
Fredens Havn. Politics of space and architecture in a little floating community in Copenhagen

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ABSTRACT

The article reflects on the importance given to the concept of space within the formation of political identity among marginal groups living in an urban context. The case study is a small 'floating community' called Fredens Havn, located in the city center of Copenhagen. The main aim of this article is to analyze the practices of space creation, by focusing on the architecture and design of the self-built floating houses and infrastructures. The purpose of this ethnography is to consider space and the built environment as a language used by Fredens Havn's settlers to communicate their presence to the rest of the city. In this regard we use the emic concept of 'take up space' applied to indicate those practices in which space is used as a language to communicate the instances and identities of marginal groups living in urban environments.

KEYWORDS

architecture, material culture, semiotics, space, urban studies, urban anthropology

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present an ethnographic case in which the use of spatial resources and the construction of places take a central role in the dialogue between citizens and institutions. I will try to describe how the management of spatial resources can help improve the conditions of recognition (Appadurai 2014) and of poor or disadvantaged groups within urban contexts.

Living means organizing and building space, both physically and semiotically. Especially for marginal groups, the organization of space acquires a fundamental role in affirming their presence and identity in the urban context. So what does it mean to inhabit urban space for these groups?

Urban policies today do not allow groups in conditions of economic or housing poverty to exercise their right to inhabit the space of the city. These groups are increasingly marginalized and are denied their right to use space (Lefebvre 1970).

The example that I am going to offer describes the ability of some groups *to take up space*¹ within the city through the management of spatial resources and the semiotic construction of places. Space itself is used as a language that assumes a fundamental role for those who live in it, in the construction of identity and in the management of conflicts. The manipulation of space becomes the tool through which to affirm a political position and resist neoliberalist policies, giving life to «new forms of agency» to try to be recognized (Appadurai 2013). The subjects of the case that I am going to present are the inhabitants of a small floating community by the name of Fredens Havn².

Fredens Havn is a housing community that stands on the waters of a canal in the city center of Copenhagen. This alternative housing experiment, in addition to being an evocative model, has a strong political value within the space in which it stands. A true laboratory of active citizenship which contrasts the mechanism of control and institutional urban policies (Malighetti 2012: 873).

Fredens Havn was born as a response to gentrification and territorial control processes that have transformed the urban space of the northeastern area of the Christianshavn district. Since 1971, this part of the city has hosted a well-known autonomous reality, the Freetown of Christiania. It was the redevelopment of this area which led to the birth of Fredens Havn as a housing settlement.

Christiania originated from a protest against housing poverty and was immediately available to marginalized classes who lived in poverty, or to people looking for alternative ways of life (Steiger 2018). After the closure of the Freetown borders, the imposition of a taxation system and the consequent impossibility for the new poor classes of accessing Christiania, many of the residents, or people who are now forbidden from accessing the large former hippy enclave, have created new housing realities on the edge of the Freetown area.

Fredens Havn was born precisely because of this closure of borders and census of the population of Christiania and has the sole objective of making a home, giving life to a particular housing model in line with some fundamental values for the inhabitants: living in contact with nature, self-management of resources and self-sustainability.

Building the environment and housing are the main activities of the community. The particular use of the available spatial resources, the resemantization of some spaces and the construction of houses are actions which, in addition to affirming a political belief, manifest the inhabitants' desire to improve their "conditions of recognition" (Appadurai 2014). These actions will be examined as semiotic processes of space construction that convey meanings and define the identity of the group.

Fredens Havn as a political space

Fredens Havn is situated in the Erdkehlgraven canal close to the northern border of the Freetown of Christiania, in Copenhagen. It is a floating community made up of several piers which has about fifty

² The choice of the name Fredens Havn derives from a debate on the terms in which the community is indicated by different actors. Formally the community is recognized by the name of Fredens Havn (Port of Peace); the inhabitants of the city of Copenhagen often referred to the place using different names: 'Pirate Bay' or 'Pirate Harbor'. The inhabitants of the community, since not all the occupied space is formally part of the Fredens Havn project, use the term Harbor. Regarding this, an interview revealed that: "We use the term Harbor, because harbor in Danish means that you are at home. Copenhagen is a port (is a harbor) [...]".

people of different age, sex and nationality³ living in it. Born as a consequence of the ‘normalization’ of the Christiania community (Amouroux 2009; Thörn 2011; Vanolo and Coppola 2015; Nielsen 2020), Fredens Havn hosts people in conditions of housing poverty who have been denied access to the Freetown after the agreement signed between the inhabitants of Christiania, formally united in a foundation, and the municipality of Copenhagen (Amouroux 2009).



FIGURE 1: Pilen, a pier of Fredens Havn (Photo by Giuseppe Mazzarino)

The agreement provides for the purchase by the inhabitants of part of the area, the payment of a rent for the remaining part of the occupied territory, the upgrading to conformity with the law of self-built houses⁴ in the neighborhood. In addition, a series of redevelopment works are planned for the physical space, such as the construction of a public lighting system, the construction of a cycle path connected to the city center and the construction of some new residences in one of the areas adjacent to the north-eastern border which will also host a restaurant linked to a well-known Danish chain⁵.

The process of normalization of the area and the introduction of private investors in Christiania, led to the closure of the borders and the census of the inhabitants. All these actions to manage the city’s territory fully reflect the neoliberal ideal (Harvey 2005; Amouroux 2009; Thörn 201). Since 2004 there have also been many raids by the police to stop the drug dealing that takes place in the neighborhood.

For many years the city of Copenhagen has been pursuing a typical policy in the redevelopment projects of European cities, with greater importance placed on city users, mainly tourists, to the detriment of residents. These operations often create effects of de-subjectivization and depersonalization of places.

Fredens Havn had a period of strong growth, both in extension and in number of inhabitants, just after 2011. What makes this community an interesting case for discussing the processes of creating space is, in the first place, the fact that it was born as a form of resistance to the loss of the right to live the spaces of the city. Secondly, Fredens Havn is a very clear example of regaining community values that were lost due to the redevelopment of a territory through a particular use of spatial resources.

A third reason, which makes this small community a case study of considerable interest, lies behind the particular political status of the area in which it stands. The Erdkehlgraven canal has in fact been referred to as ‘gray zone’ by a lawyer following Fredens havn’s case after the Danish Coastal Authority reported the occupation.

³ The age of the inhabitants varies from 19 to 61 years. There are no families or children due, above all, to the lack of a water and electricity supply network and efficient sanitation.

⁴ The self-built houses in the Christiania area have a symbolic, as well as aesthetic, value of considerable interest. They arose as a form of protest between the 70s and 80s against real estate speculation and the lack of affordable housing in the city of Copenhagen.

⁵ The restaurant was opened in May 2020 after the article was written.

In this case, a gray zone means an area of the city that is difficult to manage politically. As a matter of fact, Erdkehlgraven has a complex history, also starting from a redevelopment process. The canal is part of the Holmen area, a series of islands that form the northeastern part of the Christianshavn district.



FIGURE 2: Police raid of 16 June 2016 (Photo by Giuseppe Mazzarino)

Until 1993 it was a military area, as it housed some activities of the Danish Navy, whose main headquarters is still located in the Nyholm district, in the outermost part of Holmen. The whole area was used for training purposes and as a shipyard. In the early 90's many of the navy's activities moved to the cities of Korsør and Frederikshavn, and the Holmen territory was bought by the city and redeveloped⁶.

After the urban redevelopment operations in the Holmen area – which has now become partly a residential area, partly a place of tourist attraction by hosting Copenhagen Street Food and the new Operaen theater – the canal was opened to boat traffic, especially to facilitate passage of the boats that accompany tourists on the famous ‘boat tours’. This opening legitimizes the presence of boats in the Erdkehlgraven section. Fredens Havn, having no fixed structures, but only floating platforms around which boats, houseboats and floating houses gather, does not break any law. The ‘physical presence’ of the community is completely legal.

Before going into the theoretical considerations that I will address in this article, it is necessary to understand how Fredens Havn has managed over time to be recognized by the institutions as an independent reality. To do this it is important to make another consideration about the area where the community is located. The exact point where Fredens Havn stands is also the point where the winds of the city's canals, coming from north and south, cross each other, making that stretch the place where all the waste transported by the city's canals gathers. Because of this, often many small or medium-sized boats are transported to that point during storms. From the stories of the inhabitants, one of the first activities carried out in the area consisted precisely in the collection of rubbish deposited on the banks

⁶ Most of the information on Holmen was gathered from conversations with local citizens, particularly with the president of the Fredens Havn association. As a source for historical data, I used the material available in the online historical archive: <http://www.marinehist.dk/MHT/2010-MHT-Nyholm.pdf>.

and the removal and renovation of the semi-sunken boats present in the canal. The collected material was then selected and used for the construction of the piers or floating houses, or for the renovation of the boats.

Starting from this practice of collecting and reusing resources, the physical space of the community began to take shape. From the story of one of the inhabitants what emerges is that:

When I first came here, I saw all the rubbish that was there and started picking it up. I divided it, and took the material that I could use to build my house, which was here at the time, on the shore. My boat still had to be fixed, I could not yet live in it. At the beginning we were few, but it all started spontaneously, we had no intention of building this space, nor could we think that all this would happen within ten years. After the construction of Else, perhaps we began to understand that something was possible and that this place was special. We built Fredens Havn and now nobody can take it away from us.

(Conversation with E. of 04/2016)

Fredens Havn is about one kilometer in length following Refshalevej, a road that connects Prinsessesgade with the north-east tip of Amager.

Around each pier there are boats and houseboats. The first pier to be built was Esben's Place, after the construction of the Else and Krydse (the Cross) platform. After Esben's Place, other piers began to take shape, including F.'s place, Donkey Island and Pilen. Along with the development of the piers, the first occupants also began to inhabit the adjacent land, on the other side of Refshalevej. A hill that borders with the Freetown of Christiania and which takes the name of Garden.



FIGURE 3: The Garden (Photo by Giuseppe Mazzarino)

This space is a garden on two levels, the land is owned by a private individual, who however has granted the Fredens Havn association its use for activities related to the community's daily life. The space is in fact used as a public place; it has the function of a small square. The Garden is also used as a place to have a shared meal, as it is the only space in the community capable of hosting a good number of people and where you can safely light a fire. It consists of an outdoor area on two levels and an indoor

area called Office, which consists of a large skurvogn (a mobile home) that lies on a resistant base of wooden planks.

Garden hosts the group meetings that are held weekly. The peculiarity of Garden is that although it is on land, it has been modified to take the shape of a boat. The idea was born following an event that occurred during the eviction notice of September 2016.

A policeman in charge of posting the eviction order on the objects to be removed on the channel, also affixed the notification on some material in Garden obtained from a sunken boat, which was to be used for the construction of the communal kitchen. When asked why that piece of boat had also been marked for eviction, the policeman replied: "For the intention". The answer, which initially sparked amazement, was then accepted as a suggestion to furnish Garden in a way that would recall a boat, to affirm the identity and ownership of the space. Garden indeed has a stern, a bow and a main mast to which the flag of Denmark is affixed. It is also furnished with small objects that recall the world of boats and navigation. For its being a 'space belonging to all', intended as a place that unites the inhabitants of the different piers, Garden is the most significant place for the collective life of the community, a place with a very high symbolic value. It represents the political space, the space of common decisions, of sharing and respect for common goods. All inhabitants are encouraged to work on the vegetable garden, the construction of the infrastructures, as well as the preparation of food and to participate in meetings. As a system for political choices, the group uses the 'ting assembly' method (Ingold 2013). The *ting* is a very ancient political system used prevalently in Germanic societies that put consensus as the only form of access to decisions. This political system enhances the freedom of decision and expression of the individual. The political choice of using the 'ting' system is derived from the Freetown of Christiania.

The choice to hold assemblies at Garden is not accidental, but is intrinsic to the very concept of 'ting' and to the relationship that this term has with the 'landscape'. The morphology of the territory where the Garden is located recalls a 'mound'⁷, as a matter of fact, this space is characterized by having been created at the foot of the hill that borders with the 'wildest' part of the Freetown of Christiania.

The continuous references to the Scandinavian tradition build a highly symbolic landscape. This acquires the values that are given to it by the inhabitants' activities, which are organized and regulated during the assemblies. It is important to note how, in light of these considerations and of what was mentioned previously, the Garden's furnishing supports the concept of 'domestic landscape'. Even the presence of the vegetable garden, and therefore the practice of 'farming', recall the domestic space in Scandinavian tradition. As we can read in *Making: anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture* by Tim Ingold, the 'farm work' was the practice that gave shape to the landscape, a real spatialization practice that builds the space giving it meaning.

Assemblies, or meetings, are a time to share opinions and points of view on the political and economic decisions of the community. Often, they take place in the evening, in order to allow all the inhabitants to attend. The evening hours are favorable especially for members who work outside the community. Garden's architecture reflects this ideal of sharing thanks to the presence of a large communal table that everyone can use to carry out their work safely, as well as the use of common tools and materials that are placed in the back of the Office. The same goes for the benches built to form a sort of stalls so that everyone can have a good view when someone takes the floor during the meetings. The space is managed to suggest an idea of horizontality. Each level in which it develops is an area in itself, dedicated to a particular activity.

Fredens Havn's space is organized through juxtapositions that intertwine the physical and political dimensions of space. Indoor/Outdoor, Water/Earth, categories that organize the physical space, for example, come into contact, on a political level, with the Private/Public or Central/Peripheral categories.

The organization of the community's space, through the possible relationships between these categories, takes on real meaning if we take into account that these elements are inserted in a macro-category that opposes the previously identified dimensions of domestic and recreational landscape, which in turn are determined by the strategic and tactical development of the city. The architecture and built environment emphasize and enhance the characteristics of Fredens Havn as a space for domesticity

⁷ The 'mounds', very widespread in Scandinavia as early as the Stone Age, are ancient tombs. The mound was then linked to the funeral cult of Norse paganism (Ingold 2013).

and for living. The struggle to conquer this space and these values is based on resistance actions that stage the domestic dimension in various ways.

The metaphor of 'Fredens Havn as a home' is also reflected in the way the inhabitants organize the occupied space. As a matter of fact, some inhabitants suggested that I read the physical shape and the structural organization of the community as if the boats were private rooms, while the piers and the Garden are corridors or living rooms. The considerations of the inhabitants regarding the metaphor that relates the entire space of the community with the typical structure of a house, derive from the use that is made of the various spaces: most boats are used almost exclusively to sleep or spend time in intimacy, due to the limited space available, while the piers and Garden are the places where you can carry out the rest of the daily activities, such as cooking, washing dishes or clothes, spending time together with others, discussing organizational issues and community policies etc.



FIGURE 4: Donkey Island (Photo by Giuseppe Mazzarino)

The beginning of the construction of the first infrastructures, the settlement of many boats in the area and the formalization of the group, immediately attracted the attentions of the institutions and citizens of the surrounding areas. In the following months, a dossier was drawn up by the city of Copenhagen which collects the voices of various actors or individual inhabitants of the area opposed to the development of the project.

The dossier often relies on the impact that Fredens Havn has had on the landscape, ruining its symmetry. Pejorative expressions are used towards the aesthetics of the community space, such as *påsigende* 'an eyesore'.

As a result of the dossier, a series of legal actions took place against the Fredens Havn association, for illegitimate occupation of public land and for the defacement of the landscape. The lawsuits were followed by eviction notifications from the Danish authorities.

The responses to these actions, still in progress and which often modify the group's relationships and internal stability, were the drafting of a document explaining the functions of some of the infrastructures, primarily the Else and Krydse platform and a series of initiatives to communicate to the rest of the city the values on which the community is based. These initiatives consist of land management and cleaning of the area occupied by the group.



FIGURE 5: Floating City (Photo by Giuseppe Mazzarino)



FIGURE 6: Canal Cleaning action (Photo by Giuseppe Mazzarino)

Making a house on water: Theory and practice of spatialization

Often the concept of space poses many problems in anthropology (Low 2009, 1996). Arjun Appadurai and Margaret Rodman criticize the concept of space in anthropology (Appadurai 1988; Rodman 1985, 1992) believing that ethnographers often define space and spatiality as a setting in which natives are confined (Low 1998, 2009). Reflecting on an anthropological theory of space therefore means engaging in the construction of a clear definition of the term 'space'. This must not be a mere construct used only to place an ethnographic description (Low 2009) but, in accordance with much literature in the sector, 'space' must be understood as a social construct that cannot neglect the historical, political and cultural background of the people who live in it (Rodman 1992). Paraphrasing Setha Low we can say that an anthropological theory of space "needs to be process-oriented, person-based, and allow for agency and new possibilities" (Low, 2009: 22). Setha Low herself, in the Companion of urban Anthropology (Nonini 2014), considers 'spatiality' and the spatial turn as the reason for a revival of urban studies in anthropology (Low 2014). The idea of space as a social construct refers to the priority of action, of human action as a tool for producing places. In this work I would like to use the term spatialization to indicate all the actions of production of places and semiotic construction of spaces. By this last expression I therefore mean that ability that places have to express and convey meanings. Spatialization, thus understood, takes on the characteristics of a true cultural ability of producing a sense of space.

The concept of spatialization, in this work, consists in considering the management of space and the representations of space as *events* that constitute a *discourse* (Ricoeur 1991) that can facilitate the dialogue between the inhabitants of Fredens Havn and the institutions. The term 'spatialization' derives from generative semiotics. According to Greimas and Courtés, spatialization means one of the three components of discursivization⁸, which "it comprises procedures of spatial localization" which are used to also include procedures for spatial programming, thanks to which a linear disposition of partial spaces (obtained through localizations) is realized; this disposition conforms with the temporal programming of the narrative programs (Greimas Courtés 1979).

My aim is to borrow this term, freeing it from its meaning in relation to semiotics and implanting it in urban anthropology, to indicate all those 'human' processes of semiotic construction of space. In the case of Fredens Havn we will see how the relationship between water and earth structures a complex semiotic system which also implies questions related to the identity of the group.

Water is the element that most influences the land management practices of Fredens Havn, as well as the political actions of the community.

Living on water therefore allows a direct relationship with the element and the surrounding environment. Following the water's phases and rhythm means taking on some responsibilities towards the environment, therefore its respect and protection become fundamental values. Water acquires a social role. The element water is considered a real social actor within the community. F., who has lived in the community for many years, during a conversation on the 16th October 2016 reported: "The water has granted us all this. It has given us the opportunity to live here, in contact with nature and without breaking any law".

Water has therefore favored their occupation of the territory by helping citizens to 'act' in the space and be able to undertake a political and community action. It is the water which characterizes their living, proving to be an identity marker.

Marginal groups tend to build their own places away from the rest of the city. They build communities and places starting from values such as hospitality for people who live in the same conditions. They activate resistance practices that build new forms of right to live the space of the city, true "active citizenship laboratories" (Malighetti 2012) that redesign the conditions of existence of the inhabitants starting from their way of giving meaning to the inhabited space. Fredens Havn is the center of life of a group of people united by common and shared values, who do not feel integrated in the urban system in which they live and therefore ask to be recognized by the institutions as an autonomous reality. Welcoming everyone is an ethical value that characterizes the community: "no one should be excluded

⁸ The term discursivization in generative semiotics indicates "procédures de mise en discours" (Greimas and Courtés, 1979) of semio-narrative structures, that is, of the deeper levels of the generative path of meaning. The discursivization consists of the procedures of attorialization, temporalization and spatialization.

because only the institutional system excludes and we are not part of it”⁹. The reversal of the center/periphery category is not only spatial but also concerns social, political and ethical aspects. All these aspects shape the identity of the group.

During the field period, a connection emerged several times between the choice of living on the water and the concept of freedom.



FIGURE 7: Floating self-made houses to Floating City (Photo by Giuseppe Mazzarino)

For the inhabitants of Fredens Havn, freedom is the result of individual actions dictated by ethical and political norms, by unwritten codes embedded in people. Freedom is also understood by the group as a message to be communicated through the use of particular canons, not only political but also aesthetic. The reference to architecture and to the practice of self-construction as an act of freedom and choice emerged decisively, especially during a meeting dated 14 December 2016, in which the problem of landscape defacing was addressed starting from the reading of the 2013 dossier. At this meeting, many difficulties arose in the attempt to define an aesthetic model of the community which would be able to respond to the accusations that identify Fredens Havn as ‘an eyesore’, or to the criticisms made by the residents of the neighboring areas that define the community with derogatory expressions such as: ‘a floating landfill’, ‘a slum in the center of Copenhagen’, ‘a floating favela’¹⁰.

During the meeting it was decided by mutual agreement to define the aesthetics of Fredens Havn as the result of both planning choices and use of the material dictated by ‘simplicity’, ‘functionality’, ‘reuse’ and ‘sustainability’. The importance of identifying these aesthetic categories lies in the fact that the inhabitants read their own architecture, the inhabited space, as a support through which to convey, and consequently manifest, their ideals and values. In cases like these, architecture becomes a real language through which to trace the lines of a discourse that evokes a system of ethical, political, social and cultural values in continuous connection with each other.

⁹ Interview with Esben B. of 29 October 2016.

¹⁰ All expressions were reported by the workshop participants and are definitions used by the citizens of Copenhagen, in particular of the Holmen and Chrisitanshavn area, in relation to the community.

To better clarify this analytical approach, I borrow some considerations from semiotics which are very interesting if read from the point of view of anthropology of space. I'm referring, in particular, to an author who has dealt with the topic of space by constructing a semiotic theory starting from the interaction between subjects, spaces and built environment, Manar Hammad. In the text *Livre l'espace, Comprendre l'architecture. Essais sémiotique* the semiologist tries various ways to discuss the problem of the architectural language's capability of building enunciation. Hammad's suggestion consists in examining architecture in its necessary and indispensable relationship with the subjects who use it and complete its signification process.

Hammad's proposal therefore consists in considering an analysis of space impossible without taking into account the subjects who produce the space and make it meaningful, conveying values and meanings through it.

The message that the inhabitants of Fredens Havn intend to convey through the space and its spatial, architectural and aesthetic organization regards the key concepts that emerged during these meetings. The daily practices of use and management of space therefore produce semiotics systems that directly involve different elements.

Through the dialogues on aesthetics, mainly held with Stephen, as an artist, and with Esben B., they proved to be of great interest in understanding some fundamental aspects of the community's intentions.

In the conversations with Stephen and Esben B., the adjective 'ugly', referring to some buildings around the Fredens Havn area, was justified by the material the object under consideration was made of, which, for this reason was not in harmony with nature and the surrounding environment. The architecture of the Holmen district, for example, is not aesthetically accepted by S. and Esben B. due to the fact that the materials used are not in harmony with the environment in which they are located. The reused material acquires a certain aesthetic quality for them which makes it superior compared to new materials.



FIGURE 8: Little self-made house adjacent to the shore (Photo by Giuseppe Mazzarino)

This way of thinking highlights how an aesthetic theory can direct the inhabitants' behavior in construction practices, in the choice of material and their design, thus involving the whole way of life chosen by the inhabitants.

The contrast between the rest of the city, representing a certain system of value, and the inhabitants of Fredens Havn arises precisely because of an incompatibility that concerns a difference, a distance between visions of life and living.

Being aware of an aesthetic model creates the possibility of debate and justifies the request for recognition. The simple aesthetic model, dictated by reuse and harmony with the surrounding

environment, is in stark contrast with the strict canons of the city and the mathematical subdivision of the buildings in the Holmen district. For the inhabitants of Fredens Havn, non-harmony with the environment is a negative factor that leads to a depersonalization of the individual from his habitat and imposes a precise and non-chosen housing model. A recurrent generalization in the stories of the inhabitants that I read in terms of an emic representation and a leading element of the self-representation practices of the inhabitants of Fredens Havn used to mark a difference with the rest of the city, to create an ‘Us’ that is opposed to an ‘Other’.

The relationship established between these points of view also concerns a problem related to representation. Both the inhabitants of Fredens Havn and the actors involved in drafting the report have built a “simulacrum of the other” (Greimas 1979).

For the inhabitants of Fredens Havn the people who live in the city center are an ‘Other’ subdued to a model of life, aesthetically and socially shared, which is imposed on them. Contact with the environment and living on water, on the other hand, become markers of a different ‘Us’. This element is of particular interest to best explain that relationship between space and identity: the built space becomes the tool on which to set one's identity in contrast with the rest of the city and, through this, be able to represent oneself, communicate and affirm this identity to the city.

To understand these issues, the example that I am going to mention concerns the track of one of the piers that make up the community, Esben's place, from its construction to its inclusion in the official Christiania map of 2016. Most of the information and dialogues that I will report are the result of a series of workshops held at the CRIR headquarters (Christiania Researcher in Residence)¹¹, in which I was hosted from October to December 2016.

I arranged the workshops myself together with some members of the community to organize some public events in the light of an eviction notice. During these meetings we discussed the community space, the neighborhood residents' perception of the space and the often strong reactions of the institutions after the 2013 Dossier.

The history of Esben's place is a very significant case to reflect on the notion of spatialization explained earlier. It may be noted that in the stories of the inhabitants space takes on a cultural meaning (Basso 1990), and the management and organization of spatial resources are treated as communicative actions to assert its own identity and autonomy within the urban space.



FIGURE 9: Donley Island (Photo by Giuseppe Mazzarino)

¹¹ The CRIR (Christiania Researcher in Residence) is an institution within the Freetown of Christiania which provides rooms to host researchers, artists or scholars who intend to undertake themed research paths in or on the Christiania community. see www.crir.net.

Floating actions: from the construction of the platform to the map of Christiania

Esben's Place is one of the first piers formed in the space occupied by Fredens Havn. The construction of this pier included two phases: a first phase of construction of the platform connected to the shore which takes the name of Else and a second phase of construction of the *Krydset* (Cross). The latter, as well as being used as a pier, also facilitates the collection of waste and safeguards the boats and the shore from the waves created by the passage of boats. The cross was built at the exact point where the channel winds cross.

This pier is very particular and significant for the community since it led to the first housing settlement in the Fredens Havn space. The event is remembered like this:

When I got here there was only trash. When I saw all this garbage I thought there could be something useful, that I could build something out of that material. I started cleaning the shore with the help of some friends who also lived near Refshalevej. When we found the boards, we immediately thought of building a boardwalk that would help us tie the boats here. The idea of the cross came to me later, when I noticed that the winds and the passing boats created waves that did not allow the platform to stand still, with the risk of destroying everything. The cross determined the beginning of everything, I think. It marks the center of the community.

(Conversation with E. of 03/10/2016)

The cross has a crucial role in the development of the community both from a spatial and social point of view. The construction of the pier space also had a political role. During the same conversation, different versions of the case emerged, but in all of them the 'tactical' (de Certeau 1984) role that the construction of the cross had in being recognized as an autonomous reality was underlined:

E.: After building the cross, nobody understood what was going on in this area. Everyone thought it had to do with Christiania, but it didn't. The police came every day and told us that we had to remove everything, but we continued. We asked a lawyer for advice and he studied the case. He told us that we should form an association, and that we were doing something extraordinary, without knowing it. That that space was a gray zone, which they could not clear. So we, after an assembly, decided to make that group (settlement) Fredens Havn

(Conversation with E. of 13/10/2016)

S.: The cross? The cross gave us a voice. It was the first experiment that created this reality. Nobody lived here before. It was not possible. Only E. lived on the shore, but not on a boat.

(Conversation with S. of 13/10/2016)

R.: The cross is used to collect garbage and to defend the (bird) nests from the waves. We only did what we had to do to make this place what it is today. We cleaned it and we respect it. The police want to send us away, but this is our home. If they take the cross away, only rubbish remains here. But the council understood that the cross is necessary, they are on our side. The Fredens Havn project has been accepted.

(Conversation with R. of 13/10/2016)

Following a tradition of studies that deals with the problem of spatiality and built environment (Rappaport 1982; Bourdier and AlSayyad 1989; Holston 1991; Kalufus 2012;), we can say that the construction of Else and the Cross were the first spatial organization actions that semantised the place in a particular way. The construction activities started the identity process of a place, taking up a concept by Signorelli, one could think of a practice of modeling space as a gesture aimed at establishing a cultural identity. The space becomes a system of values that is communicated to the city thanks to the characteristics of the landscape and the rewriting of the territory.

Furthermore, this action takes on an important political value. To say that "*the Cross marks the center of the community*" means overturning a social positioning that sees these groups as marginal compared to the rest of the city. On the shore, at the cross, there is the place where meetings and public gatherings take place.

A tactical action (de Certeau 1984) useful to "acquire a presence that settles the overcoming of the dramatic socio-economic inequalities with the modification of the forms of politics" (Malighetti 2012:

873). An action aimed at *taking up space* within excluding and stigmatizing policies.

The desire to be recognized by the city as a housing reality led the inhabitants to want to insert Fredens havn in the official map of Christiania, this happened in 2016. The president of the Fredens Havn association found this step very important:

if you are on a map it means that you exist, that you are recognized. Once you are written on a map it means that your presence is real, that you are there. It is a way to claim our identity and fix it forever. Fredens havn is real. If it is on a map it cannot be deleted.

(Conversation with E. of 07/05/2017).



FIGURE 10: Meetings square (Photo by Giuseppe Mazzarino)

The official presence of Fredens Havn within a Freetown map has given visibility and recognition to the place, indicating its precise location and geographical coordinates. At the same time, however, it has produced a series of reconsiderations by some members of the community who believe that in this way Fredens Havn is identified as part of Freetown, while in reality it was born precisely in opposition and in contrast with the policies that have made Christiania a "Tivoli for junkies"¹².

For others, however, the presence of Fredens Havn on the official map is a sign that the community exists and that the project can go on. In this regard, I report a brief dialogue that took place during a meeting dated 30 March 2017, many months after the meetings held for the realization of the map:

B.: The territory of Christiania ends there, after the road, and we are not part of Christiania. They don't want our project, they just want to take over the gray zone to expand and do business with tourists here, too, on the canal. This is all Christiania is now and we are not like that. They are convinced that they are free and that they live in their territory as free men and instead they are slaves of the system and we are not part of the system. We can really live as we want, build our houses without taking into account the system, the council, the taxes and the urban plan. This way we risk being "normalized" too.

E.: Being in the gray zone allows us not to be associated with Christiania. Our presence there indicates that our space is Ours. And that we, all of us, are something, a reality that now exists, because if you are on a map everyone can see that you are there. Christiania's help is essential for

¹² This derogatory expression refers to the fact that Christiania's space management policies have transformed the community into a tourist attraction – hence the reference to Tivoli, a well known amusement park in the city of Copenhagen – for people interested in the use of soft drugs. The sale of soft drugs is, in fact, one of the peculiar characteristics of the Freetown space.

us. How do we manage waste without Christiania? Where do we get water? We are not part of Christiania but we owe it a lot. We can do what they can no longer do.

B.: If they decide to make Fredens Havn a new area of Christiania, I'll weigh anchor and move my house from here.

The conflict arises from the fear of losing one's domestic space and one's freedom. Independence from the system and self-determination are recognized values that are protected at all costs. The making of the map was an important step for the community, which felt publicly recognized. Marking space as one's 'own' is a new form of right which many, paraphrasing Lefebvre, might call "right to the city" (Lefebvre 1967), but which I would prefer to call right *to take up space* in the city.

The map was one of the elements that made Fredens havn an autonomous and spatially positioned reality. Thanks to the ability of the inhabitants in managing the space available to them, and to the recognition of the project by the council, Fredens Havn continues to carry out its activities.



ILLUSTRATION 1: Christiania's map with Fredens Havn

Conclusions

In the text *From text to action*, Paul Ricœur says: "[...] if all discourse is realized as an event, all discourse is understood as meaning. What we wish to understand is not the fleeting event but rather the meaning that endures" (Paul Ricœur 1991: 78). This sentence traces a common thread in this short and descriptive contribution, in which the attempt is to talk about space in a very particular sense. It is Ricœur himself who tells us that discourse is an event in at least three meanings, the first of which consists in maintaining that "when someone speaks something happens", the second that the event, and therefore the discourse, is always temporally located and the third meaning consists in believing that speech is an event insofar as it "refers to a world it presumes to describe, express or represent" (Ricœur 1991: 78).

In this contribution, through a particular use of the term 'spatialization', I have tried to emphasize the extraordinary ability that people have to convey meanings through the social organization of space (Rodman 1992; Low 2000, 2003; Lawrence 2003). Space, in this case, becomes a particular language. A language with at least three main and fundamental characteristics: it is a language placed within a precise context (temporal and spatial), a language through which it is possible to describe a particular political, social and identity condition, and, lastly, a language through which it is possible to express a condition and establish a relationship with other actors. This idea creates many analogies between the space thus understood and the event/discourse that Ricœur mentions in his work. Furthermore, it leads

us to think of space as a complex semiotic system in which the units involved are narrative and not linguistic (Hammad, 2006).

The ethnographic case presented showed us that both in the daily practice of 'living a space', as for example it was for the construction of the platform, and in the representations of space, graphic or verbal, reported by the inhabitants of Fredens Havn, the space acquires an indispensable role in the group's political affirmation process in the city.

The space communicates the values and intentions of the group to the city and at the same time facilitates the process of recognizing the project and its usefulness in the area.

As was mentioned in the introduction, urban policies today give little importance to disadvantaged classes, and create increasingly sophisticated systems of repression and exclusion of these from the city's territory. Exercising this power encourages the search of new forms of action to try to *take up space* in the grip of neoliberal policies.

Taking up space also means reclaiming that idea of 'locality' (Appadurai 2014) that is being lost due to the transformation of our cities. Urban policies, increasingly convinced of extending urban boundaries towards the metropolitan, have given rise to a now widespread phenomenon of depersonalization of local identities and loss of cultural peculiarities, following the logic of globalization. In accordance with what Appadurai suggests, in informal realities we can find interesting examples of re-appropriation of the rights to the city and space, implemented daily through the exercise of practices and actions to improve the living conditions of poor or marginalized groups (Appadurai 2014).

Fredens Havn is a particular example of how daily space management actions can be the starting point for the construction of new forms of citizenship. This type of reality allows us to rewrite the power relations and undermine some key concepts that govern the idea of the city today and that are pivotal to contemporary urban policies. Fundamental categories in use in the debate on the city, such as private/public, exclusion/inclusion, center/periphery are completely re-articulated on the basis of new ways of organizing the spatial resources available. Using Giorgio Agamben's words we can say that realities like Fredens Havn live in a 'state of exception' that transforms these places into real "laboratories of new forms of subjectivity" (Malighetti 2011). The place of exception thanks to which it is possible to recognize oneself through a comparison with the Other and create new forms of right to the city and to living. A spontaneous way of reacting to policies of exclusion that lead actors to "be outside and yet belong" (Agamben 2003) to the city. An action that involves using the right to live the space as sole purpose.

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