strategic attitudes with institutions in order to obtain the official assignment of the premises.

2. Models of decision-making: the framework.

Considering this political-ideological fragmentation, I wondered if all social centres shared similar types of decision making, notwithstanding their differences. The existing researches have been less focused on this feature, except for those concerning the social centres belonging to the *ex-Disobedient* sector. In particular, as far as the conception and practices of democracy are concerned, the use of the deliberative method in the internal decision-making process of Disobedients emerged, as Becucci stated: "The deliberative method… within the Assembly… does not use the system of the count of ayes and contraries, but is based on the search for consensus and tendential unanimity… the Disobedients' movement prefers the search for consensus. In the case there be positions that do not give shared solutions, the under discussion problems are momentarily suspended to be afterwards faced" (2003: 90).

But, what about the other social centres? Are their political conceptions and practices inspired to deliberative democracy too, or they follow other models? Which are their methods adopted, both in internal decision-making and in the external decisional processes through the interactions with the other SMOs within broader movement decisional settings? Which are the dynamics and mechanisms characterizing their decisional processes?

In order to answer these questions, first I have considered the practice of deliberative democracy that, according to the scholars who are studying this issue, "refers to decisional processes in which under conditions of equality, inclusiveness and transparency, and a communicative process based on reason (the strength of a good argument) are able to transform individual preferences, leading to decisions oriented to the public good." (della Porta 2006, 2; della Porta and Diani 2006, 241).

Nevertheless, because deliberative democracy is not the sole practice adopted by global movement organizations, I have checked if the decision-making, both internally and externally, of the social centres investigated, corresponded to other types or models of democracy. The typology elaborated by the *Demos Project* group on democracy within the GJM, coordinated by della Porta (2009), in fact regards the different models of decisional process adopted by diverse groups and organizations belonging to

the movement; in particular, the version suggested by Andretta (2007: 116-120), proposes four models of democracy, by crossing the two dimensions of the type of participation (indirect with delegation upward *vs.* direct without delegation) and of the decision-making method (vote or strategic negotiation *vs.* consensus) adopted for the treatment of preferences (aggregation *vs.* transformation) in the formation of political choices: a) *Associational Model* (indirect participation and preferences aggregation); b) *Assembleary Model* (direct participation and preferences aggregation); c) *Deliberative Representation Model* (indirect participation and preferences transformation); d) *Deliberative Democracy Model* (direct participation and preferences transformation). Nonetheless, the two models based on delegation upward (the Associational and the Deliberative Representation ones), are in my opinion useless for my purposes, because social centres have always been characterized by direct democracy, the refusal of internal and external delegation and the denial of formal representation (Piazza 1995; Mudu 2004; Montagna 2006, 2007).

Then, their decision-making should oscillate between the Deliberative and the Assembleary models. In fact, according to Andretta the groups of the anti-capitalist left, whitin which the social centres play an important role (*ibid*.: 127), seem to prefer the deliberative model, surprising for the poor inclination towards the assembleary model which should traditionally have inspired them (*ibid*.: 129), but thus confirming the previous researches (Becucci 2003).

Nevertheless, the two remaining models could be too rigid, reductive and not always realistic, according to a "black or white" logic, in order to describe and explain empirical cases, because in the reality it is likely that their dimensions not are always mutually exclusive but sometimes, if not simultaneously, probably successively present during the processes. Thus, because decision making is a process and not a single act, and therefore changes can occur during it, I have considered the two models (deliberative vs. assembleary) as the opposite poles of a continuum in which the real decision-making of the social centres can be placed: the proposed models are conceived indeed as ideal-types and the empirical cases can be more or less close to them.

In order to facilitate the analysis and the empirical check, I have thought to introduce two intermediate models regarding the cases in which Deliberative and Assembleary Democracy are not the exclusive practices adopted in decision-making processes. Thus, we will have four models,

starting from the Deliberative pole, along the continuum, towards the Assembleary one. Moreover, I have outlined two versions for each model, one regarding the internal decision-making of the social centres (the 'Inside'), the other concerning the external one (the 'Outside), where the unit of analysis is the way in which their activists interact, as a unitary actor, with other SMOs within movement arenas during the decisional process, and not the whole decision-making of these settings.

a. Deliberative Democracy Model.

INSIDE: The process is always deliberative: consensus is the decision-making method and preferences transformation occurs when decisions, unanimously, are taken; when unanimity is not reached, preferences are not aggregated (never vote nor strategic negotiation among different positions), no decision is taken, issues under discussion are momentarily suspended to be afterwards faced. Notwithstanding, if a unanimity decision is impossible to take on issues considered fundamental by activists, that can entails an internal split and the exit of the dissentients from the group.

OUTSIDE: activists always search for consensus and are incline to transform their preferences, but never aggregate them. They accept only unanimity (never strategic negotiation) but not majority decision (never voting). Not always a decision is accepted.

b. Deliberative-Assembleary Democracy Model.

INSIDE: The process is mainly deliberative (the rule), but it becomes assembleary when unanimity is not reached (the exception); in any case a decision must be taken, thus when the preferences are not transformed, they are aggregated by strategic negotiation (compromise or agreement) or by voting (majority decision).

OUTSIDE: activists usually search for consensus and are incline to transform their preferences, but when unanimity is not reached they aggregate them and accept a shared solution[4] - compromise or agreement - (by strate-

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[4] I have not used in these models the term 'shared solution' (or shared decision) as synonymous of 'unanimity decision', in order not to make confusion: the former means 'agreement' or 'compromise' as the outcome of a strategic negotiation among actors that aggregate their preferences, while the latter means a decision unanimously reached by the preferences transformation.

gic negotiation) or majority decision (by voting). A decision is always accepted.

c. Assembleary-Deliberative Democracy Model.

INSIDE: The process is mainly assembleary (the rule), but it becomes deliberative when fundamental issues are faced (the exception); usually preferences are aggregated and decisions taken by voting or strategic negotiation, but some issues (considered very important for the survival of the group) require unanimity and thus preferences are transformed (even to avoid internal split and the exit of minorities).

OUTSIDE: activists usually vote or strategically negotiate their positions with others to find a shared decision (compromise or agreement). They are incline to keep aggregate their preferences (they can try to transform those of others), but sometimes (on certain issues) they transform their own preferences to reach unanimity decisions. A decision is always accepted.

d. Assembleary Democracy Model.

INSIDE: The process is always assembleary: voting is the decision-making method and preferences aggregation occurs entailing the formation of majorities and minorities. Shared decisions (compromise or agreement) can be taken without voting, only by strategic negotiation among different positions.

OUTSIDE: activists always vote or strategically negotiate their positions with others to find a compromise or an agreement. They keep aggregate their preferences, but never transform them (they try to transform the preferences of others and to aggregate them to their own), nor accept majority decision when a shared solution is not found. That can entails the exit from the arena. Not always a decision is accepted.

My initial hypothesis was that all social centres shared an internal decision-making according to the logic and the mechanisms of the Deliberative Democracy Model, whereas the practices of their activists, in the external decisional processes, followed those of the Assembleary Democracy Model. In fact, on the basis of the previous researches, every social centre seemed to be characterized, 'inside', by the exclusively adoption of the

consensual method considered "the only one accepted by everyone" (Romano 1998; Mudu 2004: 926), and by decisions unanimously taken in order to make choices shared by all members; on the 'outside', on the contrary, social centres occupants tried, on the basis of the strength relationships with the other groups, to convince others to share their positions or to strategically negotiate some compromised agreements, without however questioning their political choices.

In order to test this hypothesis I designed my research around the binary comparison of two cases very different between them, that is two social centres with dissimilar characteristics (type of activities carried out, political affiliation, ideological orientation, attitudes towards institutions, etc.), to check if they, notwithstanding their numerous differences, had similar decisional processes.

For this reason I have selected two social centres in the same city, Catania in Sicily, with the most different characteristics: a) *Experia*, a political squatted social centre, belonging to the most radical national network (Revolutionary Communists), which refuse any contact with public institution; b) *Auro*, a moderate countercultural and non-affiliated social centre, whose premises have been officially assigned by local institutions. I focussed mainly, albeit not exclusively, their politics and democracy conceptions and practices of both their internal and external decision-making with other social movement organizations, especially within the local movement coordination.

Nevertheless, as we shall see in the following pages, the findings of the research have provided unexpected outcomes, at least those regarding one of the cases studied, entailing an explanation through the procedure of re-identification and/or cultural re-collocation (Pizzorno 2007a: 66-70); that is the reconstruction of the meaning of actions, identifying the real ends (re-identification) and/or beliefs and information (re-collocation) of the actors, which are different from those we had initially supposed. Explanation here is not pursued singling out constant relations between variables, as in Most Different Systems research design, but understanding and interpreting the meaning of actors' actions (*ibid.*: 70-82).

The research is based on three principal sources: a period of participant observation during the internal meetings of the social centres and the local movement assemblies; the analysis of self-produced documents and internet websites; above all, a set of semi-structured interviews with the social

centres' activists, serving as my key-informants, in order to understand the meaning of their practices and being able to interpret them.[5]

In the following pages, first I will briefly trace the long history of social centres in Italy, underlining their common features and differences, their phases and transformations throughout the years till the present time (par. 2); then I will analyse the phenomenon of squatting in Catania, reconstructing the history, the political conceptions, the activities and campaigns, the 'inside' and 'outside' decision-making of two social centres: *Experia* (par. 3.1) and *Auro* (par. 3.2). Finally, I will make some conclusive remarks returning to the hypothesis outlined above and discussing them in particular from a comparative perspective.

3. The Social Centres in Italy: a long history

Social centres' squatting in Italy has its roots in the mid-1970s when in some urban areas, mainly in Milan, groups of young people (above all students, unemployed and under-employed), namely *Circoli del proletariato giovanile* (proletarian youth clubs), "started a process of 'claiming the city' through widespread squatting of public spaces and the occupation of empty buildings" (Ruggiero 2000, 170). Most of these groups were linked to the *Autonomia Operaia* (Workers' Autonomy), a revolutionary communist movement set up by "a federation of variously sized and composed collectives which urged into action thousands of people and managed to gain the support of numerous intellectuals" (Mudu 2004: 920). Those collectives and groups shared a common paradigm based mainly on two political conceptions and on the radical actions related to them: a) autonomy as independence of the working class from the capitalistic organization of labour and society, synthesized in the 'refusal of work', conceived not only as denial of salaried work, but also as counter-power and resistance against it; b) autonomy as independence from the organizations of workers' movement, unions and left-wing parties, that is the refusal of delegation and formal representation towards party system and representative democracy (Piazza 1987). Therefore, first-generation social centres was only a part of an overall anti-institution movement (Mudu 2004; Piazza 1995), whose decline at the end of 1970s "coincided with the growth of violent protest and armed groups within the extreme left, resulting in mass arrests and voluntary exile

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[5] The data were collected between 2004 and 2008 and the results con considered valid until the eviction of CPO Experia on 30 October 2009.