Free Social Spaces: Small autonomous communities in the urban space

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Within the current context, the free social spaces can be the core cellular example of a small autonomous community. They offer great potential for the creation of new formations on the material basis of the reproduction of the social fabric, in the direction of a radical liberatory transformation. To enable such a community to be a point of reference and a hub of resistance and new ideas, certain conditions must be met.

First: There must be a territory, a place and a radius of action for the development of the community's operations. Free social spaces in fact meet these three requirements. Their territory can be occupied or rented. This is neither a question of value nor a contradiction, because what matters today is the liberating effect of the expropriation of buildings (usually unused buildings) that establishes the conditions for the radical transformation of social relations dovetailed in them.

Second: The community must guarantee the stability of the means (structures) and its reproductive relations. In order the free social spaces to be able to reproduce as a community, they must overcome the political and cultural weight that has created them, not of course by strangling or eliminating it, but spreading it over the areas of production, availability of products and services, including labor relations arising through this activity.

Guaranteeing the stable reproduction of the community requires that free spaces embody structures of production and

distribution of products/services. Depending on the size of the building, these structures may be located inside or outside or both inside and outside the confines of a building.

Labor relations, closely intertwined with horizontality, equality and solidarity can grow proportionally, synthetically and simultaneously, in three possible ways (combined or each separately):

a) payment with money;
b) product exchange;
c) donations.

Money can be in the form of alternative currency, time bank credits or euro. The fee should be between a minimum and a maximum threshold, the same for everybody each time. This is to assure that structures are not deprived of their key purpose on the one hand and to prevent money becoming the only incentive for participation in the community's structures on the other. The red line, beyond which accumulation begins that can dissolve the essence of the autonomous community, must be assessed and auto-regulated whenever necessary.

Free social spaces, as the place where community structures meet, discuss and exist, have opened up new ways to address the matters that concern them. Their grouping together, on a horizontal and direct democratic basis, produces a comprehensive dialogue on many different issues and creates the terms and conditions for more comprehensive solutions than what we knew collectives could do so far. As these spaces fill with new structures, new projects are led to leaving the boundaries of the territory of the buildings, covering more needs and creating a larger context for networking and security. This does not mean that people participating in these structures will make more money, but that they will have broader and free access to goods and services.

Finally, the free social space as a community needs at least

one product/service to start with and a respective structure. Could any kind of work/product/service be the basis for engagement in the structure in question, as long as the necessary conditions on labor equality, horizontality and solidarity are met? Certainly no. If it were so, what would prevent us from creating a structure for bouncers or one that would produce pesticides?

These start-up structures that will boost the community must respond to actual social needs, setting the limits between true and false, between what is socially beneficial and what is socially harmful. Some products can be directly integrated into the production plan for liberation and some require a transition plan (e.g. traditional seeds and toxic soil).

Therefore, if an autonomous community wishes to preserve its purpose, it must not address how the products will competitively penetrate the market, but how the community will respond to actual human needs. These have a name: back to basics, not as a form of punishment but as a choice to live an austere life in dignity, one that would be worth living.

Third: The structures of the community have to set the rules and terms for participation in its reproduction. Together with the direct-democratic context, horizontality, equality, solidarity, rotation, and the participation of all in making the decisions and implementing them, the first and foremost question raised is who the one to make the decisions is. That is, who is a member to be more exact, a part of the structures (a term that would best express what we call a collective being), who is not a part of it or who ceases to be part of it. This cannot be formalized, considering that relationships in an autonomous community are not static but dynamic. At the same time, not anybody can be a part of the community. Free social spaces create a reality that the community relies on. In other words, the parts of the community can be no other that the ones who participate in the free social space. This, as we know, is reflected in the common obligations regarding

the space, the activities, shifts, caretaking, in respecting the framework (racism, parties, sexism, theft, violence, etc.) and of course in the assemblies. Thus, free social spaces define the mark of who will be, who will not be and who is no longer a part of the community's structures.

Fourth: The autonomous community has to set the boundaries of its growth. Free social spaces must always take into account the boundaries of their growth or, as said in the beginning, the limits of their radius of action. The danger of strangling and restricting the structures is equal if not greater than the risk of its atrophy or lack of participation. The autonomous community has to be small in size in order to be able to function, which means that as its structures grow in terms of participation, the question arises regarding setting examples that will be reproduced. That is, the question of creating another small autonomous community in new territory with new or similar structures, especially with other people. The boundaries of the development of one free social space as a community are set by the space itself, summed up in two versions. Either too many participants are involved disproportionately in the structures for the production or supply of products, or there are disproportionately too many users interested in the structure's products. The first case entails the risk of the collapse of the structures and the second, the danger of concentration.

Fifth: The community must constantly create inside of it, but also primarily outside of it, federal networks of interdependence and reciprocity. Networking and federal relations make the role of the redundant and this is one of the main reasons for its existence. Otherwise, it will transform into an island, incarcerating the idea of the community, which sooner or later will shrink and die.

Considering that we are taking about structures for the reproduction of the community, networking can only entail specific products or services, to guarantee consistency,

durability and stability. Federal relations among the structures cannot rely on abstract promises of friendship and solidarity. This is clearly seen in the structures that dealing with nutrition and offering products of the primary sector. Depending on the distance between free social spaces, networking can be expressed through specific structures and choices for their complementary interdependence and support, i.e. one can produce flour, the other – the bread.

This opens a new dimension of networking, which arises from the stages, the composition and the horizontality of the relations of the production and distribution of products. Major drive in this process is the food, from "the farm" to the table. The quality, price, mode of production, redistribution, the working relations that regulate the whole cycle of production and consumption of the product, the direct connection between producers and users, all these matters are at the heart of the community. It is an endeavor for liberation of land that starts from the field and ends in the free social spaces. Urban gardening can be one of the steps towards the connection of the occupied land with the urban fabric, to which usually the free social spaces belong. The same can be done on a larger scale, through cooperatives and small producers, who are entering in this transition plan step-by-step, for the liberation of land from destroying the soil and the products in the name of increasing profit and maximizing performance in terms of money at the lowest possible cost, including state funding.

Sixth: Free social spaces as a community must intervene in the public sphere both as a hub of resistance and as a potential for exit. Therefore, there should be an organizational institution for the coordination and mutual support between structures of free social spaces. At the same time, as cells for radical social transformation, they can link their structures with the building and the neighborhood as core examples of cracks of subversion within the urban fabric, in

which basic needs are being monopolized, corrupted and alienated by business chains.

Original source in Greek: https://www.babylonia.gr/2012/09/19/eleftheri-kinoniki-chori-mikres-aftonomes-kinotites-ston-astiko-isto/