaces that can be considered lowly influential in terms of policy, over the last decade have obtained recognition on the part of the institutional elite or, in procedural terms, achieved an increased degree of access to the decision-making process. This indicates that their legitimacy was acknowledged, that their degree of citizenship within the polity increased, and that their action mattered in opening new spaces of influence, despite not leading to policy changes in the timespan considered by this study. Along the future trajectories of these actors, this new leeway has the potential to foster other dimensions of political influence.

7.1.4 Problematizing the pathways of social centers' impact

The pathways of influential actors adopting DSAs draw a motion that starts from social centers themselves, bathes into society, and from there intercepts the institutional realm. Hence, (direct) social engagement, when mobilized in a broad social environment, enables social centers seeking to intercept political competition and institutional dynamics, and thereby contributes to producing significant change. This is among the most relevant insights of the present work. As such, it should be placed into perspective and interpreted in detail, so as to

avoid any misunderstandings on the claims being made regarding the weight of social engagement.

A first aspect to clarify concerns the extent to which collective experiences are able to channel, politicize or foster the engagement of marginalized and exploited actors. Indeed, the social composition of some social centers in particular, indicates that many who live in existential precariousness, endure exploitation, suffer inequality, as they enter into relation with these collective experiences (often by means of mutualistic initiatives and support desks), do choose to take part in them. In this sense, as discussed in the previous chapters, DSAs act as vectors of politicization, making new room for the conscious structuring and fostering of struggles. At the same time, the proportion in which they do so, remains much lower than social centers themselves wish that it was. Often, people experiencing hardship and exclusion lack the opportunity and the resources (as in time, network, awareness of the options available) to enter into a political relationship with these experiences. Despite their minoritarian location in the general political scene, social centers are among the actors who make the strongest effort towards the inclusion of marginalized groups. However, this is a known and largely unsolved issue, which affects the general spectrum of political action, well beyond just social centers.

A second element, linked to the first, involves the degree of engagement of local communities. Very few academic works have tackled the community engagement capacity of CSAs, especially for younger experiences. A recent piece by Vittoria and Mazzarella (2021) has sought to investigate the social output of the Ex Asilo Filangieri in Naples. Within a broader discussion of Naples' "common goods" framework, the authors provide evidence concerning the social engagement of the local community in the activities of the space, as well as its engagement in the governance of the Asilo. Vittoria and Mazzarella's data suggest that the extent of the engagement of the local community in the Asilo as a space of commoning is overall lower than political narratives have portrayed it. At the same time, the article underscores the highly positive perceptions of the citizenry towards the experience of the Asilo[142], and the recognition of its social output (especially among more economically secure and socially active residents).

The underlining caveat here, is that the dissertation does not wish to overplay the societal grip of social centers across the decade. Rather, this aspect needs to be looked at it with some perspective. Even in retracing Legitimization mechanisms, no claim is advanced that the city, or the public opinion as a whole, at one point in time stood with a certain social center. Rather, what is argued, is that a given dynamic of societal legitimization occurred, and was significant enough to work as a channel of transmission (mechanism) of causal forces in an actor's trajectory. In other words, there are instances in which legitimization is strong enough to prompt a shift that, inherently, from the societal arena can translate into institutional effects. This can be due to a variety of factors, including the shifting perceptions of specific constituencies (close or relevant to given institutional actors) within the wider societal realm. Whichever the case, this dynamic unfolds and its effects, as produced in the societal arena, have the propulsion to trigger successive mechanisms of influence.

Lastly, the analysis of social centers' pathways of influence in the two cities points to two questions.

The first is generational, and relates to the role of youth activism in shaping the influence of CSAs. Trajectories of political influence indicate that, among the collective actors that have been more influential during the crisis decade, are those with a predominance of youth activism. Surely, some of them are recent experiences, and this research considers the last decade as timespan: in this sense, the propulsion, resourcefulness and novelty of recently

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[142] As well as the urban commons framework in general.

formed actors can, in part, explain their salience and influence in their respective political environments. However, there is ground to believe that there is more to this association. For one, the timeframe argument does not apply to all influential actors: Insurgencia in Naples was born in the early 2000s, and yet has followed a highly influential political pathway. At the same time, Insurgencia's course has been shaped by a significant presence of young activists. Yet even more, the pathways retraced in this work join much of what scholarship has argued about the regeneration of politics in times of crisis. In fact, in both city cases of Bologna and Naples, albeit to varying extents[143], youth engagement has played a pivotal role in reinventing the modes, meanings and courses of collective action. This aspect is tightly linked to the shaping of youth identities and biographical courses in the context of the crisis. This points to the generational approach suggested by scholars such as Pitti (2018a), which considers political behaviors as practices defined by socio-historical contexts, and reflects on contemporary youth's generational location, or common socio-historical position. What can be argued, on the one hand, is that the youth of the crisis decade has been marked by a crossing of plural and modular belongings. These layered identities have been poured into creative ways of action, as well as in the formation of alliances linking previously distant nodes of the sociopolitical environment, also through concurrent individual memberships and personal networks. On the other hand, youth is the demographic group that was most severely affected by the crisis, and during highly formative years. This has significantly impacted young activists' perceptions, imageries, and political priorities. Young people engaging in self-managed social centers and DSAs have sought to get back a time that they felt they had been robbed of, also re-appropriating the space and time of politics, by imagining and practicing unconventional, self-organized and prefigurative forms of engagement, and infusing new meanings into them, combining small-scale actions with long-term political goals (Pitti and De Luigi 2021). As argued by Pitti (2018b), this reflects a struggle of young people to regain a central position in the face of processes of social peripheralization, exacerbated by the 2008 crisis. In that, judging by the significance of the forms of action (notably, DSA) in the trajectories of influence of social centers, it can be argued that youth engagement played a relevant role in shaping political influence during the crisis decade.

A second question, then, relates to the interaction between social centers and governmental institutions. In a sense, the variety of configurations and interplays shaped during the crisis decade in Bologna and Naples, turns the spotlight onto the challenges and contradictions of the relationship between movement politics and institutional realm. In that, it also highlights a sort of unsolved cleavage between social centers that during the decade have engaged politically with local institutions, and those that have not.

7.2 The transformation of Italian social centers, between crisis and alternative

This dissertation contributes to the research on the effects of the crisis on Italy, particularly on the dynamics of local politics and collective action. In does so by addressing the developments of the complex and multifaceted urban experiences that scholarship has described as social centers – a definition that, albeit functional in analytical terms, needs to be contextualized in a changed post-crisis society.

In this respect, the thesis offers a limited yet heterogeneous depiction of the plurality of contemporary CSAs. With some notable exceptions, in fact, social centers have been relatively disregarded by academic research since the crisis. This is true for both longer-established

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[143] Also given the different amplitude of the two urban contexts.

CSAs, including those that were once highly studied, and for recent experiences born in the 2010s.

7.2.1 Institutionalization, contention, impact: ten years of *centri sociali*

Relating to the context of the crisis and its socioeconomic and political effects, the dissertation has sought to focus on the consequences of social centers' action on municipal politics. Amidst the heterogeneity of CSAs, some elements can be pinpointed to provide a general overview of social centers' political influence during the crisis decade.

On the one hand, the pathways of these collective actors have been deeply intertwined with the transformations of urban regimes. The crisis has accelerated pre-existing trends towards the structuring of forms of participatory democracy and cooperative governance of public resources. In that, CSAs have significantly contributed to innovating local deliberation processes and regulation frameworks for the managing of urban common goods. Such innovations come from afar. In fact, the critical juncture of the crisis has crossed paths with the long struggle carried out by social centers over the course of decades, to expand the boundaries of participation and to advance alternative pathways of legality, imagining politics "heretically", shaping a point of view autonomous from parties and institutions, but also seeking to influence them.

At the same time, CSAs have developed new ways to influence institutional decision-making and bring about change: by engaging with electoral representation, in some cases, but also by leveraging representation from below, through direct social action[144]. Indeed, amongst the most salient elements, is the evolving relationship of CSAs with political representation. From an institutional perspective, actors born within the crisis (albeit from pre-existing struggles) have typically sought to influence formal politics much more intensively. What has changed is notably the approach of social centers to the consequences of struggling, as the perception of impact has increasingly come to equate the capacity to bring social transformations into institutional decisions and practices – and this, even among actors who have deliberately chosen not to enter representative politics or engage with institutions. From a general perspective of representation, the Italian context has seen the opening of new political space in the radical left (due to the general crisis of political parties, always less self-sufficient, and the decline of radical left forces), which social centers and other movement actors have in part come to interpret and seize, especially at a local level[145]. This new leeway has allowed collective actors to advance their struggles and impact institutional politics. In that, electoral representation has significantly fostered trajectories of political influence.

Concerning the forms and meanings of CSAs representation, the arguments put forth by Frazzetta and Piazza (2018) appear on point. Indeed, social centers have historically rejected the logic of democratic delegation and radically criticized the traditional notion of representation. As recalled, the debate as to whether – and how – movement politics and institutional representation can be combined, has accompanied the journey of CSAs for most of their history. For some experiences, this has resulted in an abstentionist approach; for some, it has entailed the choice to not run directly but to support specific candidacies and lists through their vote; for others, and increasingly so over time, it has instead translated into the

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[144] For one, by deploying the grievances emerged within DSAs for the formulation of public claims, and intercepting of institutional dynamics to elicit a response.

[145] Although not exclusively, as attested by the developing national path of Potere al Popolo. Still, as recalled in earlier chapters, the local level remains more easily and rapidly attainable: the resources required to influence municipal decision-making are typically reduced, and collective actors can more effortlessly leverage territorial and proximity ties to gather consensus.

choice of participating in the electoral arena, more or less directly and through various modes. As discussed in chapters 5 and 6, the decade following the crisis has seen the emergence of novel and interesting experimentations in this area, as social centers have embarked on wider and more autonomous electoral journeys. However, the forms of representation proposed insofar by social centers, while definitely innovative on some levels, have not entailed an alternative model for the relationship between representatives and representees. As well argued by Frazzetta and Piazza (2018), the logic of delegation (without imperative mandate) is not overcome; rather, the alternative conception of representation promoted by social centers is concretized in a self-representation of marginalized social groups. However, Direct Social Action keeps embodying a radical critique to the model of representation, which it contests inherently by means of participation, unmediated practices, self-management, and the shaping of an alternative political arena. As to the shaping of representation, then, a discrepancy remains between these two levels – social practices and electoral politics – in the action of CSAs.

The pathways of social centers across the crisis decade also revamp the reflection on the models of interaction with institutions. In this respect, one can wonder to what extent the fracture within the movement between the post-Autonomous and the other branches of CSAs, remains relevant for the explanation of diverging trajectories. In this respect, evidence from the empirical cases indicates that ideological background has contributed significantly to shaping CSAs' pathways (in terms of strategic choices, practices, approaches and meanings), but also that high influence can be achieved from different backgrounds and by a variety of approaches. A similar reasoning can be ventured about DSAs, which in the cases considered were not adopted based on ideology. The choice to engage in DSAs has stemmed more broadly from the ways in which social centers have made sense of the historical reality of the crisis and the role of collective action. While these aspects were certainly affected by ideology, they were informed by actors' broader identities, as well as material and non-material resources, and specific interactions. The ways in which DSAs have played out in trajectories of political influence, then, are linked to more complex configurations of identities, dynamics and approaches.

Overall, the post-Autonomous strand of CSAs remains that with the most assiduous and tight relationships with municipal institutions. Conversely, CSAs belonging to other areas of social antagonism, such as radical autonomy, have approached institutional dialogue from a longer distance. Often, these actors have either rejected negotiation and institutional interactions, or have limited them to the minimum of what was required in a particular moment – for example, instances in which their space was threatened. Mediation and interaction with institutions, for these social centers, was not always successful or highly beneficial. Most of all, even in cases where they have engaged in a dialogue or accepted a certain degree of formalization, these CSAs have not identified political points of contact or convergences, nor have they established strong relationships of political reciprocity. In this framework, the experience of the Ex Opg in Naples stands out as a novel experiment of dialogue with institutions in the Marxist-Leninist camp.

It is worth noting how all the experiences in this dissertation that, with the due adjustments to contemporaneity, can be categorized as post-Autonomous, have undergone dynamics of institutionalization. The opposite is true for social centers of different connotation: though many of them have legalized their occupations or otherwise formalized their position vis-à-vis municipalities, these experiences have not institutionalized, in the sense of operating from within institutions.

With respect to the debate on the cooptation and institutionalization of collective actors, I have argued that the mechanism experienced by social centers in Bologna and Naples has been one of double-edged institutionalization. That is, a dynamic in which institutionalization balances the pushes towards the legalization and normalization of social centers, by making CSAs unavoidable interlocutors and voices within the polity, provided with relevant resources and channels of influence. While it is true that, in quantitative terms, the number of CSAs has decreased over the course of the decade, and many have been evicted (this is especially evident in smaller urban contexts such as Bologna), the interaction between social centers and municipal politics has gone well beyond the institutional arrangements for the legalization of occupations or the concession of spaces. The reduction of the room for maneuver outside the institutional perimeter, and the progressive shift of the interaction between institutions and CSAs, have generated new leeway for CSAs within local decision-making. The institutional impulses towards the normalization of self-managed experiences, while indeed reshaping the urban landscape of collective action, have also shaped a new role for these actors and their claims within the polity.

The present work has adopted a broad definition of institutionalization, construed as the shift by which a CSA comes to act (also) within institutions. In this analytical approach, different degrees and forms of institutionalization are possible: from the entry into the realm of local electoral politics, to the inclusion of an actor into institutional decision-making and discussions on specific social subjects (particularly addressed in the CSA's action), to the institutionalization of a social center's framework (such as the urban commons legal framework) and the inclusion of representative activists into an institutional body.

Institutionalization, however, does not equate de-radicalization. Social centers remain highly contentious actors, that channel conflict through different forms of action. Evidence from the city cases of Bologna and Naples suggests that protest and DSAs, when deployed within a Bridging mechanism, contributes to building large partisanships and, if effectively mobilized to intercept institutional dynamics, can contribute to political influence. In fact, the divisiveness of an experience and the identification of partisan lines, when communities are built through bridging, can polarize the debate in ways that support the CSA's effort to seize a political space and gain leverage. The identity work carried out by influential social centers born with the crisis, and highly engaged in DSAs, has been especially informed by the element of conflict. While, as further discussed in the following section, DSAs are often not understood as contentious by other actors (institutional ones in particular), the 'contentious branding' of young social centers has played a pivotal part in the societal legitimization of these actors, thereby shaping their trajectories of influence.

At the same time, the institutionalization of contentious actors like social centers can entail some challenges. For one, CSAs are typically brought to segregate conflict: while this dynamic can help fostering the work of activists within institutions, examples such as Insurgencia[146], seems to suggest that this is true as long as the actor is not perceived as fully 'in power'. In fact, when CSAs activists are considered to be in power, a delimitation of conflict to specific targets tends to generate skepticism and mistrust, in both elected officials and other movement actors. In this sense, institutionalization can resemble a balancing act, between maintaining a configuration that grants power and capacity of influence to the movement actor, and the willingness to keep channeling and expressing contention.

7.2.2 The relative dimension of CSAs' political influence

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[146] But the social centers and activists participating in Coalizione Civica may face similar challenges in the near future as well, as they fulfil their roles in the city Council majority and the municipal Administration in Bologna.

The pathways of political influence of social centers during the crisis decade need, nonetheless, to be placed into a relative perspective.

First, the acknowledgment of political influence, as in defining the impact of social centers and attributing responsibility or merit for specific outcomes, is not univocal. Among activists, two main camps or schools of thought can be identified. Activists from spaces that engage in some level of dialogue with institutions (or that directly target institutional politics in their action), tend to claim a high degree of impact on dimensions that range from policy to institutional practices. Conversely, activists from spaces that rarely or limitedly engage with institutions, tend to argue that self-managed experiences do not influence institutional politics. Rather, these activists often point to cultural outcomes on society at large, at times also affecting institutional actors. These answers are not just offered in reference to activists' spaces themselves, but within a wider view of movement influence on city politics. In this distinction between "disenchanted" (cynical, one activist called themself) and "claiming" activists, are reflected not only an a posteriori judgment on movement history, but also a grounding approach to collective action outcomes. Both of them shape, and are shaped, by the very trajectories of CSAs, their strategic choices and interactions. Successes and failures to impact institutional decision-making, while tightly linked to ideas and choices, also shape (and often reinforce) actors' views of their political influence. Social centers' posture towards their potential to influence institutions is, in that, a constantly negotiated and iterative process, where experiences and ideas carve each other.

A second aspect that is essential to understand the evolution of CSA landscapes in Italian city systems, is the idea of reciprocal political space. This speaks to the mutual impact of collective actors within urban environments. In fact, the relative positions of social centers have played a role in setting off relational dynamics in CSAs' respective pathways. This is especially visible in the societal arena of interaction, in the mechanisms of Legitimization and Focus Shift found in single actors' trajectories. With the crisis, after the exhaustion of the 2008-2011 protest cycle, many historical social centers have started to be increasingly neglected by the mainstream (media and political) debate. The variation in the frequency and contents of articles and institutional debates mentioning these spaces, is quite telling. While for some[147] this shift can be partially explained by the space's dynamic of progressive institutional dialogue, the same cannot be claimed for others[148], that were, at most, acting within a legalized framework, but had in no way institutionalized. On the one hand, the emergence of new CSAs in urban environments has occupied relevant space in local debates. On the other hand, polarizing and newsworthy items have been privileged by both the media and the political discussion: in this respect, actors whose spaces had been legalized were deemed less salient than CSAs operating in squatted properties, and more "debatable" actors, such as disruptive youth collectives, social centers investing in public communication and representation, or innovative experiences capable of leveraging brokerage and certification dynamics. While these features were obviously not born with the crisis, recent years have amplified the logic of 'space' and the preeminence of polarizing messages in media and political communication. The public normalization of long-established CSAs, in other words, was not based on a factual reduction of conflict or of their disruptiveness, but rather on the relative positions that different social centers came to occupy during the decade in the same arenas. In sum, trajectories of political influence have also been significantly shaped by media logics, and by the relative positionings of different social centers on the chessboard of their political systems.

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[147] Such as in the case of the TPO in Bologna.
[148] Such as Officina99 in Naples, or Vag61 in Bologna.

As a whole, political influence is relative. It is interpreted in relation to the context in which it takes place, and the dynamics unfolding in the interplays between actors in certain arenas. In the city systems considered in this dissertation, despite significant distinctions, the conditions of interaction that have taken form between CSAs and institutions have been, for the most part, favorable ones. Governing actors have dialogued with social centers, and new relational dynamics have been shaped by the interplay of institutions, local public opinion and CSAs – ultimately, defining trajectories of influence. Moreover, this thesis has purposefully addressed cases that are rich in diverse and vital social center experiences. While the movement of urban social centers is well present and structured in these contexts, this is not the case everywhere in Italy. However, this has always been the case, including during the golden age of social centers. What is more, as shown throughout the thesis, differences in CSAs' trajectories are significant even within a same city system. Therefore, it is not the pretense of this thesis to argue that the same extent of political influence has been achieved by social centers everywhere. Rather, this work has been interested in decrypting the underlying dynamics of influence. What this research contributes to uncover, is how the contentious practice of Direct Social Actions, in the Italian context of the crisis, has been able to foster political influence. In other words, how the structuring in the societal fabric of material responses, territorial entrenchment, and community and identity ties, can shape a strong impact of collective action on local institutions.

7.3 Change in times of crisis: how DSAs shape political influence

Since the onset of the crisis, self-managed social centers have increasingly adopted direct social action in their repertoires. Longer-established experiences have often broadened their resort to DSAs, while some others, born with the crisis, have placed DSAs at the core of their action and identity since the beginning.

Economic and material grievances have been pervasive in social centers' sense-making during the crisis decade and, as a consequence, of their choices, strategies and actions. However, the most significant phenomena that activists evoke while accounting for their spaces' evolutions and strategies over time, relate to social disgregation and the sociopolitical crisis. Such phenomena include the widespread questioning of pre-existing dynamics of representation, the decline of political organizations, the fragmentation of the structure of social relationships and of collective identities. In line with previous literature on the subject (Bosi and Zamponi 2019), the dimension of the crisis explains the action of CSAs and the choice of some of them to engage in DSAs, under a more complex and multifaceted light than material hardship alone.

For spaces that have significantly included DSAs within their repertoires, direct social action has produced new outlooks in the relationships with the urban environment and institutional actors. Earlier sections have recounted the mechanisms that have shaped trajectories of high political influence during the crisis decade. In such framework, DSA has played a significant role.

DSAs constitute a dominant part of the repertoire of action of half of the spaces investigated in this research, and have been prominent in the repertoires of actors born with the crisis. Expectedly, there isn't a complete overlap between the use of DSAs and high degrees of political influence. Indeed, spaces can, under certain circumstances, achieve high political influence without predominantly engaging in DSAs[149] and, conversely, the extensive practice of DSAs alone does not suffice for spaces to achieve political influence on

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[149] As in the rather unique trajectories of the Asilo Filangieri and Insurgencia, in Naples.

institutions[150]. However, the analysis of the mechanisms and sub-mechanisms of influence in the two city cases, suggests that DSAs have played a key role in the pathways of most highly influential actors across the decade.

Specifically, Direct Social Action has contributed to political influence to the extent that: i) it has enabled the unfolding of Bridging mechanisms; ii) it has been leveraged in the Disruption of the power competition, and/or iii) it has contributed to Double-Edged Institutionalization.

First and foremost, DSAs have contributed to Bridging dynamics by acting as wide social connectors, fulfilling a role that – also in its dimension of identification and representation of a collective identity – has been largely lost in other political organizations, such as political parties[151]. Thanks to a bridged social environment, social centers engaged in DSAs have been able to act on the larger society, overcoming the traditional conception of self-managed spaces as islands within the city. With respect to the classical approach of social centers, which entailed experimenting social transformation in an enclave, DSAs have been the channel through which these experiences have attempted to bring that practical realization of an alternative society to new and different segments in their local systems, including mainstream and consolidated social realms. At the same time, DSAs have played a role in making social centers known, expanding their networks and their public outreach. In the case of newly established actors, at times this has entailed a grip on the local society strong enough to prompt a Legitimization of the actor, and to increase its saliency in the city landscape. With respect to legitimization, too, DSAs have been crucial. On the one hand, they have informed the contentious branding of younger social centers, also in its outward projection towards society. On the other hand, brokerage dynamics, public support and certification have often originated from DSAs, as a result of the relationships and alliances formed through practices. Through this societal grip, DSAs have intervened in the political and conflictual dimension. In fact, when the structuring and the mobilization of collective identities were strong, social centers have been able to intercept the competition for power and institutional dynamics, carving spaces of influence for themselves. Both the structuring of clear and defined identities, and their compact political mobilization (within the broader society), have been significantly fostered by the adoption of DSAs. In turn, this has translated into the possibility for actors to intercept institutions and the competition for power, through dynamics of representation, convergence, the seizure of political spaces.

The use of DSAs as a predominant form action also puts a different spin on the same dynamics. For example, the analysis finds that a territorialization of collective action has been experienced in their trajectories by virtually all social centers considered. This points to a general trend undergone by self-managed spaces, following the end of the 'golden age' of Italian CSAs, and particularly in the aftermath of the crisis. With the exhaustion of the 2008-2012 protest cycle, urging movement actors to rethink the channels through which to conduct their struggles, and the growing demands for direct citizen participation and territorial proximity (as opposed to the increasingly vertical and distant perception of institutional politics), social centers have more or less purposefully responded to a changing socio-political context, seeking the construction of ties within territories. Territorialization has in this respect taken the form of a geographical and physical situation or focus of collective action, linked to

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[150] As shown by experiences such as Xm24 in Bologna and Villa Medusa in Naples.
[151] In fact, Bridging is retraced in the pathways of all the social centers engaged in DSAs among those considered. The only exception is represented by Xm24 in Bologna, whose social environment arena has known an encapsulation dynamic. This was due to a peculiar configuration of this actor (structured as a large incubator of fragmented movement subjectivities and surrounded by an extraordinarily deviant narrative), which, among other significant dynamics, has entailed a mobilization of DSAs within a narrow environment.

a transformation of collective identities and strategies. In concatenation with other dynamics, territorialization can contribute to political influence. Within Bridging mechanisms, a predominant engagement in DSAs tends to prompt, as a result of territorialization, the consolidation of wide, solid and transversal networks, often with established and legitimized civil society actors[152]. Conversely, territorialization dynamics can translate into networks that are narrower or more homogeneous for actors moderately engaged in DSA. The reasons for this difference reside in the nature of the practices that bring networks together. First, DSAs, compared to single local struggles or campaigns, bear a longer perspective of duration in time, much less contingent upon sudden events. Second, DSAs spur the emergence of steady alliances between significantly diverse actors, from social centers to church groups, to unions and associations. In that, they allow for the establishment of longer-term and transversal coalitions. The mobilization of these relational resources for political purpose, in turn, can foster the legitimization of collective actors and their interception of institutional and power competition dynamics.

In addition, some specific dynamics appear to be directly prompted by DSAs. One example is the certification of self-managed experiences through itemizing, by which institutional or civil society actors sanction the action of a social center by leveraging its DSAs. Itemizing describes an expression of validation for collective actors conditioned upon the distinction between different items of their repertoires, and particularly through the distinction between disruptive forms of action and DSAs, perceived as socially useful and commendable. Itemizing is often associated with instances of further procedural inclusion and improvements in institutional attitudes, as the DSA portion of an actor's repertoire of actions is validated by authorities or the public opinion.

Overall, then, it can be argued that DSAs significantly impact political influence. This is the case across all the three dimensions of political influence. With respect to institutional attitudes, DSAs play a role in mitigating negative perceptions of social centers, and in facilitating institutional recognition, also in light of these actors' societal grip. In terms of procedural access, DSAs open channels of exchange and impact: for instance, social centers come in contact with municipal bureaucracies regarding the cooperative management of social services; they are consulted or involved in decision-making concerning specific social matters that are at the core of their Direct Social Action; institutional politicians seek a dialogue with social centers engaged in DSAs to get a better sense of specific territories and the grievances of local communities. Lastly, policy influence can be affected by the presence of the two other dimensions of recognition and access, but it especially relates to the underlying dynamics that allow (or do not allow) social centers to intervene in the competition for power or other institutional dynamics. In turn, as discussed, such dynamics (as the mobilization of strong collective identities) are deeply fostered by DSAs.

However, a critical node needs to be underlined. The dilemma of Direct Social Actions lies in the fact that the contentious nature of these practices is only very limitedly grasped by external, non-movement actors, particularly institutional ones. With participants and beneficiaries of DSAs, but often also with ally actors, social centers aim to highlight the political and contentious dimension of these forms of action. This element is also quite present in the external communication of social centers, whereby DSAs are presented to broader public. Still, as activists recount, many among the general public view DSAs as they view the actions of volunteer associations and charity organizations. Even more, as attested by the discursive categories mobilized by elected officials, and by the effect of DSAs in mitigating

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[152] This, in turn, makes dynamics of legitimization (through brokerage and certification) and of disruption of power competition (especially through representation) more likely.

institutional attitudes, from an institutional perspective these practices are largely read as useful services within a context of hardship or against the background of phenomena of exclusion. While social centers themselves are perceived as contentious actors, their engagement in DSAs tends to be interpreted as a cooperative provision of services, even morally commendable, but in many ways similar to the initiatives carried out by other non-political and socially engaged actors. Only few elected officials, politically closer to these experiences, acknowledge their inherent contentious nature. More often than not, institutional actors perceive contention only in the grievances and claims that are raised as a consequence of Direct Social Actions, and are directed towards institutions. This poses some ambivalent challenges to social centers. On the one hand, it is also thanks to this normalized and "useful" view, that DSAs have worked as a leverage for political influence. On the other hand, this naturally flattens and distorts the political meaning of direct social actions. At the same time, the adoption of DSAs comes with a relevant contentious counterpart: the politicization of participants and the fostering of social centers' struggles. This balances, in a sense, the misinterpretations surrounding DSAs.

The trajectories retraced in this work offer some significant examples of how DSAs can contribute to political influence, through pathways that are overall much less contingent on political conjunctures than trajectories of influence based entirely on political convergence and electoral alliances. Of course, this does not mean that DSA is the only road to political influence. This is well attested by an experience like Insurgencia, that has bridged its environment and intervened in the competition for power even with a limited resort to DSAs. Nor does it mean that DSAs alone are enough to ensure political influence[153]. First, the boundaries of the spatial and relational context in which DSAs are mobilized make a significant difference. If collective action, for any reason, is encapsulated into a spatial or relational enclave, its potential to leverage institutional politics and achieve influence remains low. Granted, not all social centers – regardless of how bridged their social environment – choose courses of action that engage with institutional politics, or aim to produce institutional change directly. Second, to be conducive to influence, DSAs have to be mobilized for political purpose within a clearly identified collective identity.

In fact, what the experiences investigated in this work have particularly shown is the novel relationship between repertoires, identity work, and representation. In other words, the linkage between Direct Social Action, and the structuring and mobilization of collective identities. This aspect, particularly manifest in the pathways of social centers born with the crisis, goes back to the context of disgregating collective and individual identities, and confirms a phenomenon of reshaping of identities by means of practices. The Meluccian idea of constantly negotiated identities has become ever more relevant after the crisis, with the innovation of collective action repertoires. DSAs, in particular, offer a relevant example of how, in a society largely emancipated by higher-order references, shared belongings and collective identities can be built by action itself. This is most visible in the contentious branding identity work carried out by younger social centers, and by their subsequent mobilization of collective identities. Citing Pirni and Raffini, "from a situation in which identification preceded the action, we move on to a situation in which the identification is simultaneous to the action" (2016, pp. 817-818). Values, meanings, the essence of these political subjectivities are both largely formed within action and channeled by action. DSAs are a space of shaping of collective identity, but also one for its representation.

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[153] The experiences of Villa Medusa, in Naples, whose repertoire is almost entirely comprised of mutualistic practices, and of Xm24 in Bologna, who has been engaging in DSAs already since before the crisis, speak precisely to this.

7.4 Conclusions

A tension exists, within scholarship, between the willingness to find and demonstrate collective action outcomes, and the tendency to view social movements as rather uninfluential. There is no denying that, as far as political change goes, movements are typically less influential than other actors and institutions (such as governments or parties). Still, the relevance of investigating the influence of collective actors does not just reside in the inherent aim of social movements to change society, but lies also in their capacity to interpret, and often anticipate, the transformations of the society and the time in which they live.

With this dissertation, I have proposed a perspective to undertake this task, balancing the search for collective action impact with the exploration of the different dimensions, extents and forms of political influence. Rather than focusing on the quest of outcomes per se, I have sought to investigate in depth the dynamics that shape trajectories of political influence, in its multiple nuances (beyond just policy).

In fact, though abundant research has highlighted the impact of specific collective actors on political change, scholarship has often associated movement influence with precise favorable or unfavorable circumstances (for further discussion see Amenta et al. 2010). While sharing much of the scholarly elaborations on the relevance of political mediation, this dissertation has sought to show how circumstances of influence are not given, but constantly dynamically negotiated, and shaped by the interplay of actors in multiple interaction arenas. Even more, this thesis has made the case that aspects that literature has often treated as factors enabling movement impact, are in fact facets of influence in themselves. With respect to the theoretical considerations raised at the beginning of the dissertation, and more generally to the scholarly understanding of political influence, the results of this work have highlighted some new elements. First and foremost, the analysis of the empirical cases confirms the role of a form of action (DSA) that is neither demonstrative or conventional, in shaping pathways of movement influence on institutions. Furthermore, results indicate that the facets of political influence extend well beyond just policy, but also show multiple ways by which the three dimensions of influence engage in a mutual interplay and can impact and circularly reshape one another. The picture that emerges from the research also displays the complexities of collective actors-institutions interactions, and of the gain of positions of power by movement activists, beyond the risk of cooptation. The pathways retraced show the nuanced nature of double-edged institutionalization, for both institutional and movement actors, and its link to political influence. While the theoretical framework of the dissertation is still primarily focused on collective actors, it seeks to uncover a more general perspective of political influence, which also accounts for institutional perspectives and dynamics. In that, for one, the analysis of the two city cases yields specific institutional mechanisms and examples of elements that have characterized institutional attitudes in the context of the crisis. Yet, other researchers may see it fit to push this perspective even further, removing movements from the core of the analysis altogether (as suggested by McAdam and Boudet 2012).

However, influence in itself was not the only central question of the dissertation. Beyond that, this work has especially intended to bridge a gap between the research on collective action repertoires in times of crisis, and the literature on movement outcomes, exploring the role of Direct Social Actions in shaping political influence. Empirically, the research purposefully focuses on a diverse kind of actor (self-managed social centers), participating in a wide array of struggles – that is, taking action and seeking to bring about change across issues and practices. The rationale behind this was to isolate the impact of DSA on political

influence, adopting a broader perspective than single campaigns or claims, and being able to compare findings across cases. However, scholars addressing similar questions might choose otherwise – for example, to focus on a specific issue or area of influence, or to explore the political influence of other kinds of actors adopting DSAs.

The thesis has sought to dive into the local dimension of the city, as the environment in which social injustice is immediately experienced, contradictions are embraced, alternatives experimented and struggles brought forth. Diving into local spaces of struggle is a sensitive task, that requires navigating complexity and proximity, dispersion and intimacy, minuscule and enormous questions. Abstraction, or the attempt to make sense of phenomena from an epistemological perspective, is hardly a linear task, and something inevitably gets lost. Photojournalist W. Eugene Smith once wrote: "Even in its most persistent clichés, a city is composed beyond count of unpredictable fragments, and these compel a fidelity of vision that lances far beneath and beyond the hollow tag-line identifications […] that are often wrought to fit them. To portray a city is beyond ending"[154]. I would venture that these words describe most researchers' sentiment while investigating the depths of urban social dynamics. Surely, it describes my own sentiment exploring these two cities and their actors over the past four years. There is much more to say, still, about them.

This research holds no prescriptive intent vis-à-vis collective actors. Indeed, the dissertation has shown multiple experiences for which a specific model of action and interaction has proven effective, within the crisis, to achieve high political influence vis-à-vis institutions. However, the thesis has also sought to acknowledge how this model does not apply to every social center experience, pathway or identity, and to carefully reckon its challenges alongside its opportunities. Regardless of their situation, one contribution that this work can hopefully bring to the reflection of self-managed spaces and their communities (but also, for that matter, to other kinds of political organizations as well) has to do with the great potential of Direct Social Action in advancing mechanisms of influence and, thereby, of change. Particularly, this results from the material, spatial and social entrenchment and the dynamics of representation structured through DSA. From the perspective of institutions and elected officials, then, the interaction with movement actors can help leverage these latter elements – fading ones, for traditional political settings and actors – and enable new and innovative agendas to be pushed forward. In times of acute political crisis, these can be valuable elements to consider.

Several avenues for future research are open. The dissertation has attempted to consider and account for as many elements, dynamics and nuances as possible in its analysis. However, it has also carefully acknowledged the selections that were made in the process. Most notably, being concerned with political influence, the framework proposed in these pages leaves the biographical and cultural outcomes of collective action out of the picture. The thesis has shown that Direct Social Action has mattered significantly in the pathways of political influence of Italian social centers during the crisis decade. But what about the effect of DSAs on biographical outcomes? For the sake of space, and focus, the dissertation has only briefly touched upon the backgrounds of the activists that make social centers live. The question remains to be explored then, as to how the adoption of DSAs has affected the life trajectories of activists. The personal stories and experiences that I have encountered during fieldwork would suggest that direct social action has been playing a relevant role in this respect – particularly for younger generations of activists, and for many who, having entered social centers as beneficiaries of DSAs, have since politicized and joined the struggle. Moreover,

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[154] Quote by W.E. Smith, from the introduction to the author's essay "Pittsburgh, A Labyrinthian Walk", Photography Annual, 1959.

the thesis does not address the impact of social centers on the ideas and issue preferences of institutional actors, limiting its scope to institutional attitudes towards collective actors themselves. Future research could, for one, develop a processual approach associating the political influence framework with an investigation of movements' cultural influence on institutions.

Still, prominent scholarship has contended that the biggest challenge remains on the political consequences of collective action – or in the ways in which literature makes sense of them. In *Democracy reloaded*, while discussing the Spanish 15M, Cristina Flesher-Fominaya touches upon the 'failure' of movement actors in the realm of what are usually construed as political outcomes (and especially the low responsiveness of institutions to movement demands). The author argues that the movement's ability to sustain itself despite 'political failures', points to the need to widen scholarship's gaze beyond narrow definitions of political outcomes.

This dissertation has offered a perspective on political influence that is more encompassing than many previous understandings. However, the notion of political outcomes remains entirely institutions-oriented. Indeed, the spectrum of collective actors' political effects is wider than their impact on institutions, and likely calls for a re-discussion of how movement consequences are intended and categorized within the social sciences. The present work has confirmed that collective action matters, and that Direct Social Action can play a key role in politically influencing institutions at times of hardship. Still, the political effects of DSAs likely extend well beyond the institutional perimeter.

Lastly, the past two years of Covid-19 pandemic, which are not included in the dissertation, have seen a proliferation of DSAs in the repertoires of many collective actors. It remains to be understood how Direct Social Action has shaped pathways of influence during these new times of crisis.

This research is but a small stepping stone, within what looks like a much vaster picture.

Appendix

Table 1 Overview of self-managed spaces considered in the two city cases.

BOLOGNA

actor	period of activity	electoral representation	age composition
Làbas	2012-present	yes	youth
TPO	1995-present	yes	mixed
Xm24	2002-2019	no	mixed
Vag61	2003-present	no	mixed
Crash	2003-present	no	mixed

NAPLES

actor	timespan	electoral representation	age composition
Ex Opg – Je so' pazzo	2015-present	yes (national)	youth
Villa Medusa	2012-present	yes (national)	mixed
Insurgencia	2004-present	yes (city)	youth
Officina99	1991-present	no	mixed
Ex Asilo Filangieri	2012-present	no	mixed

Table 2 Detail of interviews conducted for each city case.

ACTIVISTS

	actor	interviewee	date	place
BOLOGNA				
	TPO	#I1SC1	30/4/2019	Bologna
	Làbas	#I1SC2	07/5/2019 and 30/10/2019	Bologna
	Làbas	#I2SC2	5/6/2019	Bologna
	Làbas	#I3SC2	13/12/2019	Bologna
	Xm24	#I1SC3	4/11/2019	Bologna
	Vag61	#I1SC4	28/9/2020	Bologna
	Vag61	#I2SC4	28/9/2020	Bologna
	Crash	#I1SC5	18/3/2021	online
	Circolo Anarchico Berneri	#I1SC11	17/6/2020	online
NAPLES				
	Ex-OGP Je so' Pazzo	#I1SC6	9/5/2019	Florence
	Ex-OGP Je so' Pazzo	#I2SC6	19/6/2019 and 5/11/2019	Naples
	Ex-OGP Je so' Pazzo	#I3SC6	19/6/2019	Naples
	Ex-OGP Je so' Pazzo	#I4SC6	5/11/2019	Naples
	Ex-OGP Je so' Pazzo	#I5SC6	19/5/2019	Naples
	Villa Medusa	#I1SC7	24/3/2020	online
	Insurgencia	#I1SC8	15/1/2021	online
	Officina99	#I1SC9	16/9/2020	Naples

| Ex Asilo Filangieri | #I1SC10 | 24/3/2020 | online |
| Ex Asilo Filangieri | #IS2C10 | 17/9/2020 | Naples |

ELECTED OFFICIALS

interviewee	role (past/present)	date	place

BOLOGNA

interviewee	role (past/present)	date	place
#IE1	elected official, opposition	4/2/2020	Bologna
#IE2	elected official, opposition	4/12/2019	Bologna
#IE3	elected official, opposition	17/2/2020	Bologna
#IE4	elected official, opposition	6/2/2020	Bologna
#IE5	elected official, opposition	16/2/2021	Bologna
#IE13	cabinet member	22/10/2020	online

NAPLES

interviewee	role (past/present)	date	place
#IE6	elected official, opposition	21/10/2020	online
#IE7	elected official, opposition	1/10/2020	online
#IE8	elected official, majority	17/9/2020	Naples
#IE9	elected official, majority	30/9/2020	online
#IE10	elected official, majority and cabinet member	7/4/2020	online
#IE11	elected official, opposition	12/10/2020	online
#IE12	cabinet member	15/9/2020	Naples

Key informants

position	interviewee	date	place
journalist	#KI1	20/10/2020	Bologna
municipal officer and academic	#KI2	3/11/2020	online
academic and activist	#KI3	17/9/2020	Naples

Table 3 Selection of articles analyzed for each social center, per newspaper, and corresponding timespan.

BOLOGNA

actor	newspaper	number of articles	timespan
Làbas	*Repubblica Bologna*	261	2012-2020
Làbas	*Resto del Carlino*	59	2012-2019
TPO	*Repubblica Bologna*	337	2000-2020
TPO	*Resto del Carlino*	75	2008-2019
Xm24	*Repubblica Bologna*	295	2002-2020
Xm24	*Resto del Carlino*	82	2007-2020
Vag61	*Repubblica Bologna*	131	2004-2019
Vag61	*Resto del Carlino*	27	2007-2019
Crash	*Repubblica Bologna*	97	2010-2019
Crash	*Resto del Carlino*	46	2007-2019

actor	newspaper	number of articles	timespan
Circolo anarchico Berneri*	*Repubblica Bologna*	22	2000-2019
Circolo anarchico Berneri*	*Resto del Carlino*	6	2006-2019

NAPLES

actor	newspaper	number of articles	timespan
Ex Opg – Je so' pazzo	*Repubblica Napoli*	81	2015-2020
Ex Opg – Je so' pazzo	*Il Mattino*	52	2017-2019
Villa Medusa	*Repubblica Napoli*	14	2012-2019
Villa Medusa	*Il Mattino*	3	2017-2020
Insurgencia	*Repubblica Napoli*	136	2004-2020
Insurgencia	*Il Mattino*	58	2014-2020
Officina99	*Repubblica Napoli*	73	2000-2020
Officina99	*Il Mattino*	6	2013-2019
Ex Asilo Filangieri	*Repubblica Napoli*	134	2009-2019
Ex Asilo Filangieri	*Il Mattino*	22	2014-2020

Mechanisms and sub-mechanisms

Bridging: mechanism by which a collective actor expands the boundaries of the social environment in which its action unfolds, with the more or less explicit aim of fostering and increasing struggles' salience.

brokerage: the linking of two or more currently unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with each other and/or with yet another site (McAdam, Tilly & Tarrow 2004, p. 142)

certification: validation of actors, their performances, and their claims by external parties, especially authorities (McAdam, Tilly & Tarrow 2004, p. 145)
certification through Itemizing: expression of validation for collective actors conditioned upon the distinction between different items of their repertoires, particularly through the distinction between disruptive/protest actions and non-disruptive forms of action (such as DSAs) perceived as socially useful and commendable.
de-certification: a relational sub-mechanism, defined as the lack or withdrawal of validation and recognition of actors, their performances and their claims by external authorities (McAdam et al. 2001, p. 204)

contentious branding: dynamic by which the collective identity of an actor is translated into definite semiotic structures of recognizability and identification, such as specific names and expressions, logos, standardized slogans and imaginaries.

convergence: the nearing and concurrence, be it for a short or a continued period of time, of the political goals and/or claims of more than one actor (by opposition, the estrangement and differencing of the political goals and/or claims, may be defined as divergence).

disruption: the use of force or disruptive tactics by social movement actors, to improve their chances of reaching their goals.

Disruption of power competition: mechanism by which the institutional competition for power is disrupted as a consequence of movement action, resulting in significant new alignments and divisions.

Downward spiral of political opportunity: dynamic by which the institutional competition for power increasingly unfolds on a terrain of political competition directly referring to a collective actor, intensifying along established cleavages and dividing lines of conflict.

Double-edged institutionalization: mechanism by which, as the room for maneuver outside the institutional perimeter reduces, and the arena of interaction between State and challenger progressively shifts, new leeway is created for the collective actor within local decision-making. Institutionalization impulses are balanced by increased legitimacy and validation for movement actors involved and their claims, no longer reducible to plain 'outsiders' of the polity.

double tracking: course of action by which an actor consistently employs protest or otherwise disruptive tactics at the same time as non-disruptive and even cooperative and/or institutional(ized) actions.

Encapsulation: the mechanism consisting of enclosing of a subject within fixed boundaries of action and/or within a delimited configuration of allies.

Focus Shift: mechanism that captures a shift in the space of action of a movement or movement organization, prompting the moving of a collective actor to a different location within the societal environment.

integration: the progressive incorporation of a collective actor into the institutional realm, through an increasing presence, in numeric terms and/or power distribution, of activists in government units.

isolation: the deterioration of an actor's ties with allies and its progressive distancing from them, in a context where the forming of new alliances appears unlikely or difficult for the time being.

Legitimization: increase of positive and popularly resonating representations of actors and their actions (cognitive mechanism).

narrative: placing of an actor into an overarching narrative, produced either by the actor itself or the mainstream debate, or a combination of the two.

network: the dynamic through which an actor builds or expands its network of social and political ties.

normalization: sub-mechanism through which the public image of a given actor becomes less newsworthy, and its overall visibility (in the media and the public debate) decreases significantly.

Partitioning: the mechanism through which either a collective actor willingly distances itself from its (even potential) State counterparts, as a form of rejection of institutional logics and a means of guarding a certain degree of autonomy, or both parties proceed with their respective course of action segregating themselves from one another and avoiding interactions.

perimeter unlocking: in the perspective of furthering struggles, the reconfiguration of a space's action and cognitive perimeter as accessible to, and involving, new or larger publics.

polarization: widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode and the gravitation of previously uncommitted or moderate actors toward one, the other, or both extremes (McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow 2004: 322).

public support: the consolidation of favorable attitudes towards an actor on the part of a given environment or community.

reciprocity: instauration of a relationship of reciprocity between two or more actors (here, between the institutional and the movement actors).

repartition: situation of interaction in which each actor feels compelled to carry their position all the way through, in order to gain as much as possible from the terrain of political struggle and exit the interaction with their part of a political resource.

representation: dynamic in which an actor mobilizes its collective identity, acting on behalf of a clearly identified group whose claims it brings onto the political debate.

segregation of conflict: the distinction and selection, on the part of an actor, of circumscribed settings where conflictual dynamics can unfold (i.e. specific targets, struggles, practices), but not in others.

seizure of political space: the dynamic by which political space is occupied by an actor within the broader political debate, discursively and cognitively, but also in terms of political positioning and role.

territorialization: revitalization of territorial dimension of collective action, through the development of ties of vicinity, reciprocal knowledge and solidarity within a local community, building collective belongings in a determined spatial and relational context (Bosi & Zamponi 2019)

tokening: the use of a given case or example – interpreted as representing, symbolizing or signifying something else – as an indication, proof or model, to support a political point or argument referring to a broader category of situations or actors.

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