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# **Normalizing autonomous spaces: ongoing transformations in Christiania, Copenhagen**

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## **Abstract**

Christiania is an autonomous Free Town, born as a squat in 1971, located in the center of Copenhagen. After 40 years of struggles and negotiations with the Danish institutions in order to survive and to maintain its autonomy, Christiania reached an agreement with the state in 2011. If on the one hand the agreement apparently guarantees the survival of Christiania, on the other hand it regulates various domains that used to be self-regulated by the community, and therefore limits Christiania's autonomy. The aim of the article is to discuss the potential effects of the agreement – and more specifically of the new government technology placed in operation through the agreement – on some of these domains. Assuming that autonomy is always fractured, partial and ongoing, the thesis proposed in the article is that, in this new context, Christiania has come to represent a peculiar case of hybridization of forces of autonomy and of forces of neoliberalization, and that the tensions between these two forces could potentially lead to different outcomes that challenge traditional understanding of both autonomy and neoliberalism in urban contexts.

**Keywords:** Christiania, Copenhagen, autonomous spaces, normalization, rescaling, neoliberalism

## **1. Introduction**

The Free Town of Christiania is a semi-autonomous community of about 900 inhabitants in the centre of Copenhagen, Denmark. Born in 1971 as a squat of an abandoned military base, the Free Town is a 340.000 square meters area that survived for more than 40 years by fighting and negotiating its status with the Danish institutions. Particularly, till July 2012 Christiania resisted attempts to be 'normalized' and 'regularized' with Danish laws, and for more than 40 years the Free Town has been a space for social experimentation, political activism and resistance outside the normal rules of Denmark.

A landmark event in the history of Christiania has been the negotiation, during summer 2011, of an agreement with the Danish Ministry of Energy and Buildings, the government entity in charge of the area since the mid 2000s. The agreement allows the inhabitants to collectively own part of the land, and to rent the remaining part, in exchange for the payment of about 14 million euro by 2015. On 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012, the first part of the sum has been paid. Although the agreement has been celebrated as a success by a large part of Christiania inhabitants, a number of critical nodes rose in the last months. Particularly, the agreement regulates a number of issues that used to be self-regulated by the inhabitants, and therefore acts as a governmental technology modifying in a meaningful way previous regulatory mechanisms for local politics and urban development.

The aim of the article is to analyse the relation between the agreement and the politics of autonomy in Christiania. Assuming that autonomy is always fractured, partial, open and ongoing and thus always in relation to the prevailing social and economic structures in the society at large, the thesis proposed in the article is that Christiania represents a peculiar case of hybridization of forces of autonomy and of 'normalization' to the forces of neoliberalism. In fact, a consolidated critical literature discussed how neoliberalism introduced a rescaling of power relations and governance structures at different levels, including the urban (see Brenner and Theodor, 2002; Kohn and Warner, 2004), generating a number of different

spatial formations as gated communities, special interest districts, etc. Using Christiania as a case study, the paper will argue that neoliberal urban rescaling also involves sites for autonomy struggling for survival and for the preservation of their alterity. Christiania represents a hybrid autonomous space fully involved in a neo-liberal governance framework, and the tensions between the forces of autonomy and neo-liberalism in the Free Town could potentially lead to a number of different outcomes, including a strengthening of autonomy, as it will be discussed in the conclusions.

Methodologically, the analysis is based on fieldwork carried on by the two authors between 2010 and 2012. Thank to a local Christiania initiative aimed at hosting researchers and artists interested in the Freetown, the two authors have had the possibility to live in Christiania for a total time of 6 weeks– through different trips – and to participate in local life. During fieldwork, the authors carried on semi-structured interviews with 30 inhabitants and with 20 privileged informants – some of whom were also residents – including scholars studying Christiania, residents involved in the management and provision of local services, people who played an active role in the shaping of the agreement with the Ministry of Energy and Buildings , and local activists openly criticizing the agreement.

The article is organized in five parts. In the next section, the theoretical framework concerning rescaling processes in the neoliberal scenario and autonomous spaces is presented. Then, section 3 briefly presents the case of Christiania. Section 4 analyses the relation between the agreement and the construction of Christiania as a hybrid space combining elements of autonomous and normalized governance. Finally, section 5 proposes final remarks concerning the relations between resistance and normalization.

## **2. Theoretical perspectives: rescaling and autonomy**

The debate on the geographical scales of neoliberalism and rescaling processes is rather well known and will be shortly reviewed here. The debate on rescaling has been developed at the end of the 90s by the works of Erik Swyngedouw (1997). He observed the hollowing out of the state induced by the rapid expansion of trade, foreign investment and international financial flows and its consequences in terms of the contested restructuring of the institutional and regulatory realms from the national level both upwards to supranational and global scales and downwards to the scale of the local, the urban and the individual body. According to Swyngedouw (1997, p. 170), regulatory codes, norms and institutions are “spatially jumping from one scale to another”.

The rescaling process have had important consequence for metropolitan and urban areas. On one hand, there has been the spread of new development agendas based on ‘entrepreneurial’ urban policies, as already observed by a number of authors by the end of the 80s and particularly during the 90s (see Harvey, 1989; Cox, 1993; Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Jessop, 2002). On the other hand, a number of scholars, drawing from the Foucaultian concept of governmentality, analyzed how in the neoliberal scenario individuals and local communities are reframed as subjects that are increasingly responsible for the pursuit of their own well-being, also in reference to areas - such as safety, social security and urban services – that were once exclusive domains of the state (Osborne and Rose, 1999).

Drawing from this literature, Neil Brenner, in his analysis of the scales of governance within the European Union, introduced at the end of the 90s the well-known expression *rescaling*, concerning the various ways by which the national state has re-positioned itself as an interconnecting site and a strategic spatiality between the supra-national institutional scale and the urban and regional spaces of governance (Brenner, 1999; 2004). Particularly, with the crisis of the Keynesian state and of the related redistributive agendas, the goal of the state has become to facilitate the developmental capacities of different places (Jessop, 2002). The

pivotal concept of 'territorial competition' justified and opened the field for 'urban locational policies' including the devolution of regulatory responsibilities, the construction of place- and scale-specific institutional forms (like Enterprise Zones, and the Urban Development Corporations); rescaled 'metro-politanized' spatial planning strategies that distribute infrastructural investments across major urban areas in order to enhance their competitive abilities; and state-financed mega-projects designed to stimulate growth in particular places (Cox, 2009).

This is certainly the case for Copenhagen, where entrepreneurial strategies, including mega-projects, private-led urban regenerations and 'creative city' strategies, have been developed in the last decade (see Desfor and Jørgensen, 2004; Majoor, 2008; Thor Andersen and Winther, 2010). But rescaling processes also concern Christiania. On the one hand, it has to be considered that the Free Town is a relevant tourist attraction, and therefore it is important for the Copenhagen policy-makers to take advantage of Christiania by preserving it while, at the same time, 'normalizing' it, that means removing the excesses in order to allow the widening of the spectrum of potential tourists and, according to critics, to represent the Free Town as a kind of 'hippie Disneyland' (cf. Amouroux, 2009; Vanolo, 2013). On the other hand, as it will be argued, the agreement has introduced a new level of governance involving supra-local Danish institutions, and therefore it has changed the scale of regulation, that is now no more entirely 'local'.

At the same time, Christiania may be thought in terms of what Pickerill and Chatterton refers to as 'autonomous spaces', described as "spaces where people desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social, and economic organization through a combination of resistance and creation" (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006, p. 730; cf. Jarvis, 2013). According to this conceptualization, localized autonomous spaces and alternative processes include a wide variety of spatial structures and social practices, like social centres, eco-villages, alternative currencies, food production networks, housing cooperatives

and self-education, and various experiments in non-hierarchical organization and consensus-based decision-making. As it will be discussed, the concept of 'autonomy' – described as the search for freedom and connection beyond national states, international financial institutions, global corporations and neoliberalism (ibidem), and the deep desire to expand collective capacity for self government (Chatterton, 2010) – fits well with the cultural and emotional framework of Christiania.

As stressed by Pickerill and Chatterton (2006), autonomy is a controversial concept, that may oscillate between pushes towards reciprocal collectivism and towards egoistic individualism.

On one side, one conceptualization of autonomy insists on ideas of localism, self-management, cooperation, solidarity, communitarianism, sustainability (see the classical literature on the 'progressive city': Clavel, 1986). In a number of cases, including many discourses concerning Christiania, autonomy is factually defined as a counterpart to capitalism and neoliberalism, as an impulse to find creative survival routes out of the capitalist present through a rejection of hierarchy and authoritarianism and a belief in collective self-management (Chatterton, 2010). Of course, autonomy is not a synonym for independence and self-reliance (Sorens, 2012), particularly because of the many compromises characterizing autonomous spaces: spaces of resistance, including Christiania, are ultimately capitalist systems depending on flows and services from the outside. In Christiania, for example, a vast part of the inhabitants work 'outside' during the day. Autonomy as a form of resistance to neoliberalism has to be conceptualized as a political objective, a strategy and a process (see Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006; Featherstone, 2008) concerning the attempt to resist the logics of mainstream neoliberal culture. Such conception is in line with the logic of what Yack (1968) calls 'the Kantian left' , focusing on the idea that the ability to escape the dehumanising conditions of capitalism is linked to the search for autonomy. In this vision, the veritable human character of people asserts itself in their liberty,

allowing them to oppose their own aims to those imposed upon them by society (Boltanski, 2002). If we assume neoliberalism as a set of power relations – or as an apparatus of Imperial control, according to Hardt and Negri (2000) – than autonomy may be intended as a relational construct: another set of power relations *in opposition* (DeFillipis, 2004). Autonomy is not, therefore, an individual or collective property of people or places, but a temporary and situated social construct.

Although autonomy by necessity occurs in a locality, it is not the transformation of the locality which is specifically relevant, but the tendency towards autonomy which has the potential for multiscalar change. Through a series of discrete local actions, resistance creates a space where alternative to neoliberalism are posed, and therefore where the ubiquity and pervasiveness of neoliberalism is broken down (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Routledge and Cumbers, 2006). Autonomous spaces are daily negotiated spaces of symbolical and material struggles, where people live by their beliefs and face contradictions from living between worlds, the actually existing and the hoped for (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). Autonomous projects negotiate their existence in a global capitalist economy where profit, a wage economy and the corporate control of goods and services prevail. Hence, the tendency for autonomy is always contested and fractured, contradictory and overlapping (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006).

Historically, a crucial set of experiments concerning the construction of autonomous spaces have been developed by the Italian autonomous currents of the 1970s (Cunningham, 2005; Mayer, 2009; Gray, 2012). Autonomy, in this context, represented forms of organization which no longer accepted the union or the political party as mediating agent, and that were inspired by the desire to bring the class conflict outside the factory walls. The movement ‘Lotta Continua’, for example, documented multiple and alternative forms of struggle including rent strikes, mass occupations and mass squatting in ‘a direct response to the tyranny of rent’ and in the perspective of living the city as a space of struggle,



transformation and direct appropriation of social resources, as testified by the slogan 'take over the city' (Lotta Continua, 1973).

Despite the fact that autonomy is not rarely romanticized or generally perceived in a positive light, it has to be noticed that a different set of ideas and perspectives may nurture different conceptualizations of autonomy. Particularly, utilitarian deformations of the ideal of autonomy may lead to elitism, particularism, exclusion and separatism, with consequences in terms of material and symbolical violence. One extreme case is that of fortified spaces and gated communities, but it is also possible to detect a number of more nuanced examples, including cases of communitarian self-defense leading eventually to separation, segregation and removal of difference (see for example the very different cases presented in Watts, 2004; Glasze, 2006; Legg, 2007; Arif, 2008). In a similar vein, a rhetoric of autonomy may be detected in various forms of privatopia. The concept of privatopia has been originally introduced by McKenzie (1996 and 2011) in order to describe forms of homeowners associations, in the USA, characterized by shared property ownership of common areas and by private governments that carry out what once would have been the responsibility of local governments, including the making and enforcement of rules, the management of property, and the administration of a wide range of services paid for by their members. Of course, the idea of autonomy at the basis of autonomous spaces of resistance is radically far from the idea of autonomy nurturing privatopias. Anyway, what may be indirectly similar is the ideal of commonality, as *the common* is a complex social and political ecology that is bounded and closed rather than open, and it exists in order to nurture and sustain particular groups (De Angelis, 2010; Chatterton, 2010). Of course, in resistance movements the communing is a socio-spatial practice and a key strategy in order to fight against spatial enclosure and produce openness (Sen, 2010), while in privatopias it is mostly an instrument for exclusion and separatism (see Atkinson and Blandy, 2009).

The hypothesis at the basis of this paper is that, in the case of Christiania, a traditional understanding of autonomy has been challenged as a consequence of the rescaling process activated by the 2012 agreement. As it will be argued, the formation of a new governance level – a fully formalized relational scale involving Christiania institutions, the City of Copenhagen and the Danish state – hybridize resistance, autonomy and neoliberalism in a peculiar way, including both neoliberal forces and resistance towards normalization.

### **3. Christiania and the 2012 agreement**

#### *3.1 Introducing the Free Town*

The history of the Christiania commune dates back to 1971, when an heterogeneous group of people occupied a 34-hectare abandoned military site right in the centre of Copenhagen, founding a community driven by the many values, ideologies and practices of the cultural revolution of the 1960s, including ideas of anarchism, the squatter movement and social activism (Karpantschof, 2011). Today, after 40 years, the Christiania community includes about 900 inhabitants living in 400 buildings and running a number of social and commercial activities, including restaurants, bars, shops, workshops (producing bicycles, ovens, furniture) a cinema, a post office, and a wide range of urban and social services (Bidault-Waddington, 2006). Businesses can be run both collectively and individually while social activities and community services are managed collectively and follow a non-hierarchical work organization model. The community funds its activities and services through the collection of local fees from residents and businesses: the so-called 'common purse' – the Free Town's global budget – is 70% funded by residents' payments and 30% by businesses' payments.

The internal governance structure of Christiania has been inspired since its foundation by ideas of collective self-government and direct democracy, where

relevant decisions have been always taken by consensus, after long discussions and negotiations (Hellström, 2006). This was practised through a series of local and thematic meetings, such as the *area meeting* (15 areas have been instituted), normally held once a month, where inhabitants face local and daily problems: the maintenance of buildings, the management of applications for vacant dwellings, the payments of utilities and rents, etc. Other collective encounters refer to the *treasure meeting* (dealing with economic and planning problems), the *economic meeting* (administering Christiania's common purse), the *business meeting* (common problems concerning businesses), the *building meeting* (technical administration of infrastructures and buildings), the *associates' meeting* (representatives of different organizations of business categories, collectively organized) and the *house meeting* (disagreements between neighbours in large houses). Finally, the most important is the *common meeting*, used to take important collective decisions and to settle disputes on which no agreement could be reached at the relevant meetings.

As already mentioned, the Free Town manages a wide range of urban and social services that, in most cases, are autonomous from larger municipal services schemes operating in the city of Copenhagen. The Economic Office is the institution in charge of collecting the community taxes paid by residents and businesses: the common purse supports locally managed services such as trash collection and recycling, streets' cleaning and repairing, building and renovation assistance programs, a sauna and showers, a kindergarten and a youth club. Most of the costs faced by the community for the supply of these services amount to labor; the Economic Office has in charge 29 individuals employed in these services, some on a full-time basis and some on a part-time basis. Following a larger pattern of 'formalization' that has been accelerated in the context of the agreements with the Danish institutions (as it will be discussed in the next section), all individuals employed by the Economic Office, as long as a consistent part of individual businesses' employees, are currently contracted under Danish labor law.

It has to be noticed that some services, even if funded through the common purse, collect specific fees from users. It is notably the case of the kindergarten that is partly funded by all Christiania residents and businesses through the common purse and by residents who send their kids to the institution. Following a broader model of parent-run institution, it is the parents in cooperation with the kindergarten's personnel who decide the amount of the fees.

### *3.2 The relation with Danish institutions and the 2011 agreement*

Until 2012, the Christiania community did not own the land it occupies, and no one owned the house where he/she lives, or the shop where he/she works. A 1972 agreement, resulting from a negotiation with the Ministry of Defence (the owner of the land), recognized the Free Town (collectively) as having the right to use the area, besides the payment of a fee to cover expenses for electricity and water. This controversial concession has been renegotiated many times with the Danish Minister of Defence and the Parliament, leading in 1989 to the stipulation of the Christiania Law, which formed the legal basis for a 'normalization' of Christiania in close accordance with the local plan which the Ministry of the Environment draws up in 1989. The plan divided Christiania into two parts. A 'rural' part, which had to be cleared of dwellings, and an 'urban' part which might have further developed in a regulated and legalized way and without actual time limits.

The details of the Christiania Law have been periodically renegotiated, and during the years relations between Christiania and the Danish state have been not rarely heavily conflictual. More in particular, the neo-liberal Rasmussen government (2001-2009) manifested a firm will to 'regulate' and 'normalize' Christiania, as testified by Law 205/2004, intended as an interim law that will eventually lead to the end of Christiania's special status (Karpantschov, 2011). The Danish neoliberal discourse, in fact, has been heavily characterized by the production of a new

imaginary of the Danish state – combining economic liberalism and cultural conservatism – through a complex process of ‘othering’ immigrants (Amouroux, 2009; Haldrup et al., 2006). Specifically targeting Muslim immigrants, the government suggested that integration failed because of inherent cultural differences between ‘normal’ Danes and Muslim others. This process of ‘othering’ was not applied only to the immigrant population, but also extended to include Christiania’s residents, deviating from ‘normal’ tax-paying, law-abiding citizens. While most Christiania residents shared the same cultural-racial background of the Danish majority, they were nonetheless targeted for normalization.

Despite the attempts to normalize Christiania, the role of the Free Town as a significant space of contestation has revealed many times during the years, as for example through the fights between activists and police during the United Nations’ ‘COP 15’ negotiations on climate change held in Copenhagen in 2010 (Chatterton et al., 2010). Particularly, it has to be considered that Christiania is a central node in *international* networks of activism and counter-culture: since Christiania’s foundation, members of the various Christiania movements – as anti-capitalist, women’s, peace and squatting movements – build transnational political connections for example by hosting and cross-fertilizing with other social movements abroad (cf. Mikkelsen and Karpantschhof, 2001; Amouroux, 2008; Vanolo, 2013). Also, the Free Town historically developed in strict connection with ideas from the squatter movement developed all over Europe, and particularly in Germany, Netherlands and Denmark, and the attraction of an heterogeneous mix of squatters (including students, leftist activists, drug offenders and other young people; Mikkelsen and Karpantschhof, 2001; Karpantschhof, 2011)

The 40 years old history of negotiation and resistance came to a turning point on 22 June 2011, when the Danish government concluded an agreement enabling inhabitants of Christiania to buy collectively most of the land on which they live at the price of about 76 million kroner (14 million euro), to be paid half in 2012 and half before 2018. Many Christiania inhabitants consider the agreement as a

victory, and fund-raising started in September 2011. Given the difficulty to reach the sum for the first part of the payment, the Christiania lawyer, Knud Foldschack, succeeded in negotiating a loan with a local bank, and on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2012, with the payment of the established sum, the agreement has become fully effective.

The agreement is a complex technical documents of more than 5 thousand words, signed by the state and the Christiania Negotiating Group, represented by the Christiania Lawyer. Under the new agreement, a Foundation promoted by the Free Town – named Christiania Foundation – has bought the largest part of the land and of the building stock currently existing within the perimeter of the Free Town from the formal owner, the Ministry of Energy and Buildings. All former military buildings and the area on which they stand – roughly what we can define the ‘center’ of the Free Town where most workshops, shops and other amenities are located – is therefore currently in the possession of the Foundation, while the land and twelve houses located on the former ramparts have been rented to the Foundation through regular contracts for a period of 30 years. This latter area has not been alienated due to regulations regarding state assets that, given their historical value, are protected under the heritage Danish Law. For the same reason, under the new agreement, six of the many houses that have been built over the years on the protected ramparts will have to be demolished and residents relocated, with the Free Town assistance and support, within the community. The very limited number of houses planned for demolition – ‘normalization’ plans proposed by previous conservative governments called for large demolition plans – has been one of the most consistent achievements on the part of the Free Town during the negotiations. The lease contracts applied to the buildings that are still owned by the state will be diversified on the basis of the uses – residential, commercial, productive – that currently take place in them.

The Foundation has already paid a consistent part of the total 84.5 million Danish Kr of the transaction on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 and is supposed to complete the payment in three different steps in 2014, 2016 and 2018. It is mutually agreed that renovation

costs in which the Foundation might incur both in the owned and in the leased buildings – that very often need major structural interventions – could be deducted from the total sum of 84.5 million Danish kr: according to an official of the Ministry of Energy and Buildings, negotiations on this particular aspect were taking place at the moment of the writing of this article (Spring 2013). Regarding the lease rates, the agreement has established a total sum of 5.3 million kr to be paid in 2016, before that date rates will be lower but increasingly closer to the final agreed sum.

Under the agreement, the Foundation has also acquired the right to build 15.000 square meters of new constructions within the perimeter of the Free Town with the possibility to acquire more by paying the extra on a square meter basis. Any new construction program will be processed following ordinary planning regulations currently established in the municipality of Copenhagen.

The agreement has also determined a wide range of policy changes within the Free Town itself. These changes are in most cases justified by the financial impact of the agreement and more specifically by the need to raise the amount of money that is required to complete the buy-out of the area. Traditionally, Christiania residents have paid a per capita community tax that was indifferent to both the size of the housing unit and the income of the occupier. With the agreement, the Free Town has modified this regulation introducing a new system of payment that is still indifferent to income but takes into account the actual size of the occupied housing unit. Starting with 2013, the new community tax will take into account also the amount of square meters that is actually available to every household while economic activities – ranging from workshops to shops and cafés – will be required to pay discretionary sums agreed with the Economic Office of the Free Town as already in use before the agreement. This discretionary system, according to the Economic Office, has allowed the Free Town to retain functional diversity: some activities – for example workshop needing large surfaces or food retailers whose presence is considered very important to the well-being of the

community – have been targeted for benevolent tax treatment aimed at ensuring their economic long-term sustainability; vice versa, other activities that are able to generate relevant income streams, like some cafes and restaurants, are asked to contribute more also in reason of the more intense consumption of local services associated with their activity. For the moment, the Free Town is not planning to change this system while is already engaged in the lengthy process of mobilizing area committees in the measurement of the surface of every single housing unit under their jurisdiction in order to implement the new taxation system.

The Foundation is seen as being the direct expression of the Free Town and therefore the ultimate guarantor of its long-term preservation. The same composition of the Foundation board is seen as a strong indicator of its submission to the will of the Free Town. The board is composed by 11 members – all named through the consensual democratic process of the Free Town – 6 of which have to be residents of the community while the 5 other can be ‘external’. The Danish Government, that does not directly name any member of the board, is granted the right to express an opinion on members’ nomination that could technically amount to a veto power. Officials interviewed for this paper have stated that “Government would avoid at any cost a situation as such” (Interview, 29 November 2012), underplaying the effectiveness of this veto power. Regarding the decision making process of the board, the Foundation’s statute states that all decisions have to be taken through consensus and that, in case of lack of consensus, decisions can be taken by majority.

On a purely theoretical footing, the Foundation could actually decide to sell the land and the building stock it has acquired but, under the new agreement, the resulting profits – the difference between the initial price paid by the Foundation and the final price to a buyer – would be entirely sequestered by the state. This is thought to be a strong disincentive to any alienation project that might arise in the Free Town, even if all observers tend to underplay this risk.



Overall, how the Foundation's board – that is often presented as a mere extension of the consensual will of the Free Town – will deal with the possibility of different opinions in the board, the community and among the two remains unclear.

#### 4. Negotiating autonomy and normalization

Despite the approval of the new agreement by the Free Town, fears and concerns regarding its impact on the life of the community are widespread among residents, activists and users of the area (figure 1).

Fig. 1 – A board criticizing the agreement



Source: photo by the authors, July 2012

Note: the text may be translated as "From FREEtown to BOUGHTtown. Resistance against state & capital. The struggle for liberation is international"

Narratives regarding the potential negative impact of the new agreement with the state underscore the risk of deep and manifold processes of cultural and social normalization taking roots in the community. These processes would lead to the radicalization and formalization of already present patterns of 'internal

normalization' detectable in the life of Christiania today (Amoreaux, 2009). Key arguments in these narratives are the risks of social and cultural homogenisation, gentrification and commodification of the Free Town.

"I think, seriously, that in about ten years the main group of people who live here will be changed. I could be scared that (for) all the dopes, the addicted people, the weak ones there won't be space for them here. I think that in ten years this could be like Notting Hill in London. Nice quarter, nice people, lots of funny things, yes. Young designers and all that stuff (...). Things are going to change because you have to pay the rent from now on. Christiania has a mortgage to pay, it owes a lot more money. You have to pay rent every month and a lot of these people here I'm not sure they can find out to pay it. And who is going to be the sheriff to throw them away? We don't know now. But I'm sure things like that will come. (...) So you have to be a little more normal to be here. I can see many of the young people who move in here and our own children who want to stay in here that they want it nice, all should be nice, and smart and perfect. It's very important for them to have around the house a gate, a fence. Fence is very important". (Interview with activist, 18 July, 2012)

"(...) Disneyfication which is one the biggest threats. My daughter is now going out to buy some berries and make smoothies. She will then take my bike i think. And she can make tons of money just selling the smoothies because there are loads of tourists, loads of tourists. And so this is one of the things now also with the legalization that we bought the area, you can see there has been an extra increase. Now it's legal for everybody, you don't need to be a little bit quirky to go to Christiania. Anybody comes. (...) and the all point with Christiania is that we want to keep it open with everybody" (Interview with activist, 25 July, 2012).

These concerns regarding the loss of Christiania's distinctive qualities of social inclusiveness and cultural originality see in the agreement a dangerous force able to impose a 'norm' that is fundamentally subversive of the community's funding values. On a more general footing, the entrance of Christiania in a new and unprecedented relation with the state – through the governance technology mobilized by the agreement – is seen as conducive to a loss of autonomy on

behalf of the Free Town. This loss of autonomy is somehow perceived as being double-faced: on the one hand it involves the loss of associated and collective autonomy of the Free Town itself, on the other hand it involves the loss of individual autonomy of residents and users of the area. Following this narrative, key aspects in the community's every-day life will have to be now negotiated with the institutions that are part of the regulative framework in which Christiania is embedded. Among the realms in which this loss of autonomy would make itself manifest are the regulation of access to housing, the regulation of the planning process and more in general of the transformations in the built environment, and the regulation of local childcare and educational services' provision. In these three realms the Free Town has built over the years a stratified setting of regulative habits that differ deeply by mainstream regulations operating in the rest of country.

In the case of access to housing, in the past dwellings' openings have been handled informally through a highly localized application process in which the last say on the choice of new residents belonged to area meetings. Following this system, individuals already known in the community – because working, spending time or even living as guests of other residents – have often enjoyed a privileged position in the access to dwellings made available over time. Alternative to both market and state mechanism, this application process was based on values of communality, informality, trust and local sovereignty. The 'normalization' process has inevitably raised issues of public scrutiny and transparency in the management of the housing sector. As we have seen, talks between the state and the Free Town reached an agreement favoring the coupling of the preservation of the old system with the establishment of a third party where complains against local decisions can be filed. However, the fear of more formalized and standardized housing regulations is still present.

“There was this talk to make the all housing in Christiania into a social housing but it tends in some places to make people not caring of where they live, they don't have personal responsibility of where they live because someone is gonna

come to carry it. If the water goes through your ceiling and your roof, nobody will come to fix it. So at some point you gonna fix it. In social housing there is somebody coming to fix it". (Interview with activist, 30 July 2012)

"(in the social housing) system the municipality can decide 20% of the houses and who live there. They can take, you know, some person from outside and then it's not because we would not like to have new Christianites moving in. But if you are not interested in Christiania it's actually harmful to Christiania if you live here and you consider that 'this is a place only to live'. While you should, you know, ...it's an all package. It's a choice, it's a way of life". (Interview with activist, 30 July 2012)

In the case of the planning process and of the everyday regulation of transformations in the built environment, in the lack of central planning schemes and procedures, the tradition has consistently recognized everybody's full agency in the shaping of the urban environment as far as individual actions do not lead to complains by other individuals. Following a consistent tradition of self-construction and design, residents have been able to shape not just the interior but also the exterior of their dwellings as long as neighbors in local area meetings did not oppose their interventions. Furthermore, these interventions would often enjoy the technical assistance of a specific office in the Free Town aimed at facilitating individual agency and autonomy in the realm of the built environment. More broadly, individuals and groups have been able to intervene also in common areas placing pieces of self-produced art and activating more relevant interventions such as the arrangement of green areas, as far as nobody openly complained against them. The potential loss of this peculiar character and the gradual assimilation to a highly bureaucratized planning process as a consequence of the implementation of the new agreement is another concern raised in the community by the normalization process.

"(...) if people wanted to build something on the house they just did it. And some (people) were building the wrong way, then started to rot and they had to tear it down. You only had to agree with your neighbors in that area you lived in and the

most time it worked. (...) But now if you wanna build something you have to see the area, and then the neighbors, and then the Christiania Fund and also in the municipality. So I hope that people still have the energy to do all the bureaucracy and to get around to do the extra building of their house. (...) It's not that people should be free to build whatever they like. This is not what I say, but I hope that still it can be maintained a pretty (large) amount of flexibility in how to deal with these matters". (Interview with activists, 30 July 2012)

Finally, in the case of educational and childcare services' provision, the tradition has seen these institutions – mainly a kindergarten and a youth club – to be managed by parents and workers outside the national educational system. The small kindergarten currently in place is funded by the common purse and by individual fees paid by parents. Educators do not need to have professional training and, according to local narratives, they implement very progressive educational models granting significant freedom and agency to attending kids. With some exceptions in the recent past, the institution is attended exclusively by Christiania residents' kids. Even if not directly related to the agreement and the normalization process as in the two previous cases, the risk of the assimilation of this institution to the national system and the need to preserve its autonomy and peculiarity is presented as a strong concern for the future.

"the risk is that we get too normalized, that was not the point with Christiania at the beginning. Like the society on the other side of the fence. I'm afraid that this kindergarten will get money from the outside and is not only Christiania kids who can go here (...)" (Interview with activist, 31 July 2012)

"we have done the all process to be formally approved and we have decided to be not, the playground has been checked for the security rules. It's been measured for this and this and that. It has been checked. (...) That's why we hold on our rights to sort of do it our way. It would make good economic sense to have the institutions formalized because then we could be able to get the money. Again these two institutions alone would be one million kr a year. (...) We rather pay ourselves and do it our own way and not be bothered by the municipality than to receive 1.2 million kr a year". (Interview with activist, 25 July 2012)

## 5. Conclusions

One of the key research questions is how the agreement will actually regulate the space of autonomy creating – out of the inherited tradition of self-regulation and self-management – a set of ‘differential rights’ belonging to the residents of Christiania. While in the past these rights were loosely defined and activated in the largely undetermined sphere of self-management and self-regulation of the Free Town, in the context of a relationship with the state that had successive relatively ‘peaceful’ and ‘conflictual’ phases, after the agreement these rights are going to be increasingly embedded in the formalized reality of the Foundation and of its contractualized relationship with the state achieved with the 2012 agreement. In the frame of this emerging ‘differential citizenship’ that can be understood as a locally rooted ‘micro-citizenship’ (Centner, 2012), residents of Christiania will be included in a now formalized system of double taxation based on the legal recognition of the existence of a collective property regime insisting on a significant portion of the city and administered by a special private body that is the Christiania Foundation.

More broadly, this process has led to the creation of a new fully formalized governance scale based on the contractualisation of the relationships between the Free Town, the City of Copenhagen and the Danish state, in a way that seems to be overall coherent with wider processes of geographical re-scaling operated in the neoliberal scenario in the last decades. How this new scale will be enacted and operated on the ground will depend on many different factors.

From this point of view, it is crucial to understand how the mechanics of informal consensus democracy, that the community claims wanting to preserve in its traditional form, will interact with the workings of the new governance scale. As we have seen, this contractualized governance scale will be most likely conflictual, turbulent and contested across different important realms in which the Free Town has had full autonomy until the 2012 agreement. In the three realms examined – access to housing, regulation of the built environment and children care – it is

possible to imagine a range of potential outcomes consequent to the agreement. For example, in the case of the regulation of access to housing, it is possible to hypothesize a range of outcomes going from the de-facto preservation of the highly localist and informal selection process currently in the hands of local areas' committees, to the implementation of a new system introducing more formalized and standardized rules and procedures. Similarly, in the cases of planning regulation and children care, the actual organization shall be challenged and hybridized, to different degrees, in the context of intensifying normalization forces.

It needs to be noted how, across the three realms, narratives underlying the risk of 'normalization' mobilize desires of 'separation' and fears of integration: for example, the disdain of regulations that could bring people who do not make a choice to live in Christiania to actually live in the community or that could fully include some services – like the kindergarten – in national systems therefore opening them also to users from outside (a point that is not necessarily related to the agreement). More in general, voices in the community express a desire to escape from standardized and highly regulated welfare state systems, that could limit the collective and individual autonomy that characterize the Free Town (cf. Bøggild, 2011). These claims of self-determination and self-management, associated to the portraying of Christiania as a 'community of choice', somehow recall narratives mobilized in the common-interest developments repertoire, coming to represent a refusal of universalistic state-regulated and funded welfare systems and a desire of separation and secession through the creation of 'homogeneous' environments. Even if the cultural content is peculiar – a radical, alternative, anarchist culture – the logic is similar.

From this point of view, it is key to understand how values and goals of autonomy are being reframed in the context of this rising contractualized governance scale promoted by the agreement and in which the Free Town is now embedded. Autonomy is no more the insurgent practice of a complete and often conflictual

separation from the state – that had already been partially negotiated in previous but less far-reaching agreements with the state (...) – but rather a ‘regulated’ practice, where autonomy is negotiated on a contractual basis: the search for the preservation of some degree of associated and individual sovereignty on local matters needs to be continuously negotiated within the Free Town and between the Free Town and the statist institutional realm. This reframing of ‘autonomy’ as a practice and as a goal suggests the subsumption of Christiania to the neoliberal governmentality characterizing various ‘separatist’ spatial formations as CIDs and special interest districts, leading us to the inclusion of the Free Town in the turbulent geography of spaces and practices of exception generated in the context of wide processes of neo-liberal rescaling. From this point of view, the agreement represents a government technology that is consistent with a wide range of urban governance tools “defining special rules and procedures for specific urban governance situations” (Baptista, 2013, p. 39) and of “new formal or informal institutional arrangements that engage in the act of governing outside and beyond the state” (Swyngedouw, 2005, p. 1991).

However, if the post-agreement Free Town seems to enroot itself in the kind of neoliberal scalar restructuring we have discussed above and tends to mobilize narratives of secession and separation, it needs to be stressed once again how essential characteristics of Christiania make it alternative to configurations currently associated with them. While the literature over common-interest developments and more generally over gated communities has often emphasized and stigmatized their rationale for being based on a search for physical separation, social and racial homogeneity, property values’ protection and aesthetical standardization (see McKenzie, 2006 and 2011), past literature and the authors’ work on the field have confirmed how Christiania is characterized by its exceptional openness and porosity, social and racial diversity, the deficiency of private property and a very high degree of distributed agency in the shaping of the urban environment (see Lund Hansen, 2011; Vanolo, 2012; Jarvis, 2013). At the same time, the fact that local narratives by the Christiania inhabitants often



insists on dichotomies and process of 'othering' (us vs them; us vs the state; Christianitters vs non-Christianitters) echoing the 'banal' Orientalism of mainstream, neoliberal Danish culture (cf Haldrup et al., 2006), emphasizes how the passage from an 'insurgent' autonomy to a 'regulated' autonomy may represent, on alternative cultural basis, a case for spatial fragmentation allowing the regulation of autonomy in a way that is coherent with neoliberal governmentality. For example: if the kindergarten will remain autonomous and closed to the outside in the framework of a 'regulated' (and no more 'insurgent') autonomy, will Christiania experience a strengthening of autonomy, or rather the homologation to a kind of privatization and fragmentation of public services? It is therefore questionable if the rescaling process enacted by the 2012 agreement represents and experiment of adaptation to neoliberalism, where neoliberalism itself absorbs and assimilates several anti-neoliberal values of the Christiania 'alternative' space as the refusal of private property, or rather Christiania is unfolding a new adaptive strategy, where autonomy and survival are negotiated in the interstices of the agreement. Certainly, the Christiania normalization process raises important questions that students of neoliberal urban rescaling stressing the 'conservative' content of this project have normally not considered. Post-agreement Christiania could somehow represent a case in which a rescaling practice – that is the outcome of the formalization of an already existing reality and of the relationship between the state and this reality – actually preserve and recognize, even if in a contested and turbulent way, an alternative project that is conducive of values that challenge the ones of the neoliberal project, as the abovementioned refusal of private property. This opens up very interesting questions: can the logic of neo-liberal rescaling allow progressive openings through the empowerment of alternative communities embodying with their existence and recognition a real alternative to hegemonic values? Can the state, through rescaling, open up areas of learning and innovation of 'progressive character' 'rolling back' powers to alternative communities as in the case of Christiania? Or, on the other hand, is the normalization of Christiania just another

episode in the spread of a 'medieval modernity' (Alsayyad and Roy, 2006) characterized by an increasingly fragmented and contractualized urban governance deeply entrenched in a landscape of social inequality and cultural separation?

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