

## **Resisting the urban existing. Transgressive and creative living in Californian informal settlements and communities**

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In times of crisis, when cities go through increasing social and economic divides, concepts like commons, self-management and autonomy easily come back in vogue and become appealing to a wider array of people. Different experiences seeking innovative alternatives to contemporary cities appear also in informal settlements along the US West Coast, where creative organizational forms and transgressive attempts to overcome the crisis are increasingly emerging. In such a way, new interactions between regulation/self-management, institutions/grassroots, urban/rural are also redefining the boundaries between inside/outside the system, adaptation/innovation, legal/illegal.

Which role does creativity play in self-managed peripheries and how does it help build coalitions in urban cores? To what extent do transgressive practices in informal settlements challenge the normative urban order? Do counter-cultural radical practices in the countryside have an influence on the economy of urban peripheries?

This paper intends to answer to these questions with regard to some settlements and communities in California, a state marked by a late but intense urbanization. Three key-concepts will be used as guidelines for our reflection: self-sufficiency, self-management and counter-culture.

Some case-studies, based upon ethnographic investigations and qualitative interviews, will be presented as different creative practices of urban and anti-urban resistance: from the new participatory models in rural areas and in the outskirts of cities (like the food justice actions and the environmental community projects in the San Francisco Bay Area) through the informal settlement, such as the free-town "Slab City", to the cannabis-based illegal communities which seasonally attract marginalized city dwellers.

A conceptual-theoretical approach will explore the interrelation between some creative practices and their imaginaries and how this interaction has changed over time. Namely, how some practices are influenced by which imageries and how imageries are reshaped by new practices. Classic literature on urban communitarism, the latest reflections on self-management and autonomy, along with Murray Bookchin's work on Social Ecology, will contribute to frame the case-studies.

What this paper aims at offering is a reflection on the crossfertilization and influence of creative and alternative practices of living in different informal settlements and communities. This contribution will also address the issue of how such expressions of resistance to the existing normative urban order are self-perceived and how they are reframed by institutional actors.

**Keywords:** informal settlements, autonomous community, alternative economies, free-towns, urban sustainability, direct actions, environmental and social movements, neo-ruralism.

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