

Still standing? Young Christianites between consensus and normalization

by

Helena Colom Montoriol

Universitat de Barcelona

Facultat de Geografia i Història

Departament d'Antropologia Social i Història d'Amèrica i Àfrica

and

Luna De Maio, Giacomo Turci

Dipartimento di Storia, Culture, Civiltà

Scuola di Lettera e Beni Culturali

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Helena Colom Montoriol, Luna De Maio, Giacomo Turci

Corresponding author:

Giacomo Turci

via zavaglia 158

47522 Cesena (FC)

Italia

Tel: +39-0547-317886, mobile: +39-339-7208191

e-mail: giacomoposta@virgilio.it

Foreword

This paper is the result of a fieldwork in Christiania, conducted from October to December, 2013; the paper itself was used as the final written exam for "Anthropology: Methodology and Analysis" course, Copenhagen University. Here you can read the original paper with just few and minor changes: despite not being an "educational" work, but rather an ethnographic report, we decided not to erase several "technical" anthropological aspects of our paper, hoping that our readers (especially other social sciences students, and whoever is interested in anthropology without being an expert of it) will enjoy them.

Our practical activity in Christiania was often the result of a common effort, based on group-discussion and mutual feedback. Due to end of the fieldwork and of our course's lessons, and to other tasks, the "writing up" phase was mostly based on individual work, anyway preceded by group brainstorming, and finally improved by feedback.

"Introduction" and "Conclusions" were written by Giacomo; "Methodology" and "Ethical considerations" were written by Luna and Giacomo; "Analysis" was written by Helena and Luna.

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Introduction

Giacomo's notes

I've been sitting here, just outside the bar [the famous "Moonfisher"] for ten minutes: everything is quiet, I can hear the music coming from inside, and from Christiania's "downtown"; several birds are twitting in many different ways, "Vor Frelzers Kirke"'s bells tell me that right now it's ten o' clock a.m.; hard-working Copenhagen's noises are near, but here they always come vague and distant. Looking around, I realize how many trees are around me, how much space here is free from palaces, still unscathed by massive urbanization. How much longer will such an anomaly like Christiania "stand"?

Giacomo's question could sound a bit too pessimistic, but it reflects our vision *at the end* of the fieldwork, when Christiania was no more a completely separated *Other* to us,



Christiania: *still standing*.

but a lively reality we had studied and personally dealt with for one month and a half in 2013 autumn.

Our group was concerned with studying how this "stand" could be understood allowing for historical changes and internal social dialectic (photo by authors, December 2013)

We were already interested in setting our fieldwork into Christiania, due to our interest in social and economic relations that differ, more or less, from the mainstream global capitalistic society, and Christiania showed itself as a significant field of study, a rare opportunity which could not be ignored. When we came to

know the recent agreement between Christiania and the Danish State, we became aware that it was likely to find new anthropological perspectives, due to the importance of that agreement, even different from the ones collected just before the final signature of the contract with the State. As long as a paper regarding present Christiania would just sound obscure without any

1 "Our Saviour's Church", a Baroque 17th century church, situated just one hundred metres outside Christiania.

historical introduction, we briefly introduce our fieldwork's historical setting.

Historical introduction



September 1971: people squatting the military area which will be soon used to be called *Christiania* (photo from "Christianias Lokalhistoriske Arkiv")



Christiania as it used to be (photo from Christiania's Local History Archive, 1920)

The very existence of the self-declared "Fristaden" ("Free Town") of Christiania has always been threatened for forty years by Danish State's claims over the land which hundreds of people squatted – without any legal right – in September, 1971. On September, 26, Christiania was declared open as "a self-governing society where all individuals can develop themselves under responsibility for the community" (Willis, Willis 2003).

Christiania's founders were mostly young Copenhageners, students and workers, members of the Danish Squatter Movement, hippies (Offset, 2005:3). The 32-odd-acres area (Søderdahl Thomassen 2013), which Christiania consists of, was previously a military one, an important part of Copenhagen's military defense: stores, barracks, military factories had been built in the north-eastern part of Christianshavn, the

island reclaimed by Christian VI of Denmark in the first years of XVII century. Having detracted such a strategic area (which was left from the military by 1968), partly property of the Danish Ministry of Defense, Christianites immediately became *natural enemies* of the State: several times during our fieldwork, the Danish State, often identified with the national government, was defined as "our enemies" by Christianites we talked to. Despite that, generally Christiania managed to reach several (more or less) temporary agreements with the State, and was given the "political seal of approval as a 'social experiment' already by 1972 (Offset, 2005: 3): as we have understood during our fieldwork, Christianites' "praxis", when they have been acting as a community, was (and is) based on the avoidance of direct conflicts with no chances of debate, as we will

better explain in the analysis of consensus democracy.



A sight of Christiania from "Vor Frelser Kirke" spire (photo by authors, October 2013)

After four decades of disputes and negotiations with Danish police and national government, the latter came up with an ultimatum in 2011, due to the a verdict against Christiania in Danish Supreme Court (the ultimate one after a long series of lawsuits): Christianites had to choose between a complete legalisation process, or the definitive threat to be kicked out "en masse". That ultimatum led to the choice of signing a definitive agreement with the Danish State. The

result was the creation of a Christiania Foundation, composed by both Christianites and "citizens broadly respected from the kingdom of Denmark" (Manghezi, 2012), which gave Christianites the opportunity of "buying the area free" (ibid.) collectively, without individually owning it, and to rent Christiania's areas bound by environmental laws; consequently, the illegal status of Christiania, due to the initial squatting, has ceased. But the question was not automatically over: Christiania was supposed to fall back under Danish general law, while it had followed special "ad hoc" rules for four decades; in fact, the Danish Parliament approved, last June 4, a law that confirms that point, with the major legal consequence that Christianites have to restore the old bastions which encircle Christiania as they were in 1971, making sure they they will be preserved, and that touristic plaques will be put for tourists.

The economic consequence of the agreement was the taking out a huge mortgage, guaranteed by the Danish State, which covers the deal: 76.2 million "kroner"² for the part which has been bought, 40 million "kroner" for the cost of building additional properties on the land, plus an annual rent costing 6 million "kroner" (Vinther 2011); for a relatively poor community (Lund Hansen 2010:17), this means decades of community budget straits.

² Danish national currency: 7.45 "kroner" are exchanged, in December, 2013, for 1 euro.

Research question

Choosing such a wide context as Christiania, a community of about 900 people – officially, they were 878 in 2003 (Lund Hansen, 2010:16) – our main initial problem was to get specific in our project due to limited time and precedent preparation. We were able to select one topic before starting our fieldwork, producing this statement: “*How do Christianites deal with common property and collective comunitarian decision-making after "Bevar Christiania?"*”. After a few days in Christiania, thanks to good research chances given by those who became our gatekeepers, we focused our question, choosing to work with young Christianites, i.e. people younger than 30 years old living in Christiania. After some difficulties in gaining access to specific places and groups (as you can read in the *Methodology* section), and keep thinking of how "to limit, specify, focus, and contain" (Geertz, 1977:4) we found possible to go on with fieldwork focusing on people in their twenties. So, we came to our final research question:

How do young Christianites deal with common property and collective consensus decision-making after "Bevar Christiania"?

In order to make our investigation not too unstructured – a concrete danger in a short fieldwork like ours -, we stated two sub-questions which stood as a guide for our personal analytical reflections:

How is consensus democracy lived and perceived?

How are Christiania's historical changes perceived, in particular in relation with the notion of normalization?

All of these questions reflect a methodological decision which was the basis for our whole work: our primary sources were collected only among Christianites. The same definition of Christianite is problematic (as we will argue), but "our" Christianites were all living in Christiania in 2013.

Hypothesis

We found a passage, from Bertolt Brecht's *Me-ti*, very significant for us as a sort of a summary of what we thought we could find out doing research in Christiania – a reality characterized by a strong dialectic process, both internal and with the rest of society:

It was a habit of Mi-en-Leh to go and search for some contradiction inside phenomena which seemed to be uniform. If he saw a group of people which formed an unity, comparing with other groups, he nevertheless expected that in some aspects they were very different between each other, even rather adverse, as some of them had interests which harmed others' ones. And also compared to other groups, members from the considered group did not behave uniformly, non completely uniformly, and not only uniformly. After all the group was not completely and uniformly and always opposed and hostile against another or other groups, but there were fluctuating relationships which continuously called into question, even if with various intensity, the unity of the group, and its diversity from other groups (Brecht 1973:99).

The epochal 2011 agreement made us think that Christiania could not simply still “stand”: we wanted to explore possible changes and contradictions as consequences of that historical outcome of the 40 years long struggle for the survival of Christiania. In particular, we were not convinced by some public accounts: their narrative actually built an image of a bitter social conflict peacefully ended, just a like a “fairy tale” (Manghezi 2011). After all, we found true that the relation between Christianites and the Danish press is not a “fairy tale” one, as Thomas, one of our informants, stated:

Thomas: It's not that people don't talk to the press, but people are just tired of the press, because they are the only people, or like one of the only ... mmh, *things*, in Denmark, that really don't like us: that's the press. They don't like *anything* positive about us: that's why everybody in Jutland have prejudices about Christiania, that's because they get all the infos from the press, and the press hates us (interview, November 15, 2013).

Statements like Thomas's one confirmed us that we could not simply rely on public accounts and narrative about Christiania if we wanted to build up a sort of factual truth when re-elaborating our data. But the self-definition of Christiania as a “losers' Paradise” (Offset 2005:2) stimulated our curiosity: was Christiania simply victoriously

“standing” one more time? Our hypothesis was this:

while Christiania is generally thought as an old '68-hippie-anarchist immovable bastion, it shows a much more significant complexity, we could say, in every level of its existence, from Christianites' personal philosophies to the “political” management of both daily life and the very survival of the community itself - and of the ideals it was built on.

In particular, we supposed that different points of views, also among peers, could come out from different ways of living in Christiania, mainly due the length and to the premises of one's personal stay in Christiania: probably, being born and grown up in a community one has not chosen (as most of elder Christianites did), one could come to a critical view of Christiania's dynamics. Therefore, we were interested in catching a more dialectic reality coming out of Christiania, remembering that culture changes, even if it is taken for granted (Ferraro, Andreatta 2012): our hypothesis precisely implied not to take for granted the vague legendary image we had, like most of the people who have never visited Christiania before, of a '68 *reservation*, uninfluenced by social and historical structural processes for four decades.

Informants and gatekeepers



Where we found our gatekeepers: Kvindesmedien laboratory and CRIR house (photos by authors, November 2013)

Having visited Christiania just a few times before starting the fieldwork, we managed to meet Kirsten Larsen, a former anthropologist, now retired and volunteering as a tourist guide and at Christiania's info-point: there we met with her two times, being able to get general informations and

contacts through informal talks and a semi-structured interview (performed as a preparatory exercise before starting the proper fieldwork). Thanks to Kirsten, we came

to know CRIR³'s "manager", Emmerik Warburg, a 61 years old sound engineer who moved to Christiania three decades ago, and who lives just in front of CRIR house: being quite a popular person inside Christiania, he was able to give us several contacts for our research, especially related to Christianite youngsters.

We also visited a few times "Kvindesmedien" shop: a laboratory held by three female blacksmiths – one of them is the mother of two guys, and was able to give us indications to find the flat they lived in. We took advantage of those ladies' interest to get a date and interview one of them, Gitte. But, being young Christianites our core



Thomas, one of our informants, standing at Fabriken doorstep (photo by authors, December 2013)

informants, most of our direct data came from people in their twenties: Jens, Jesper, William and Rasmus were living together in a flat in "Maelkevejen" ("The Milky Way"), which is in the north eastern part of "central" Christiania, where six old barracks are sited. We also kept in contact with Thomas, a friend of "Maelkevejen" guys, living in the building called "Fabriken"⁴, and Sandra, a girl living with other youngsters in a collective house called "Vadestedet"⁵, just in front of the lake which encircles Christiania's eastern inner part.

Ourselves as ethnographers

As we wrote, none of us ever visited Christiania before October 2013, i.e. when we were preparing our research project. In fact, none of us ever visited Denmark before 2013 summer, when we came to Copenhagen to enjoy our stay as "erasmus" students. It is noticeable that the fieldwork related to this essay was the first important ethnographic activity in all of our academic careers.

Every of us was able to interact in English with our informants, and we were able to

3 Christiania Researcher in Residence Center

4 "The factory": it used to be an explosives factory.

5 "Ford"

avoid speaking Danish (which we did not know), and to use just few data in Danish from the Internet that had to be translated. Being foreigners speaking only English surely implies that people in our fieldwork were less likely to get in touch with us and to spend their time with us, being more difficult for them to identify themselves with us in some ways; but the presence of one Spanish (Helena) and two Italians (Giacomo and Luna) proved to be particularly interesting to some of our informants: in particular, comparisons with Italian society (especially for *alternative subcultures*) were useful to find a common ground, and the possibility to make fun of Italian politics appeared to be an attractive topic during talks with our informants.

Living in Copenhagen, it was possible to go to Christiania most of days, although, at the same time, we had to attend classes from other courses and prepare other exams, limiting the time we could dedicate to the practical activity inside Christiania. It must be said that, despite what one could imagine, also Christianites live a busy and "wandering" daily life, and are not always easy to trace: the sole search for our informants' addresses was quite hard, given the fact that house numbers were recently officially adopted by Christianites but, as a matter of facts, one could not find anything like that in Christiania.

Methodology

Preparation

Ethnography, being a part of social sciences studies, should not produce "obscure", imprecise or mysterious material, even if "the distance is often enormous between the brute material of information [...] and the final authoritative presentation of the results" (Malinowski 1964:3-4). This implied, for us, that "in order to make an overall argument, a lot of background information is important" (O' Reilly 2005:194), and so we carried on an important preliminary phase of multifaceted studies on Christiania, a reality which we barely were told about before going to Copenhagen; during October we started collecting material: amateur videos, documentaries, books, papers and newspaper articles became useful sources – they allowed us not to show ourselves as largely ignorant towards our field, and to give us a historical and theoretical basis for our paper.

But one field's characteristics and peculiarities are not just a background for the ethnographer: thinking of conducting ethnographic research from the start to the end, without considering one's field's influence, would be an amateur approach, not a scientific one; peculiarities of field have therefore a big influence on the methodology of the ethnographic research, making the ethnographer considering them while conducting his or her research. For this reason, we took on our fieldwork keeping in mind that it should have consisted of, as Michael Agar states, a dialectic process (Walcott 1994), looking like "a spiral or helix, that demonstrates how analyses and writing up can lead back to more data collection and writing down" (O' Reilly :177): this helped us a lot through the difficulties related to our field, and to smartly shape our work.

We found ourselves strongly in agreement with Philippe Bourgois when he writes "Truth' is of course, socially constructed and experientially subjective; nevertheless, we did our best to seek it out" (Bourgois, Schonberg 2009:12). This entails that we did not

think of our informants' statements as something that can simply be seen as “the truth”: we fact-checked as many accounts of past and present events and situations as we could, availing ourselves of different indirect informants *picked* from several various secondary sources, and making sure that the knowledge coming from the field is not overall altered by biases (or just pure errors) towards delicate social and political questions; this implied “anthropology’s tenet of cultural relativism” (ibid.:7) was to be followed, remembering at the same time that none of our informants could tell us any oracular truth nor any negligible oddity.

Dealing with a “stressed” field

An aspect that has to be considered regarding our fieldwork is that Christiania can be seen as “stressed” field: most of Christianites have got bored with all the tourists and researchers going around their neighborhoods, asking about their private life, taking notes or pictures of them and their houses, commenting about their activities or their aspect. As a consequence, most of them are not willing to spend a lot of their time with people from outside interested in their unique way of life: partly because they would be compelled to extensively talk in English with no-Danish-speakers - and this could become boring for anyone⁶; partly because they always feel like “monkeys” (interview with Thomas, November 15, 2013) in a zoo, with hordes of foreigners looking at them while they have their ordinary lives in their “town”.

Due to the fact that we actually stayed in Christiania during the “low season”, when tourists are very few comparing to the Christmas-new year period and to late Spring, and Summer, we realized that that particular part of the year is generally the one in which Christianites are less likely to be touristic objects, but also research objects: practically all of them have been object of one or more studies (of every kind) along their life, having to answer to the same questions over the years. For this reason, several people we asked to talk with, in the first part of our research period, told us they were too busy for us. Then, having found the right gatekeepers, we came to know and meet

⁶But it is true that, also thanks to living in a very touristic area (and as we could verify), they are all able to correctly express themselves in English.

some young people, very willing to tell us their stories and their opinions.

Limits of the field: on focus group and participant observation

Another limit we had during our work was linked to our identity: our project of conducting a participant observation in some of Christiania's periodic meetings went awry when we found out that meetings, as a general rule, are reserved to Christiania residents. In the same days we were also advised that, being over 18 years old, we were not allowed to access “Youngstarz”, the teenagers club of Christiania, where we were planning to spend some time with youngsters in order to have talks, interviews and focus groups.

Therefore, talking of “fieldwork that failed” (Kent 2000), our attempts to do participant observation related to our research (i.e. joining local meetings) had to be abandoned, and we decided to concentrate our work on interviews and informal talks with youngsters we had met thanks to our contacts among elder Christianites.

In the second part of our period of work we also asked our informants if they were interested in doing a focus group about “Bevar Christiania”⁷ process, consensus democracy and communal management of houses. As we were asking people about this idea, we found out that setting up a focus group among youngsters would be very hard in Christiania and even, according to one of our informants (Thomas), “dangerous”, due to the concrete possibility of debates degenerating into a “fight”, especially among people grown up together in Christiania. Our informants wanted to avoid this *danger* which actually is for them the bad side of promoting such strong individual personalities, inside the community, who get easily bored of compromise and debate *outside* meetings. All our informants refused to take part to that activity, and most of them strongly suggested us to avoid wasting time with it; they explained us that, although decisions are taken with the formal consensus of everybody, actually nobody in Christiania has the same opinion about such significant questions as the ones we wanted to talk about. They were sure that a focus group would have been absolutely

7 “Save Christiania”: it is the expression commonly used when referring to the public campaign launched by Christianite to make the world know the *threat* of the 2011 agreement, and to gain social and financial support.

useless, because it would have been whether chaotic, and maybe “violent” (if everybody had to frankly debate their opposite opinions), or, on the contrary, useless if nobody had to be more *accommodating*, and therefore *false*.

Collecting data: notes, interviews, visuals

Being part of a particularly "easy-going" context, a touristic world-famous place like Christiania, young Christianites are particularly used to the *spectacularization* (Debord 2001) of their own lives, which meant for us that there were no problems with recording all of our interviews, or with taking notes while talking with our informants, or with taking pictures of them.

Generally, we were able to jot down, just after finishing our single activities, everything we had not written during our visits to the field.

Editing tape recordings⁸ has been a tough challenge for us, and Bourgois's considerations (2009:12-13) turned helpful in understanding how the *conversion* from a “performative art” (ibid.:12) into a literary product, part of a scientific work, could be done: editing and reporting excerpts of our talks, we tried to “maintain what we believe was the original sense” (ibid.:13).

We also agreed that including pictures (mostly taken by us) in our essay would have been useful to help our readers connecting our work, a collection of words, with the lively historical reality of Christiania – keeping in mind that “letting a picture speak its thousands words can result in a thousand deceptions” (Bourgois, Schonberg 2009:14), and hoping our captions could avoid that.

Organizing our work

Our activity basically followed two principles: rational division of tasks, maximum team work; this meant that everyone could do the tasks which fit better for him or her (trying to divide them as equally as possible), and that almost every activity of ours in the field was done in pairs or by the whole group. Living in different parts of

8 Which are a huge part of our material, thanks to our informants' habit to be recorded as Christianites – as „monkeys“, one of them, Thomas, said.

Copenhagen during our fieldwork, we decided to save time reserving some of it for short briefings before most of our activities in the field, and to organize group meetings (one per week) to sum up what we had done, what could be improved, and what was to be done. However, we were able to continuously share our material, stay connected and give feedback to each other via Google Drive and Facebook.

Ethical considerations

Before starting our research with every informant, we accurately explained our project, our activity as exchange students, our topics of interest. During this briefs, we made clear that they had the right to withdraw any statement or personal information at any moment, also after the end of the fieldwork: we left our personal contacts to keep sure that there was no intention to *take data and run*. Most of the times, we came to being invited to our informants' houses, being introduced by our gatekeepers or having sent written messages, with our contacts, explaining our purposes.

Keeping in mind that Christianites generally have a non-mainstream concept of “private“, we always respected their will and right to privacy, avoiding any kind of covert activity or stalking-like procedures to find and meet them. Every informant was granted to choose to stay anonymous, but nobody opted for that possibility.

Emmerik reminded us to always think of “what's the beef“, i.e. how to avoid being just exploiters of knowledge. We were able to collect personal contacts of every informant of ours, letting ourselves the opportunity to receive some feedback after having sent the *exam version* of our paper: since Emmerik asked us to send our essay to him to publish it on CRIR site (crrir.net), we will wait for a final feedback from our informants, allowing them to make us correct parts which could be problematic for them and/or for their community if made public. It must be said that most of our informants were sincerely looking forward to read our paper, hoping that it could somehow help them carrying on a constructive debate about several key issues they talked about with us.

Being able to read the most recent scientific literature about Christiania, we tried to produce an essay which, without being unlinked with past works, offers new perspectives and materials thanks to “up-to-date“ ethnographic materials – no scientific work about Christiania, as far as we know, has been published after 2011.

Being able not to hurt too much such a “stressed” field, and having gained good relations with our informants, we think to have left the field open to future research on similar topics, both for ourselves and other researchers.

Analysis

Consensus democracy

Christiania's *consensus democracy* is a radical form of direct democracy, a particular way of decision-making in which every person has the right to speak, be heard, and thus have input into the decisions made. Since its beginning, Christiania community has been ruled by consensus democracy. All of our informants⁹ have no doubts: consensus's strong point is that everyone's opinion and voice in Christiania is valuable. Thomas put the idea in these words:

Thomas: It's not the smart people who get to talk [...] but of course we have "brains" who talk a lot as well... so you have to think about everybody, as like politicians, so everybody can get their voices heard, and that's a lot of people and that's a good thing, I think: you don't have to have like a college degree to speak, also just work in Pusher street or...(interview, November 15, 2013).

Amy Starecheski (2011) analyses Christiania's consensus democracy using the concept of *strategy* and exploring some of the most remarkable processes of decision-making between 2004 and 2008, when Christianites had to decide how to deal with Danish State's pressure for legalising their community. However, it is not easy to evaluate consensus process's strategic efficacy "with such an informally structured process and a large and diverse group of people" (ibid.:266); for instance, Starecheski points that consensus has been more strategically useful for legalisation plan's opponents. Diversities within Christiania make the process of decision-making through consensus democracy quite more difficult thanks/due to (it depends on one's perspective) the importance given by Christianites to individual peculiarities and differentiation .

Gitte: There are many disagreements between groups of people. It is very hard to reach agreements, because we are very different peoples living here, it is a kind of learning process

⁹ But their opinion is also shared by the great majority of Christianites: every Christianite we talked with during our fieldwork agreed, and every secondary source confirms that.

maybe. To be able to make disagreements with people who are so different from yourself (interview, November 15, 2013).

Jens: So many people have to agree on the same thing. It's often very long meetings and people yelling and it's really frustrating (interview, November 26, 2013).

Christiania's consensus democracy has undeniable advantages compared to other “democratic” systems but, as other possible models of government, is not seen by young Christianites as the perfect system, and sometimes it has to cede something to “democracy”:

Jasper: Yes! Like an area meeting (a small meeting with other guys who live in your area). It was very special. It's very consensus democracy. You know, there so many different people living out-there. It's not like they can all agree in a consensus democracy, so it's more like a democracy¹⁰. But people always have the consensus like a main theme. It's not like totally consensus but the decisions are taking a bit longer because so many as possible has to agree... (interview, November 20, 2013).

It must be said that it has been useful as a strategy in the negotiations with the State, but was also seriously questioned by most of our informants in Christiania:

Jesper: It doesn't work! What's the chance that 750 people could agree in one thing? It's more like a democracy. But everybody can take the microphone, everybody has a voice. This is how I see consensus. But I don't think it works that way, maybe by ten people in a collective. I like the idea, I really like it but I don't think it's possible. It's difficult to agree on “yes or no” issues (ibid.).

Nevertheless, it was hard, for our informants, to think about a better system than consensus democracy to manage Christiania:

Thomas: I think it's like a hard decision making process. I think it's a beautiful thought, and as long as I can't figure out a better way, then I think that's the best way, because I can't see any better ways. Everybody gets heard: I think that's beautiful. Even “small” ones have that grant: I know it's stupid, but I think it's beautiful (interview, November 13, 2013).

¹⁰ Quite evidently, Jesper was referring to "classic" modern forms of representative democracy based on voting.

Starecheski analyses some of the strong points of the consensus model; for instance, although the difficulty of using consensus democracy to reach an agreement in order to act, the moments after one big decision are characterized by a sensation of transcendental unity. “Christianites’ refusal to vote has protected them from being divided and weakened, and the powerful sense of unity created when Christianites have managed to agree has sustained many participants through a stressful process. However, the more common experience of ongoing, unresolved conflict has exhausted many others” (Starecheski, 2011:265): the latter

Consensus democracy entails openness to innovation because even minority voices, which might otherwise be marginalized by the majority in a common democracy system, are heard and taken into account. When the community has to deal with some conflicts, creative solutions arise in order to overcome differences. The slowness of the consensus-based decision-making processes can be seen as a weakness but also as an asset. Decentralized organisation and the need of reach an agreement with the whole community has been an effective tool against the State co-option: without leaders it is more difficult to make a deal, especially one which does not fit the majority.

As we have seen, our informants express only positive opinions about consensus process, although all of them like it, and a process of informal bureaucratization is often recognized: “[...] most participants recognise the disjunction between the ideal of direct, participatory democracy and the informal structure that determines who can participate in meetings, and attempts to reform the process are ongoing” (ibid.: 287). It is also true that the high level of active participation, which was intended to be kept along the years in Christiania, is not to be taken for granted: all of our informants are not used to attend all the scheduled meetings; in particular, it is common just to attend one's building meetings and the most important general meetings.

Being more used, having lived in Christiania for about thirty years, to Christiania's political life, Gitte was able to summarize our informants' doubts about the limits of a non-voting democratic system:

Gitte: I think is very bad that we can't vote, I think it makes very hard and everything takes very long time. If you are going to take a decision about something big, it takes too long time. I'm

not good at this. It's too long time. So I don't think it's very good. In the principle it's very good, if it works it's nice, of course is very, very good. But it's too difficult if you don't have rules about it. Now you have two meetings or three meetings about this and there are still disagreements, then you must be able to take a new form. (interview, November 5, 2013).

So, a rethinking the consensus process, introducing the idea of trying some kind of voting, is taking place in order to allow a broader participation. If everyone really actively participated in the meetings consensus democracy would actually be "functioning", but it is not exactly the case of Christiania, where, mainly due to this lack of active participation, some implicit rules and informal structures grew up. The potential emergence of a hidden group of power within loose structures, the limited access to rhetorical power, and the long-term consolidation of political power through hegemonic authority are problematic and real phenomena which loom over post-agreement Christiania.

Thomas: The ones who have been living here for the longest time have the guts, you know, to speak up, you know, say what they think – I've never spoken, or maybe twice, because I'm afraid and I don't feel people listen to me because I'm just a kid... or I feel like it anyway (interview, November 20, 2013).

Common Management



"Vadestedet" residents do not think of their home as "their castle" (photo by authors, December 2010)

During our fieldwork we were often invited by our informants to visit their houses and businesses in Christiania, and during our interviews we inquired after the issue of common management of places inside Christiania.

We looked into the way Christianites manage their houses and their work places, how businesses are administrated, how decisions in houses and collectives are taken.

We inquired, in our interviews with our informants, about the procedure one has to follow in order to move in a collective. We came to know that, in their cases, the admission is not obtained with a formal application, but mainly thanks to personal

relationships or contacts. All the people we talked with admitted that they were living in their present houses thanks to some friend of them:

Sandra: All the guys who came, we knew them before, there was some connection.... It's no application, it's more the feeling of how it is, like *the flow* (interview, November 13, 2013).

Sandra explained us the whole process with which people are admitted as new residents in her collective: she told us that, when someone they know wants to move there, they firstly let that person stay with them in their house for like two months in order to have an idea of which kind of housemate he or she could be, and then they decide if he or she can move in or not. The final decision is always “collective”: “in the collective we all have to agree. So, if we need one person to move in, we all have to say yes to one person: if one says no, then he can't move in” (ibid.).

We also inquired on the way collective flats residents make their decisions. We expected that, in Christiania's collectives, residents would use common consensus in the making of daily decisions; instead, we were surprised to hear, from one of our informants, that they absolutely don't use any sort of common consensus within the collective. Rather, they make their decisions by a majority rule, Jasper told us: “It would probably be a normal democracy. He doesn't want this, he's the only one, so 'shut up!'“ (interview, November 20, 2013).

Another issue we talked about during interviews is the management of businesses in Christiania. Two of our informants invited us to visit their activities: a vegetarian restaurant and the women-blacksmith (“Kvindesmedien”) shop. During the interviews we did with them, we inquired on the inner structure and the way of taking decisions among the members of these businesses. Regarding the cases we came to know (the restaurant and the shop), we found two opposite way of administrate a business. Sandra, who works in the restaurant, told us that they are a collective, not a normal business with a boss and permanent employees with fixed salaries. The employees are voluntaries and they have no stable work time but the ones who guarantee a certain amount of hours get a pay. For example, Sandra is a university student, she has another job (which is her “regular” job) and she works at the restaurant just as a voluntary.

On the contrary, in the shop there is a “normal structure” with three bosses and some

employees all working with a stable work time and stable salaries.

Normalization

Christa Amoroux presents normalization “as a strategy where coercive, spatial and rhetorical practices are employed by the state in order to legitimize Christiania's closure.”: “the term *Normalization* was used by state officials to justify their plan to privatize and “clean-up” Christiania.” (Amoroux 2007:108-110). The main step of this process of normalizing Christiania, conducted by the State, was without any doubt the agreement in 2011 which made Christianites buy the land squatted in 1971. That pact allowed Christianites to stay in their land and to preserve their autonomous way of life, but it also established some rules, some requests that Christianites had to satisfy. Those requests tended (also in previous several temporary agreements) to remove all characteristic aspects of the neighborhood, making Christiania more “normal”.

“The Normalization Plan began by identifying three key transgressions that placed Christiania “outside” society: refusal to pay property and other taxes, selling hash, and building communal houses and collective businesses on public lands.” (Amoroux 2007:113)

Regarding taxes payment, it came out from our interviews that nowadays this is just a prejudice against Christianities. People outside Christiania go on with thinking that Christianities don't pay any kind of tax but, on the contrary, they have been “proclaimed 'model citizens' by both politicians and authorities, because, since the start of the 1990s” they “have paid all consumption rates and taxes in full” (Offset 2005:21), as all of our informants confirmed.

The second point, that normalization was about, was the free hash market in Pusher Street. Although our research was not focused on this issue, we found interesting the link between it and the influence of the process of normalization on the creation of the identity of young Christianites.

Our informants recognise the presence of two different parts of Christiania (briefly, a good one and a bad one) but they also think at both parts as fundamental: “That's why it's a very special place. Because it's like half hippies and half criminals.” (Jasper,

interview, November 20, 2013). Young Christianites think people outside don't like Christiania because they look just at the criminal side. "Nobody here can neglect this is also a criminal place, but when you live here you can choose how you will attempt to use Christiania." (ibid.).

Danish governments tried to use "good" Christianites against bad ones in order to normalize and eliminate hash market. A part of the process of normalization consists of labeling, Christianites and fragmenting Christiania's society in supporters of the government's action and opponents. Dividing between legal and illegal Christianites, between a good and bad part of Christiania, the government tries to persuade Christianites who are not involved in hash selling to support normalization. "If Pusher Street was the reason for normalization, then its closure would mean the end of state interference. For many living in Christiania, "the street" was a transgressive space inhabited by criminals who were impeding the work of the activists." (Amoroux 2007:115). Reforming good Christianites into "regular citizens" the state make them complicit participants in the normalization process. (Amoroux 2007:116).

Regarding common property, young Christianites have a conception of their situation as always changeable. They bought their land managing to maintain common property, and this inspired two different general perspectives, centered respectively in the loss of "good old" Christiania (and the perspective of its ruin), and in the opportunity of a new era, free from continuous threats to the very existence of Christiania:

Thomas: sooner or later, the government is gonna retreat the contract anyway. [...] I was like - this little project working on out here, who's been running for forty years, I saw that, I see it as like a project who took some land – can we make that land our own without signing any paper? And signing that contract and letting them sell it to us – I would say that it destroyed the project: for me, Christiania died that day. It's a bit safer, but the project just died. (interview, November 20, 2013).

Helena: And what do you think about the process of "Bevar Christiania"?

Jasper: I think it's a great idea. Because there's a new generation right now of Christianites who are thinking in a more realistic way to the future. Because the older ones didn't want to. But I think the time was modern now for this decision "How can we keep this area?" and "If we buy it, it's ours!". We haven't paid it all yet but we will, and when it's done, it's ours, forever, and

they can shut up for ones! But I think some of the oldsters think that the idea is just criminal. So the newer generations are more looking into the future. The next step I think must come from the all society, and it's legalizing cannabis. That would also change Christiania forever (interview, November 20, 2013).

Christiania is considered by young Christianites as a safe space and

“normalization would undermine the myriad social functions provided by their community, such as offering acceptance and integration of the marginalized, housing for the poor, a refuge of acceptance for addicts, and a nurturing environment for the mentally ill ... a “safe space” where cultural, religious, sexual and other differences are accepted as a welcomed counter balance to the homogeneity of Danish society” (Amoroux 2007:111).

Summarizing: for Christianites, normalization eradicates differences and tolerance; for the Government, normalization makes Christiania legal, integrated and manageable.

Conclusions

In this paper, we had to cut some details about our fieldwork and our informants which, in our opinion, were great representative samples of our informants' ideas and of the reality they live in, but which we found that did not substantially deal with our research, or turned out to be private details that our informants do not want to make public, or which we decided not to include. Thus, writing up this paper, we became aware of how many things we had learnt and understood, about Christiania and Christianites, which simply will not be part of this work – but that could partly become considerable ethnographic material for future works of ours.

We found a quotation from Clifford Geertz very significant, in our opinion, about how to look back to our work, culminated in this essay: “in short, anthropological writings are themselves interpretations.[...] They are, thus, fictions” (1973:15). Realizing that our essay is no more (as we have written) than a collection of words (and images), it is important to remember that no ethnography can actually represent univocally the reality we studied and lived. However, linking this point with British philosopher Gilbert Ryle's¹¹ thought, we like to see our work as a little cartography or a map which *translates* our *natives* practical and direct knowledge in “symbols” (Ryle 1973:440-442). The point of this process is “to enable one's audience to understand something of interest about a corner of the world” (Lederman 1990:82); “in other words, ethnographic writing is all about directing readers toward novel modes of seeing the world” (ibid:86): here, in our way of explaining a real situation *with novel modes*, stands our *agency* as ethnographers: we strongly hope that it will sound (somehow) *true* to every reader that came (or will come) into contact with that reality.

¹¹ Who inspired Geertz's reflection about *thick description*.

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