



THE RECOVERED FACTORIES CASE IN ITALY: BETWEEN RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

Giovanni Orlando
CORES lab
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Bergamo

Come citare questo lavoro: Orlando, G. 2015. *Il caso delle fabbriche recuperate in italia: tra resistenza e resilienza*. CORES working paper n.4 (inserire link alla pagina web qui).

How to cite this work: Orlando, G. 2015. *The recovered factories case in Italy: Between resistance and resilience*. CORES working paper n.4 (insert link to webpage here).

CONTENTS

Sommario italiano	p. 4
1. Summary	p. 8
2. Background	p. 9
2.1 The Argentinian case	
2.2 The Italian case	
3. Theory	p 15
3.1 Recovered enterprises as an example of labor self- management	
3.2 Recovered enterprises as part of social movements	
3.3 Recovered enterprises and the solidarity (or social) economy	
4. Methodology	p. 19
5. Results	p. 20
5.1 The workers' buyouts phenomenon	
5.2 The case study	
6. Dissemination	p. 26
7. Conclusions	p. 27
Bibliography	p. 28

Sommario italiano

Questo studio esplora il caso delle fabbriche recuperate in Italia come un contributo allo studio del rinnovamento di forme di solidarietà sociale, soprattutto in risposta all'erosione dello stato sociale, alla disoccupazione cronica, e alla delocalizzazione delle attività produttive.

L'era degli accordi di Bretton Woods è stata caratterizzata dall'espansione dei mercati, dalla costruzione di una solidarietà pubblica nella forma degli stati sociali, e dallo spostamento delle esternalità socio-ambientali nei paesi periferici. L'era neoliberista ha visto una radicalizzazione dell'espansione dei mercati e dello spostamento delle esternalità negative, ma anche l'inizio dell'erosione dello stato sociale e il ritorno delle esternalità nei paesi più avanzati. Questi processi sono esemplificati dalla perdita dei diritti dei lavoratori, dalla disoccupazione, e dalla delocalizzazione. La stagnazione economica e le politiche d'austerità che sono seguite alla crisi finanziaria del 2008 hanno ulteriormente accelerato la precarizzazione del lavoro. In conseguenza di ciò, tentativi di rafforzare forme di solidarietà di base (grassroots) sono emersi in tutta Europa. Questo studio esplora quello delle fabbriche recuperate in Italia.

Se da un lato il caso argentino è fondante, casi di fabbriche recuperate si sono sviluppati di recente anche in Francia, Grecia e Italia. La solidarietà è al centro di questo fenomeno in almeno due modi. Il primo, sotto forma dell'ideale di autogestione. Guardando a casi recenti di recupero in Italia, questo studio prova a comprendere il ruolo che i valori della solidarietà giocano nel motivare i lavoratori a recuperare un'azienda fallita. In secondo luogo, la solidarietà è alla base di alleanze con altri movimenti sociali. Lo studio vuole comprendere come questi valori sono usati per stabilire collaborazioni con altri movimenti che si fondano su simili ideali di uguaglianza, come quelli dell'economia solidale, sia a livello nazionale che internazionale. Lo studio offre un contributo alla comprensione di quelle forze grassroots che contrastano il mercato tramite il rafforzamento della sfera della solidarietà.

Nell'immaginario pubblico, l'espressione 'fabbriche recuperate' evoca il fenomeno che è emerso in Argentina negli anni 2001-2002, quando gruppi di lavoratori provarono a far ripartire le loro aziende fallite senza il coinvolgimento dei precedenti proprietari. Queste esperienze furono il risultato dell'enorme crisi economica avvenuta nel paese in quegli anni. Se da un lato la storia delle fabbriche recuperate argentine è relativamente ben nota, negli ultimi anni casi di recupero sono avvenuti anche in Francia, Grecia e Italia. Le informazioni sul caso italiano sono ancora notevolmente parziali. Uno dei risultati principali di questo studio è stato quello di stabilire che una differenza importante per comprendere il fenomeno in Italia è quella tra i casi che appartengono saldamente al mondo delle cooperative, con la loro storia politica e sociale, e quei casi che appartengono a un mondo più piccolo e variegato, fatto di pezzi di movimenti sociali ed (ex) partiti politici. Questa distinzione è importante sia a livello teorico che empirico.

Nonostante ciò, essa è raramente compresa nelle rappresentazioni pubbliche del fenomeno in Italia.

Sebbene si tratti di una piccola nicchia nell'economia italiana, di recente le fabbriche recuperate hanno ottenuto una buona attenzione nei media, probabilmente grazie alle sensazioni positive che tali storie ispirano nel panorama post-crisi.

Lo studio ha riscontrato che il fenomeno italiano ha ben poco a che vedere con quello argentino. Nel paese latino-americano, le fabbriche recuperate furono il risultato di un ampio sommovimento sociale. Niente di questo genere è avvenuto in Italia. Nel nostro paese le fabbriche recuperate rappresentano una particolare modalità di creazione di nuove cooperative, meglio note col nome di workers' buyout (letteralmente: rilevamento da parte dei lavoratori). Esempi di rilevamento di aziende fallite da parte dei loro lavoratori, con conseguente creazione di una cooperativa, possono essere trovati sin dal dopoguerra, e anche durante le crisi economiche degli anni settanta e primi anni ottanta.

In particolar modo, nel 1985 il parlamento italiano ha passato la legge Marcora, che offre aiuti di stato ai lavoratori che investono nella conversione di un'azienda privata (fallita) in cooperativa. Questa legge consente agli ex-lavoratori di chiedere allo stato di ricevere le varie forme di assistenza sociale a cui hanno diritto (come la mobilità) in un'unica soluzione, la quale è poi usata come capitale iniziale della nuova cooperativa, spesso in congiunzione con il trattamento di fine rapporto (TFR). A loro volta, le confederazioni cooperative possono fornire un ulteriore prestito alla nascente cooperativa, raddoppiandone così il capitale iniziale. Questo meccanismo istituzionale consente di creare una cosiddetta fabbrica recuperata senza il ricorso a forme di protesta.

Lo studio si è concentrato in particolar modo su un caso specifico, che mettesse in luce i rapporti tra fabbriche recuperate e movimenti sociali, soprattutto quelli attivi nell'economia solidale. Il caso in questione è sito in Lombardia, nella provincia di Milano, e differisce considerevolmente dai casi di workers' buyouts descritti sopra per due motivi principali. Il primo, poiché questa esperienza è il risultato di una lunga lotta da parte dei lavoratori, con numerose forme di protesta messe in atto per recuperare la fabbrica, compresa l'occupazione del sito produttivo. Il secondo, poiché essa intrattiene stretti legami con i movimenti sociali e l'economia solidale, come appena accennato.

Riassumerò qui brevemente le attività portate avanti da questa iniziativa. Il capannone principale della ex-fabbrica è stato trasformato in un centro polifunzionale, dove gruppi di cittadini svolgono riunioni, proiezioni di documentari, concerti, spettacoli teatrali, ecc. Al suo interno vi sono anche una cucina e un bar. Nel secondo capannone si svolge, durante i fine settimana, un mercato degli artigiani.¹ Un altro capannone è diventato un posteggio per camper. Un altro ancora, un

¹ Al momento di scrivere queste pagine, alcune di queste attività erano state sospese a causa di una negoziazione con le autorità circa la destinazione d'uso del luogo.

deposito per privati (stile box). Queste attività sono finalizzate al sostentamento degli ex-lavoratori, e al finanziamento di due progetti più ampi. Il primo riguarda il riciclo e il riutilizzo di materiali elettrici ed elettronici, attività che già viene svolta ma in piccola misura. Il secondo riguarda il recupero e la riparazione di pallet per il commercio. Infine, gli ex-lavoratori distribuiscono alcuni prodotti alimentari, in particolar modo arance, provenienti da agricoltori biologici del sud-Italia ai gruppi d'acquisto solidale dell'area milanese.

Sebbene questo caso si differenzi da quelli del mondo delle cooperative (workers' buyouts), i lavoratori che lo animano ritengono fondamentale rivitalizzare il valore cooperativo originario del mutualismo. Sin dalla sua nascita in Inghilterra nel diciannovesimo secolo, il movimento delle cooperative si è diffuso in tutto il mondo, cambiando così in maniera drammatica. In alcuni paesi, come l'Italia stessa o la Spagna, le cooperative di lavoro hanno raggiunto grandi numeri, impiegando alle volte migliaia d'individui. In casi come questi, i valori della solidarietà sono stati spesso compromessi. Ciò nonostante, nei piccoli gruppi come quello preso in esame in questo studio, la presenza del mutualismo come valore fondante si è mantenuta molto più facilmente.

Più di trent'anni fa, Thornley (1981) descriveva già nuove tendenze all'interno del movimento cooperativo inglese, che appaiono ancora oggi rilevanti alla luce del caso studio. Thornley ricostruiva l'emergere di un nuovo tipo di cooperativa di lavoro: piccola e impegnata in servizi come la vendita di prodotti alimentari alternativi; la stampa, pubblicazione e vendita di libri; o con professioni quali l'architettura e l'informatica. A suo avviso, questa tendenza dimostrava un desiderio di offrire prodotti e servizi nuovi, invece di riprodurre le pratiche economiche esistenti sotto una forma giuridica cooperativa. Questo quadro presenta notevoli punti di contatto con quello del caso studio preso in esame da questa ricerca, rappresentando, in effetti, la base delle sue relazioni con i movimenti economici alternativi. Discutendo gli orientamenti politici di questi nuovi gruppi, Thornley scrive: "[I loro membri] ... vogliono più controllo sulle loro vite lavorative ... sono disillusi dalla politica dei partiti o dei sindacati, e hanno pochi legami con essi o con il movimento della cooperazione del consumo" (1981:43). Il caso studiato presenta numerose di queste caratteristiche. All'interno di questi gruppi, l'essenza del mutualismo è mantenuta dal fatto che essi "originano dalle condizioni di avversità e disillusione causate dallo sviluppo capitalistico" (pag. 2). È questa condizione che spiega sia la loro resistenza che la loro resilienza.

La ricerca è stata condotta dall'autore sotto la supervisione della Professoressa Francesca Forno, presso il Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali dell'Università di Bergamo. Il progetto è stato finanziato tramite un assegno di ricerca annuale "Progetto ITALY® - Azione: Giovani in Ricerca 2014", area disciplinare: 14 (scienze politiche e sociali), settore scientifico-disciplinare: SPS/07 (sociologia generale, giuridica e politica).

L'osservatorio CORES è un gruppo di ricerca interdisciplinare il cui scopo è quello d'indagare i meccanismi e i processi all'origine dell'aumento, registrato negli ultimi anni, di quelle pratiche economiche come i gruppi di acquisto solidale, gli investimenti socialmente responsabili, le imprese sociali, le monete locali, le economie alternative, il commercio equo e solidale, la microfinanza e altri esperimenti innovativi, quali le reti di co-produzione tra consumatori-produttori locali, nuove esperienze cooperative, gruppi di risparmio, le banche del tempo, i LETS, ecc. Queste pratiche, molto spesso risultanti dell'azione diretta di gruppi di cittadini, rappresentano un modo di re-incorporare l'economia nella società, e quindi riorganizzare la vita economica sulla base dei bisogni umani e sociali. Per ulteriori informazioni, si prega di visitare il sito web all'indirizzo: <https://coreslab.wikispaces.com/>.

Un sincero ringraziamento va a tutte le lavoratrici e a tutti i lavoratori della fabbrica recuperata presa in esame in questo studio, che sono coinvolti quotidianamente in un progetto di utopia concreta. Vi auguro ogni fortuna, ve lo meritate! Vorrei inoltre ringraziare, per le utili conversazioni sul tema: Francesca Forno, Simone Maurano, Romolo Calcagno, Marco Semenzin, Fabio de Nardis, Luca Antonazzo, Paolo Barcella, Mimmo Perrotta, Marco Marzano and Anna Carola Freschi.

1. Summary

This paper looks at the recovered factories case in Italy as a contribution to the study of (re)new(ed) forms of solidarity, especially in response to the erosion of the welfare state, chronic unemployment, and the delocalization of productive activities.

The Bretton Woods era was characterized by the expansion of markets, the building of public solidarity in the form of welfare states, and the displacement of socio-environmental externalities to peripheral countries. The neoliberal era saw a radicalization of market expansion and peripheral displacement, but also the beginning of the welfare state's erosion and the backflow of externalities to core countries. These processes are symbolized by loss of labor rights, unemployment and delocalization. The economic stagnation and austerity policies that have followed the 2008 crisis have escalated the 'precarization' of labor. In its wake, attempts at increasing grassroots solidarity have been emerging throughout Europe. This paper explores the recovered factories movement in Italy.

While the Argentinian case is seminal, workers' recoveries have recently developed also in France, Greece and Italy. Solidarity is at the center of this movement in at least two ways. Firstly, solidarity in the form of the self-management ideal. By looking at recent cases of recovery in Italy, the paper wishes to understand the role played by solidaristic values in motivating workers to recover a failed business. Secondly, solidarity as the basis of alliances with other social movements. The paper also wants to comprehend how these values are called upon to establish collaborations with other movements that build on similar egalitarian ideals, such as the solidarity economy one, both domestically and internationally. The paper will contribute to an understanding of the grassroots forces that counteract the market by strengthening the sphere of solidarity.

This research paper forms part of the outputs of the project 'L'esperienza delle fabbriche recuperate in Italia: tra resistenza e resilienza', carried out by the author at the University of Bergamo, Department of humanities and social sciences, under the supervision of Dr Francesca Forno. The project was funded through the following scheme: Assegno di ricerca annuale "Progetto ITALY® - Azione: Giovani in Ricerca 2014", area disciplinare: 14 (scienze politiche e sociali), settore scientifico-disciplinare: SPS/07 (sociologia generale, giuridica e politica).

CORES (the Italian acronym of COnsumi, Reti e pratiche di Economie Sostenibili) is an interdisciplinary research group based at the University of Bergamo, whose aim is to investigate the social processes behind the current growth of a wide range of grassroots economic practices (solidarity purchase groups, socially responsible investments, social enterprises, alternative currencies, alternative economies, fair trade, microfinance, new consumer-producer cooperatives, local savings groups, time banks, LETS, etc.). For more information on the group, please see: <https://coreslab.wikispaces.com/>.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank all the workers and the activists who are involved in the concrete utopian project that is the recovered factory Cool-Cars.² I wish you all the best, you deserve it! For useful conversations on the topic, I would also like to thank: Francesca Forno, Simone Maurano, Romolo Calcagno, Marco Semenzin, Fabio de Nardis, Luca Antonazzo, Paolo Barcella, Mimmo Perrotta, Marco Marzano and Anna Carola Freschi.

2. Background

2.1 *The Argentinian case*

The expression 'recovered enterprises' is the English translation of the Spanish *empresas recuperadas*. This is the collective name that emerged in Argentina around 2001-2002 to describe a number of instances in which the workers of failed businesses attempted to restart their activity without the involvement of the former owners.³ These experiences were the result of the massive economic crisis that took place in the country at the time.

The Argentinian crisis of 2001-2002 had its roots in the politico-economic policies that were implemented after the military dictatorship of 1976-1983. During the dictatorship, the country began a long process of economic restructuring that freed interest rates and removed trade tariffs, leading to the development of new banks and credit institutions. This shift toward the financial sector eventually led to a loss of domestic industry and to increased concentration of ownership. As small-medium factories closed, Argentina lost approximately 600000 industrial sector jobs (Merz 2008:13-14).

After the end of military rule, similar policies were followed throughout the 1980s, in keeping with the rise of neoliberal doctrines internationally. During that decade, global financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) gained a strong influence over the country. The 1990s saw Argentina become a model for neoliberal policies under the Menem presidency. Inspired by the Washington Consensus and the founding of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Menem removed tariffs, privatized public industries, and deregulated the labor market even further. An estimated 300000 jobs were lost in the secondary sector, and the situation of workers in general deteriorated, as incomes were cut, hours prolonged, and union rights abolished.

One of the most controversial moves of the Menem government was the pegging of the Argentine peso to the US dollar in a 1 to 1 conversion rate. In 2001, the De La Rúa administration became unable to keep up

² The name is a pseudonym.

³ Palomino et al. write: "The notion of 'recovered company' was 'born' in 2001 and was coined by the promoters of the worker recovery of IMPA. ... During the deepening of the crisis of 2001 ... the notion of 'recovered company' began to gain momentum, in no small way via the dissemination of this concept through the political work of the ... National Movement of Recovered Companies ... made up mostly of IMPA workers at the time" (2010:256-257).

with foreign interest rates on its public debt, and therefore removed the peg. This led to the collapse of the national currency's value. The government then passed a law that limited the amount of money that citizens could withdraw from their bank accounts, in an attempt to shore up funds to repay the country's debts. The people responded by taking to the streets en masse with pots and pans, demanding the food they were unable to buy because their money was worth nothing, and their savings were blocked in the banks. Known as the *cacerolazo*, these events took place in December 2001 and spearheaded the popular revolts of 2002, of which the recovered factories are one aspect.

The Argentinian state thus went bankrupt, defaulting on some 160 USD billions, and in the first three months of 2002 52% of the populace (approximately 19 million people) fell below the poverty line. Unemployment reached 23%, with under-employment estimated at 22% (Merz 2008:12-13). The effect of such a deep and widespread crisis was social mobilization on all levels. Alongside the *cacerolazo*, people organized permanent neighborhood assemblies (*asambleas barriales*), informal bartering networks (*trueques*), the occupation of roads (known as *piquete*, which gave the name to the *piqueteros* movement), in order to obtain unemployment benefits, food, healthcare and social services.

Kabat (2011:367) has described these popular manifestations, known collectively as the *Argentinazo*, as a "revolutionary process". She also writes: "The factory takeover movement served as a catalyst for the popular mobilization that accompanied the *Argentinazo* but at the same time was one of its major beneficiaries—it would not have been able to sustain itself without the popular mobilization or the support of the organizations that led the process" (ibidem). The relationship between the recovered factories movement and the other actors of this period highlights the heterogeneous ways in which recoveries actually took place.

Physical occupation of the worksite, in order to maintain access to machinery and prevent their removal (for sell-off to creditors), was probably the most common strategy during the protest peak. This strategy involved considerable risk, both legally and, as a consequence, physically, as the police would often be called to evict the workers, with the potential of violent clashes. A slightly different and less risky tactic was to picket the factory entrance. As Kabat mentioned above, the wider population supported these actions in very practical ways (e.g. by protecting workers from the police, by providing them with food and other necessities, etc.).

After the occupation, the next step was—broadly speaking—to normalize the situation. Initially, many groups demanded that the state expropriate businesses from the previous owners and, while maintaining ownership, assign their management to the workers. However, the state proved very reluctant to go down this road, arguably due to the socialist overtones of the idea of workers' councils, and to their lack of legal status. As a result, virtually all experiences of recovery ended up going through the formation of a workers'

cooperative, in order to obtain legal recognition in front of the authorities. Through the cooperative, workers would then try to obtain the continuation of production either from a judge (under bankruptcy laws), or from their former bosses (as a private agreement).

It is important to stress the spontaneous and novel character of this phenomenon, as it represents a difference when looking at the following developments. Both the actions of the workers and the response of the authorities (local governments, legislative bodies, juridical institutions, etc.) exhibited considerable variability. The legality and viability of each recovered factory was dealt on a case-by-case basis. The same is true of the unions' response, which varied, spanning from hostility, through indifference, to support.

According to Palomino et al. (2010:256-259), 123 businesses were recovered during 2000-2004. The majority were small-medium sized ones (with less than fifty workers) serving the internal market, with a history of downsizing and dilapidation, resulting from the deindustrialization of Argentina's recent economic past. Two sectors predominated: food manufacturing and metallurgy. Many recoveries also originated from fraudulent bankruptcies, of which there were many in the 2002 crisis. Geographically, the vast majority was located in the city of Buenos Aires, its greater urban area, and its province.

Since 2005, the political, social and economic situation has changed considerably in Argentina, deeply affecting the recovered businesses movement. A center-leftwing coalition took hold of the Buenos Aires city council, which created a more favorable environment (the coalition passed a law to expropriate thirteen businesses; Merz 2008:17). At the national level, the Department of Work created the *programa de trabajo autogestionado* (program for self-managed work), which offers subsidies to recovered businesses. As Dinerstein (2008) argues, this political initiative set in place the conditions for the institutionalization of the movement.

The institutional response extended also to changes in the legal avenues available to recovered business. For example, modifications to the national bankruptcy and preventative bankruptcy law made it easier for groups of workers to gain control of a failed business. The most common strategy remains temporary expropriation by the state, which "give[s] control of the enterprise to the cooperative for a period of typically two years in which they can restart production and enter a payment plan with the government to gain full ownership" (Merz 2008:19). As of 2010, there was no single national law on this procedure, and each business was still dealt on a case-by-case basis (Palomino et al. 2010:260-261).

Another major difference with the first phase of recovery is the drop in social mobilization that has characterized the latter half of the 2000s. While some groups are still active, like the *piqueteros* organizations, the wider support to recoveries provided by direct actions in 2002 is now lacking. This makes the prospect of occupations more difficult, and pushes further in the direction of less confrontational, more institutionalized tactics.

From an economic point of view, crisis has given way to growth. Even when taking into account the difficult global conditions of 2008, structural unemployment has diminished significantly in Argentina compared to 2002. Around 2005, the labor market consolidated after considerable uncertainty, and the living standards of the country's working class have now improved overall (Palomino et al. 2010:255).

2.2 *The Italian case*

While the history of the recovered enterprises movement in Argentina is now relatively well established, information on the Italian case is still considerably sketchy. Indeed, one of the principal aims of this research was to try and make sense of this phenomenon in Italy. The starting point to do so was to distinguish between the cooperative sector, with its political and social history, on the one hand, and a smaller, less well-defined set of actors from social movements and political parties on the other. As I will show below, this distinction is of relevance both at the theoretical and the empirical level. However, its importance is often lost in what public representations exist of the phenomenon in Italy.

While still clearly a small niche in the Italian economy (see 'Results' section below), recently recovered factories have garnered some attention in the media, perhaps even disproportionately so, considering their actual impact. The topic appears to make a good news story. Articles on it have been published in several mainstream newspapers and magazines, such as *Corriere della Sera* (Di Vico 2013), *la Repubblica* (Rociola 2014), *La Stampa* (Alfieri 2012) and *Panorama* (Abbate 2014). Internationally, even the *New York Times* has run a piece on the topic (Pianigiani 2015). Television has played a role alongside the printed press, with stories being aired by such prominent programs as TG1 and Uno Mattina (COOPFOND 2014). The topic has also been covered on the Internet (Bianchi L. 2013), in some cases extensively, for example on activist websites like *Comune.info* (e.g. Carmosino and Belloni 2012; Coscia et al. 2012).

Before delving deeper into the distinction between the cooperative aspect and the social movement one, it is worth dedicating some space to how the global financial crash of 2008 has impacted the wider Italian industrial sector. This is because the vast majority of recovered factories in Italy have appeared after 2008, as I will show in the 'Results' section.

To understand the impact of the crash on Italian industry, one has to look at its trajectory over the past thirty years. Since 1980, Italy's GDP has been constantly below the advanced economies' average, a trend that became more marked after 1992 (with exceptions in 1995, 2000 and 2001; see Bianchi P. 2013:257). To try to improve this situation, in 1992 the government left the European fixed exchange-rate system, thus devaluing its currency (the *lira*) almost by a third. This move boosted the country's exports considerably. However, it also created a strong separation between those businesses that were able to compete on international markets, and those that remained locked in producing

for the internal market, which was damaged by the deflationary policies of successive Italian governments.

In 2001, Italy adopted the newly created euro currency. In doing so, the country lost one of its most powerful measures of economic policy, the possibility of devaluing its currency in order to make its export sector more competitive. This meant that from now on competition on the international market would have to rely only on increases in productivity. 2001 was an important year for Italian industry also for another reason: the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Doha, Qatar. This agreement, which replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) signed in Bretton Woods in 1944, ushered in a new era of worldwide financial and commercial exchange, commonly referred to as globalization. A key factor in the establishment of the WTO was the fall of real socialism in the Soviet Union, and the impact this had on a number of emerging economies. The collapse of the bipolar world allowed countries like China, Brazil, India and South Africa to open more trade routes with the United States (US) and Western Europe.

This new phase of the world system is better characterized as *neoliberal* globalization, given it is the product of the neoliberal conservative policies adopted in the 1980s by the Reagan and Thatcher governments in the US and the United Kingdom (UK). To summarize very briefly, these policies are based on a considerable reduction in taxation and state spending (except in the defense sector), including the cutting of welfare; on the deregulation of the economy, for example through labor market reforms; and on the expansion of the financial sector. This supply side economics largely continued throughout the 1990s, especially the deregulation of the banking sector, with the cancelling of the distinction between commercial and investment banks. It was this trend that ultimately led to the collapse of the world financial sector in 2007-2008.

Globalization has entailed a deep restructuring of industry all over the world. This restructuring has taken the form of an “unbundling of productive cycles” (Bianchi P. 2013:255), with the delocalization of many of them in areas of the world where relative costs prove more advantageous. While initially it was only the least complex and cheaper aspects of production that were delocalized, activities that have high technological and human capital content are also increasingly being moved to developing countries. This process of value chain restructuring has gone hand in hand with the increased control that companies need to exert on the chain, and with an increase in company size, in order to be able to compete on the global arena. This has been particularly problematic for a country like Italy, where small-medium enterprises, often linked into territorial districts rather than vertically integrated, have represented the backbone of the industrial sector for many decades.

The Bank of Italy (2009) offers an insightful picture of the state of the country’s industry during the crisis. According to the Bank, after the establishment of the euro in 2001 a number of Italian companies had

begun an important process of reorganization aimed at increasing productivity and thus competitiveness on the international scene. However, the fall in demand that followed 2008, especially in key target markets like the US and northern Europe, meant a 20% fall in sales for these companies, and a 12% reduction in investments. Companies with twenty employees or less have suffered the most. The global crisis, therefore, acted to worsen what some have called the preexisting “illness” (Bianchi P. 2013:259) affecting Italian industry: its long reliance on strategic devaluations of the *lira* to increase competitiveness on foreign markets, and the consequent languishing not only of that part of the sector that relied on internal demand, but also of the sector’s overall productivity.

The effects of this illness can be gauged from the changing share of Italian industrial products in the global market.⁴ In 1986 this was 4.8%, which fell to 4.3% in 1992. Thanks to the following devaluation, in 1995 the share had risen to 4.6%. However, after more than a decade, in 2007 the figure was just 2.8% (Bianchi P. 2013:259). Export of traditional Made in Italy goods, such as clothing, furniture and food, have been declining relative to mechanical products, which have seen the biggest rise. Automated machines for production and packaging have done particularly well, benefitting from the demand in rapidly developing countries. Some niche pharmaceutical companies and food businesses have also performed well during the crisis. What characterizes all these cases is their almost complete reliance on international exports, rather than domestic demand.

As I mentioned above, Italy’s recovered factories broadly fall into two categories: workers cooperatives and social movements. I will now sketch the context for each.

Together with Spain and France, Italy has one of the biggest workers cooperative sectors in western Europe. Probably more than in other countries, the diversity and public profile of the sector make Italy the perfect setting to study the issue of labor self-management (Holmström 1989). The largest coops have historically been found in the building industry, but many are also found in manufacturing. The history of labor cooperation dates back to the 19th century, when mutual societies were created under the enlightened guidance of socialist and liberal intellectuals. This was the same period that saw consumer and financial coops also being created. The early coops were closely linked to the new trade unions and trade councils (*camere del lavoro*). Liberal and leftwing politicians helped their development by assigning to them government contracts through local authorities (Meriggi 2005). In 1893 the *Lega Nazionale delle Cooperative* was born, from which two smaller federations eventually broke away: the Christian-democrat Confederazione, and the social-democratic and republican *Associazione*. Workers’ coops grew rapidly in the early 1900s, when they might have employed more people than at any other time (Holmström 1989:24). However, this growth was ended by the rise of Fascism after 1922, with

⁴ See also D’Arcangelo (2014) for a more qualitative account of this situation.

Mussolini bringing all coops inside the structure of the fascist corporate state.

After the end of the Second World War, the years of the economic miracle saw a rapid expansion and increase in size of the coops, which modernized their technology and merged to form larger enterprises and take advantage of the reconstruction. In the 1970s, there was a considerable change in the social constituency of cooperatives. Until the 1950s, members were almost always of very humble status, both in terms of class and education. This picture began to change from the late 1960s. Holmström notes how a younger generation, from the middle-class and with higher qualifications, joined the movement and changed it: "Social conflicts reached their climax in the 'hot autumn' of 1969. In this decade the co-ops ... changed ... the social composition of their work force. [They] recruited university graduates and people with high qualifications from technical schools into management, technical and office work" (1989:27). This change was also a consequence of the substantial expansion of the cooperative sector during the post-war decades, especially in construction and connected manufactures, with coops starting to own considerable capital assets and employing thousands of workers. This process created also an important fracture between bigger mainstream coops and a much smaller kind. Finally, it considerably changed the politics of the sector, as I will discuss in the 'Results' section below.

A very small number of recovered factories in Italy have positioned themselves more or less in contrast with the workers' cooperative sector, preferring instead to create links with the world of social movements. I will discuss in more detail what this entails in the 'Results' section below. Here it will suffice to say that the social movements in question represent one evolution of the wider international cycle of protest that has been termed global justice or alternative globalization movement (Maeckelbergh 2008). The events that led to this cycle of protest started coalescing in the late 1990s, when a diverse set of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), movements, and political parties from all over the world initiated a counter-process of 'globalization from below'. This process linked issues in post-materialist and class-based movements in a novel manner, showing that a sharp separation between 'new' and 'old' protest cultures is not always tenable. Rather than on its rejection, many of the groups involved advocated an alternative notion of globalization, based on ideals of justice and equality, hence the name of alternative globalization and global justice movement.

3. Theory

I have said before that there are important differences between the Argentinian recovered enterprises case and the Italian one. Given this difference, it would make sense to divide this section in two parts, as I did the previous one. However, currently there is virtually no body of literature that has been developed specifically from the Italian case.

Except for a passing mention in Corona (2014:9), only a handful of authors have looked at the subject, and most of them cursorily (Azzellini 2014; Barbera et al. 2013; Coscia et al. 2012; Jossa and Screpanti 2014; Müntzer 2014). Such paucity of resources makes any theoretical distinctions between the Argentinian and Italian literatures superfluous. In this section I will therefore discuss the academic literature on the Argentinian case, noting how this can be applied to the Italian one where appropriate.⁵

Leaving aside some undergraduate works (e.g. El-Najjar 2009; Marcuse 2015; Monteagudo 2011) and works aimed at the general public (e.g. Corona 2014; Ventrone 2007), three approaches can be identified in the academic literature on the Argentinian recovered enterprises phenomenon. These approaches overlap with each other and should not be considered as mutually exclusive. The first one looks at the issue of self-management and how recovered businesses transform labor relations (e.g. Bryer 2010; Faulk 2012; Marchetti 2013; Monteagudo 2008; Rizza and Sermasi 2008). The second one looks at recovered enterprises as an expression of social movements (e.g. Dinerstein 2008; Evans 2007; Hirtz and Giaccone 2013; Palomino et al. 2010). The third one addresses their links to the solidarity (or social) economy phenomenon (e.g. Bryer 2012; Healey 2014; Ruggeri 2014). I will now review each of these bodies of work.

3.1 Recovered enterprises as an example of labor self-management

Recovered enterprises are an example of labor self-management, as they are directly owned and run by their workers.⁶ They thus interrogate debates in the sociology of work and industrial relations at two interrelated levels (Ozarow and Croucher 2014:991). Firstly, at the practical one, since their viability of more than fifteen years shows that a model of productive organization alternative to the capitalist one is possible. Secondly, at the theoretical level, since this alternative model raises a number of key issues for the sociology of work.

In living memory, the oldest example of a phase of workers' occupations dates back to the 1970s, when numerous cases were documented in Italy, France, Portugal and the UK (see Ness and Azzellini 2011). At the time, Marxist sociologists debated heatedly on whether workers' cooperatives might offer the basis for a transition to democratic socialism, or on the contrary, whether they were incapable of surviving in the long run when operating under a capitalist system. As the social and political situation in Europe changed considerably during the 1980s and '90s, so did sociological concerns, and these debates largely disappeared from the radar. Contemporary discussions have tended to deal with how much (or how little) work influences individual identities, with many arguing that this influence has

⁵ In this section I use the expression 'recovered enterprises/businesses', rather than 'factories', as many Argentinian cases operate in the service sector.

⁶ Some authors (e.g. Ness and Azzellini 2011) prefer the term "workers' control", to stress a more political and conflictive dimension. "Industrial democracy" is another related, but much broader, definition (see Holmström 1989).

considerably decreased in time. For the majority of people, it is claimed, working represents simply a form of self-support, rather than an identity, as was the case during the Fordist age and before.

According to some authors, however, the case of the recovered factories confounds this picture (e.g. Ozarow and Croucher 2014; Upchurch et al. 2013). These authors suggest that “developments in workers’ self-activity ... demonstrate the need for a broader perspective” (Ozarow and Croucher 2014:992). In their view, Marx’s argument about workers’ alienation from their own human nature, their colleagues, their products and society is still relevant today, and positive collective experiences such as the recovered factories one can help overcome it. Starting from this assumption, four core themes can be applied to the study of recovered factories as an example of self-management: 1) Control, identity and orientation to work, with links between work and ‘non-work spaces’; 2) The moral economy and class, linking individual experiences and neoliberalism; 3) Industrial change, capital mobility and the meaning of work; 4) New social movements and their embeddedness in communities (see Ozarow and Croucher 2014:993). While this framework has been developed particularly for the Argentinian case, it is arguably applicable also to the Italian one, especially in the case of workers’ cooperative.

3.2 Recovered enterprises as part of social movements

As I explained in the ‘Background’ section, in Argentina the initial nucleus of recovered enterprises developed as part of a general popular uprising. Many of the features of this event are consistent with those that characterize social movements and cycles of political protest more generally, so an almost natural approach in the literature has been to treat recovered enterprises as an example of, or at least as part of, social movements.

Merz (2008), for example, has developed a model to understand the process of repertoire institutionalization among Argentinian recovered enterprises. Looking at changes within the political opportunity structures of the country between 2001, the year of the movement’s explosion, and 2008, Merz argues that workers changed their strategies when these structures also changed. Specifically, he argues that this process led to modifications in the direction of less confrontational tactics. He calls this “repertoire institutionalization”, seeing it as a result of the interaction between political opportunity structures, the internal organization of the movement, and the workers’ interpretation of these two factors. Merz draws the conclusion that closure in political opportunities is the cause of a decline in effectiveness on the part of the recovered enterprises movement, and that its institutionalization is simply a survival strategy to cope with this closure.

Other authors have taken different, more positive approaches. Those close to the global justice movement, like Sitrin (2012), have argued that recovered enterprises express an emancipatory vision that is one of the key elements in achieving a non-capitalist society. Others (e.g. Holloway 2010) have followed strands of ‘neo-Marxism’ and ‘open

Marxism' to claim that workers' self-management is a viable model even without the capture of the state. This strand emphasizes the creation of quotidian moments of rebellion and autonomous spaces in order to expand the "cracks" inside capitalism. Another line of thought is that of 'autonomist' thinkers like De Peuter and Dyer-Witheford (2010), who view workers' cooperatives as concrete example of the "labor commons", because surplus is shared equally within them, and decision are taken democratically. According to these authors, the potential of workers' coops can be increased by establishing networks between them and other social movements that fight for the commons. It is by circulating this "common" that capital's hegemony can be eventually challenged.

3.3. Recovered enterprises and the solidarity (or social) economy

A third approach to the recovered enterprises phenomenon has been to view it as part of the solidarity (or social) economy. Ozarow and Croucher, for example, write that "social economy advocates have suggested that self-management should be used merely to construct a more 'responsible capitalism' and help 'correct' market failures by creating a new stratum of entrepreneurs" (2014:992).

A different interpretation is that put forward by D'Alisa et al. (2015). While these authors do not deal with recovered enterprises specifically, their overall topic—grassroots economic activism in times of crisis—can be fruitfully applied to the case in question. In the last three decades, argue the authors, Western societies have transformed into a network society driven by a model of economic growth known as global informational capitalism. This model has undergone numerous crises, one of which was the Argentinian crash of 2001-2002, with the most recent, and more global one being that of 2007-2008. During the current crisis, social movements are confronting two interrelated difficulties. On the one hand, institutions are less willing to accommodate demands for social justice and equity, due to the neoliberal policies largely prevalent in Europe. On the other, the highly individualized nature of contemporary society makes it difficult to create bonds of solidarity and cooperation among people.

Nevertheless, in some cases people's discontent has been the basis for collective actions that try to increase both the resistance to neoliberalism and the resilience to its impacts. D'Alisa et al. define social resilience as "a dynamic process which describes the ability of embedded social actors to foster collective transformation through a process of social learning and participative decision-making" (2015:334). The actors they describe seek to found a fairer society than the current neoliberal one. Recovered enterprises can be considered one example of this attempt, particularly given their emphasis on the value of solidarity, both practical and ethico-political (Vigliarolo 2011). This value is what they share with other grassroots initiatives belonging to the solidarity economy itself. Indeed, some commentators (e.g. Guadagnucci 2007) view the latter as a recuperation of the old

politics of the cooperative movement (Ferraris 2011; Meriggi 2005; Rodotà 2014).

4. Methodology

The first phase of the research consisted in a detailed and exhaustive review of the scientific literature on the topic. The review was carried out using both academic databases (e.g. Elsevier, university catalogues, etc.) and commercial ones (e.g. Amazon, Feltrinelli, etc.). Special attention was given to the gathering of English language resources, so as to give an international profile to the research from the very beginning. The main result of the review was to put in focus the key strands of research on the topic in the international scientific community, with an emphasis on the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and political science (see 'Theory' section above).

A comprehensive sampling of the Italian instances of recovered factories followed the initial phase of literature review. Considering the almost complete absence of any literature on the Italian phenomenon, the sampling was carried out primarily through Internet search engines. A number of newspaper articles and reports were thus located, some of which have been published by important national presses (Abbate 2014; Alfieri 2012). Numerous articles published by more activist sources (mostly websites) were also found (Carmosino and Belloni 2012). Finally, the sampling revealed the European dimension of the phenomenon, particularly thanks to the work of the European Confederation of Cooperatives and Worker-owned Enterprises (CECOP 2013).

The main result of the sampling was to locate a number of lists and maps of recovered factories in Italy, the earliest of which dated back to 1994 (Ardenti 1994; Bianchi L. 2013; Di Vico 2013; Rociola 2014). After locating this material, the data was comprehensively verified and crosschecked for its reliability and internal coherence. As far as possible, the existence of each single case was substantiated, by gathering information on the following variables: geographical location (city and region); year of closure; year of re-activation; protest form (whether or not the re-activation went through a period of protest, such as strikes, workplace occupations, etc.); financial subsidies (from cooperative organizations, the state, etc.); current situation (whether or not the recovered factory is still operating); economic sector (e.g. manufacturing, services, etc.). Finally, some general information (such as newspaper articles) was also collected for each case, where this was feasible.

The literature review and the sampling allowed painting a general picture of the phenomenon in Italy (see 'Results' section below). The research then focused on a single case study that specifically highlighted the links between recovered factories and social movements, particularly those active in the solidarity economy. The case in question was located in the Lombardy region, near the city of Milan. Initially, a thorough search was carried out in the literature,

online, and in the secondary materials already collected, to gather as much information as possible on this case. The search turned up a considerable amount of information, in the shape of press releases, newspaper articles, radio and TV news pieces, books and academic articles. After this initial phase, primary data collection was carried out using a qualitative methodology that consisted in participant observation (periodic visits to the field site and other relevant venues) and semi-structured, in-depth interviews (mostly with key informants). All interviews were digitally recorded.

5. Results

5.1 *The workers' buyout phenomenon*

A database of cases of recovered factories in Italy was developed from the sampling exercise referred to above. At the time of writing, this probably represents the most detailed picture of the phenomenon currently available in the country.⁷ A total of 64 cases were found, spanning from 1982 to the present day. The vast majority has emerged after the 2008 crisis. Six of these cases, however, are no longer active, while two are struggling to survive. Emilia Romagna and Tuscany host the greatest number of cases, respectively 17 and 15 (Veneto has 7, Lombardy 6, Lazio 5, Marche Umbria Campania and Sicily 3 each, Friuli and Puglia 1 each). Given such wide geographical discrepancy, it is safe to assume that the strength of the cooperative sector in the old 'red' (communist) regions of Italy (Holmström 1989:25) has played an important role in facilitating the spread of workers' buyouts (see below). By far the majority of cases (50) work in the manufacturing sector, with a small number of businesses dealing in services (software, quality control, cleaning, printing, food, transportation). One case deals in pharmaceuticals. 52 cases have received some form of subsidy to restart their activity (COOPFOND 2013). Only 12 cases witnessed some form of protest, which was often limited to workplace strikes.

This picture shows very clearly how the Italian phenomenon has very little to do with the Argentinian one, especially with the initial phase that I described in the 'Background' section (2.1). In the Latin American country, recovered factories were the product of wider social unrest, involving mass protest and strikes, occupations of all sorts, violent confrontations with the authorities, etc. Nothing of the sort can be said of the Italian case. Indeed, in Italy recovered factories represent one particular way of creating new cooperatives, sometimes described as workers' buyouts.

Following the literature (Holmström 1989:23; Ozarow and Croucher 2014:990), three kinds of workers' cooperatives can be distinguished: production coops (*cooperative di produzione*), labor coops (*cooperative*

⁷ It should be noted, however, that the number of recovered factories is constantly changing, partly due to new ones being founded, partly due to some going bust. Furthermore, in some cases it was very difficult to locate reliable and/or complete information, because the phenomenon is poorly studied and because the factories in question are often quite small and have little or no public presence.

di lavoro) and workers' buyouts. Production coops are usually larger enterprises that own factories and (sometimes considerable) capital assets. They are more prevalent in manufacturing and similar industries. Labor coops are usually much smaller endeavors that tend to have little fixed and financial capital. They tend to operate in the service sector (e.g. printing, information technologies, etc.). While the difference between these two kinds is less important than it used to be, the distinction still exists (see Zarri N/A). Finally, there are coops that were converted from private businesses, either those given away to their workers by idealistic employers, or (as in the study in question) those that were converted from failed businesses. While some in the media and the public tend to call this latter group recovered factories, to link to the famous Argentinian ones, they are better described as workers' buyouts.

Workers' buyouts are a small part of the history of the cooperative movement in Italy (and elsewhere; see CECOP 2013). Amari (2014), Beccalli and Pugliese (2013), Dandolo (2009) and Holmström (1989) provide interesting information about the historical emergence of these experiences. Before the Second World War, instances of conversion of failed (private) firms into coops were extremely rare. Immediately after the war, however, there were numerous cases, as many firms had had enormous difficulties during the conflict, and because the cooperative movement was regaining its strength after the collapse of Fascism. These conversions took place with the help of the workers themselves, the unions, political parties, local authorities and the *Lega delle Cooperative*. Some of them were successful, but others soon collapsed. After this period, a new wave of conversions took place in the 1970s and early 1980s, as a result of the widespread economic downturn generated by the oil crises of those years (Minervini 1980). Out of this historical juncture came the Marcora Law, a parliamentary bill that provides state aid for workers who invest in the conversion of a private firm to a cooperative.

The vast majority of workers' buyouts currently active in Italy have benefited from this law. According to it, when a private enterprise fails, its workers can set up a cooperative and ask the state to release all the social security benefits they are entitled to as a lump sum, which is then used as the start-up capital for the new coop, together with any severance pay. The cooperative confederations can also match this sum and double it, by providing a loan to the new coop. Following Palomino et al. (2010), we can describe this process as an "institutional mechanism". This is how the authors describe the most recent process of recovery *in Argentina*, which is becoming more formalized, to point out the differences from the original wave of recoveries linked to the mass protest of 2001-2002. As I said before, in Italy protests and occupations have never been a (major) part of the workers' buyout phenomenon, because these have (almost) always followed the institutional path of the Marcora law.

5.2 The case study

The main focus of this research was a case that specifically highlighted the links between recovered factories and social movements, particularly those active in the solidarity economy. The case in question was located in the Lombardy region, near the city of Milan, and differed considerably from the workers' buyouts described in the previous subsection, precisely because of its links with social movements and the solidarity economy.

The factory in question, which I will refer to here with the pseudonym Cool-Cars, used to make tubes for the air conditioning systems of cars. Two Italian entrepreneurs founded Cool-Cars in 1973. The business grew until, in 1990, a larger Italian group from the plastics industry acquired it. This group had been expanding rapidly during the 1980s, buying similar automotive businesses all over Europe. Cool-Cars thus became part of a much larger, international business, with plants in Spain, France and the Netherlands. In 1996, the Milan plant was employing the staggering number—at least by today's standards—of 700 workers. Soon afterwards, however, management began restructuring the company, laying off hundreds of workers. In 2000, the group opened a factory in Poland, taking advantage of one of the country's Special Economic Zones, and two years later it closed the Dutch plant, moving production to the Polish site.

In 2004, the group sold Cool-Cars to a private equity fund. The fund kept buying similar businesses across the world, including in the UK, Mexico, Argentina, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, and even China. During this time, the Polish plant reached 2000 employees, some of who had been trained by the workers in Milan. Also, the mortgage on the Italian site was sold to a bank, which then rented the site back to the firm at a higher price than the mortgage repayments.

In 2009, workers in Milan were down to 330. However, the plant still operated at full capacity, with three daily shifts (effectively meaning 24/7 production). The plant was also the headquarters of Cool-Cars' prototype division, which tested the air conditioning systems of new models by BMW, Audi, Jaguar, and even Ferrari. It was therefore to general astonishment that that year management summoned the workers to tell them that the business had gone into controlled administration due to a debt of 300 million euros. Eventually, the workers would discover that back in 2004, the business had been bought by the private equity fund at a considerably higher price than the market one, and that the cost of this operation had not been borne by the fund itself, but by Cool-Cars. In other words, the purchase had created a company that was already heavily indebted, as if the business had bought itself, instead of being bought by others. As I mentioned, after this purchase, other companies had been acquired all over the world, while the financial crisis had led to a general fall in car sales.

In October of 2009, BMW, who were the main client of the Milan plant with 80% of all orders, terminated their contract because of fears that their just-in-time manufacturing process would ground to a halt due to the uncertain situation. As a result, production went from three

shifts to one. The Italian state administrators told BMW that without its orders they could not find a new buyer for Cool-Cars. BMW replied that without a new owner they could not trust the business. At this point, the workers began a series of protests, which I describe below.

After almost a year, in 2010, the administrators found a new buyer, a Polish entrepreneur, who bought the business using financial incentives from the Italian state. The legislation used for this deal required the new owner to keep the business intact for at least two years. At the Milan plant, only 80 workers were kept, while the rest were put on *cassa integrazione*, which is a form of interim social security that workers get in Italy when they are not fired, but the business is in trouble. Exactly after two years, at the end of 2012, when the law allowed it, the Italian plant was closed down and all the workers were laid off. It was at this point, in January of 2013, that a group of workers pitched a tent in front of the factory, and after this had been completely emptied, moved in and occupied the warehouses. They have been there now for more than two years.

As the protests and occupation show, the case of the Cool-Cars factory is very different from the workers' buyouts one. Those who have occupied the factory (approximately 23 people) feel their allegiance is with the Argentinian movement, rather than the Italian one. They have not used the institutional mechanism of the Marcora law, in the knowledge that production at their plant will never restart. Once a large, capital-intensive operation, no machinery has been left on the 14000m² site. Another reason for not using the law has been a somewhat negative view of mainstream cooperatives. However, the group *has* formed a cooperative, the meaning of which I explain below. Also, the occupation *has* led to a number of new income-generating activities, though it is somewhat difficult to find a definition for what this recovered factory actually 'does'. I will briefly describe what goes on at the site.

The main warehouse has been turned into a poly-functional space that is used by local groups for concerts, meetings, movie screenings, plays, etc. There is also a kitchen and a bar. In the second warehouse, an artisans' market with permanent stallholders takes place on weekends.⁸ Another warehouse has been turned into a parking space for campervans, and another one into a storage area for people who cannot afford garages. All these activities are meant to generate an income for the Cool-Cars workers, but also to raise funds to set up two productive activities. One would be the repairing and recycling of electronic goods, which already happens on the site but at a very small scale. The other is the repairing of pallets (the wooden frames used to move cargo). As the vast majority of those who repair pallets use unregulated, poorly paid labor, the Cool-Cars workers aim to sell theirs to retailers as 'ethically produced' pallets. Finally, the workers have taken to distributing food from organic growers in the south of Italy (mostly oranges) to groups of

⁸ At the time of writing, some of these activities had been put on hold due to negotiations with the local authorities over the use of the site. It was unclear which ones would be allowed to continue.

ethical consumers in and around Milan, using the site to stock the crates.

Considering all these widely diverse activities, resilience and solidarity appear in this case to be a grassroots process of trying to create new sources of income through the factory's occupation, and therefore an example of self-help that responds to the general impoverishment caused by the crisis. Among the workers of the Cool-Cars plant, resilience and solidarity emerged during the protests to keep the factory open, which I mentioned earlier. This aspect constitutes one of the main differences with the workers' buyouts.

Already in May of 2009, when the business went into controlled administration, some of the workers picketed the entrance to the plant. In October, they began a permanent assembly at the factory, and decided to take more public, direct actions. Representatives of one of Italy's rank-and-file unions (not one of the three big confederations) were very active in organizing these protests. The workers picketed numerous venues in Milan: the tribunal where their case was being discussed; the German consulate and the headquarters of BMW, to put pressure on them to make new orders; the first opera performance at the *La Scala* theatre, an important international event; and the seats of the provincial government and the prefecture. The workers also met with the local mayor, and even with a member of parliament. They staged a weeklong protest outside the regional government, and blocked the railway tracks at Milan's central station. Eventually, they started actually sleeping inside the factory, to prevent the machines from being sold off to repay the debts. They also climbed on top of the warehouses, which was a popular form of protest with the media at the time (see Giachetta 2012), and blocked the main road in the local town. Finally, they travelled to the global headquarters of BMW in Munich to protest there. After ten months of actions, in July of 2010, the Polish entrepreneur purchased Cool-Cars.

Throughout this period, the workers put a lot of emphasis on the need to be united *outside* of the factory and participate *as a group* to these public protests. They also tried to build alliances with workers involved in similar struggles all over Lombardy. Resistance and solidarity were already in place at this stage, mostly linked to a form of community unionism and to activists who had taken part in the global justice movement during the 2000s. However, after Cool-Cars changed owners, this activism virtually stopped. The mobilization had aimed at securing a new buyer and new contracts. With the former in place, the workers hoped that the latter would also follow. However, when, after two years, it became apparent that no new contracts would be secured, the grassroots protests I have described played an important role in the more explicit emergence of resilience and solidarity.

It was also at this point that the workers decided to establish a cooperative. They did so mainly to give themselves a legally recognized structure in front of the authorities. However, through the establishment of this coop, the value of self-help came to the fore. For the workers, mainstream cooperatives today have lost the values that

marked their beginnings in the 19th century. In countries like Italy or Spain, where workers' cooperatives have reached great sizes, solidarity has been compromised by the need for professional management and the search for profits. Self-help, they argued, cannot be embodied only in the legal form of the enterprise. The way the workers framed their decision to form a coop is therefore particularly interesting.

For them, this decision was a reversal to self-help activities determined by the failure of the union struggle. In such failure, they saw a recapitulation of the history of the labor movement in Europe and Italy during the 19th and early 20th century, but in the opposite direction. Mutual organizations, they argued, had historically preceded the unions, often contributing to their formation. Their decision was therefore a consequence of the involution of the labor movement, and of wider society itself, towards the conditions of the 1800s. Faced with the prospects of being left on their own and at the mercy of the labor market, with little prospects of being reemployed (and therefore with no use for the unions, which effectively ceased to exist for them), the Cool-Cars workers saw a parallel between themselves and workers at the dawn of the market society. Activists who had been involved in the global justice movement played an important role in elaborating this view.

Solidarity as a form of resistance to the market was also the basis of alliances with other social movements, such as the solidarity economy one, and particularly food movements within it. As I mentioned above, the Cool-Cars workers distributed ethical foods to solidarity purchase groups, using some of the plant's warehouses to stock the good in questions. Historically, food has been the focus of popular movements throughout the world, often simultaneously as a symbol for political action and a material concern for survival. One recent example has been the cycle of protest of the global justice movement (Maeckelbergh 2008). As I also mentioned above, a small number of individuals who had taken part in this cycle in Italy helped the Cool-Cars workers in their struggle. The movement was an example of grassroots globalization, opposed to the exploitative globalization 'from above' promoted by the World Trade Organization, which closely connected activists in identity- and class-based movements.

This connection characterized Cool-Cars' engagement with the solidarity economy in important ways. Discussing the role of food-based social movements in the mobilizations of the past decade, de Neve et al. offer a useful framework to understand the discursive space in which the Cool-Cars workers positioned themselves after the recovery of their business:

(1) Social relations are opposed to impersonality; (2) ideas about boundedness and autonomy reject open markets and the separation of production and consumption into distinct domains; (3) fair prices based around livelihoods contest intermediaries and profit, which is also a conversation about where and how value is created and how it circulates; and (4) regulation stands against unregulated markets. (2008:2, original emphasis)

Many of these elements can be applied both to contemporary food movements and to the recovered factories one, especially the Argentinian version, as the section on 'Theory' above showed.

Many instances can be found of the way that food embodies values that go beyond those of money and competition, while obviously remaining a very important part of the economy. The value of solidarity is at play here in many ways. One of the ideas that best encapsulates it is Grasseni's (2013) "co-production". Grasseni explains that among the kind of food activists that the Cool-Cars workers collaborated with, the term is used to describe relations of alliance that enable alternative forms of production to take place. Especially from the consumers' point of view, this notion permits the overcoming of views of food purchasing as simple shopping. But the notion also moves beyond strategies of individual boycott and 'buycott', as it refers to collective strategies deployed by groups rather than individuals. Seeking to establish direct relations with farmers and distributors, ethical consumers not only express, but also practice, solidarity. The same can be said of the Cool-Cars workers.

This practice points to a desire by some groups of people for a more active kind of citizenship, based both on resistance and resilience. It thus interrogates questions of democracy, especially when one considers that formal politics is often sidestepped in this context, as it is perceived to be a domain no longer capable of expressing the desired model of citizenship. But co-production does not mean a utopian return to the land or the rural idyll. The (economic) roles of producer/worker and consumer are only rarely collapsed into one another. Solidarity is expressed by the creation of pacts between groups of consumers and individual farmers, workers, cooperatives and other collective entities. Grasseni describes the process of co-production in the following way:

Responsible consumers, who are prepared to pay "the right price" in solidarity with producers, organize themselves into a collective and collaborate with farmers, associations, and public institutions to plan, buy, and distribute provisions. In some cases, co-production entails the negotiation in advance of part or the whole of a farm's crops including types, quantities, and cultivation methods (from certified organic farming to ad hoc compromises about specific weed killers or animal diet integrators). (2013:30)

The Cool-Cars workers have thus tried to establish links with the initiatives just described, based on shared notions of solidarity, democracy and a critique of markets.

6. Dissemination

The research project entailed a number of activities undertaken to create links with other researchers working on similar issues, and to disseminate the results of the project. In 2014, during the initial phase of literature review and sampling, a one-day workshop was organized on the international recovered factories phenomenon (focusing both on Argentina and Italy) at the University of Bergamo. This workshop

brought together scholars from the University of Bologna, Rome 'la Sapienza', and the University of Salento. In 2015, at the beginning of the data collection phase, a presentation on the project was given at the annual meeting of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, held at the University of Exeter.

7. Conclusions

In the popular imagination, the expression 'recovered enterprises' evokes a phenomenon that emerged in Argentina around 2001-2002, when a number of workers attempted to restart their failed businesses without the involvement of the former owners. These experiences were the result of the massive economic crisis that took place in the country at the time. While the history of recovered enterprises in Argentina is now relatively well established, workers' recoveries have recently developed also in France, Greece and Italy. Information on the Italian case is still considerably sketchy. This research has found that an important element to make sense of this phenomenon in Italy is the difference between examples that fall squarely in the cooperative sector, with its political and social history, and those that belong to a smaller, less well-defined world of social movements and political parties. This distinction is of relevance both at the theoretical and empirical levels. However, its importance is often lost in what public representations exist of the phenomenon in Italy.

While still clearly a small niche in the Italian economy, recently recovered factories have garnered some attention in the media, mostly due to the 'feel good' factor their stories convey in the post-crisis panorama. The research found that the Italian phenomenon has very little to do with the Argentinian one. In the Latin American country, recovered factories were the product of wider social unrest. Nothing of the sort can be said of the Italian case. In Italy, recovered factories represent one particular way of creating new cooperatives, recently referred to as workers' buyouts. Instances of this phenomenon can be traced back to the period immediately after the Second World War, and to the economic crisis of the 1970s and early 1980s, when the Marcora Law was passed, a parliamentary bill that provides state aid for workers who invest in the conversion of a private firm to a cooperative. This law allows the workers of a failed enterprise to ask the state to release all the social security benefits they are entitled to as a lump sum, which is then used as the start-up capital for the new coop. The cooperative confederations often match this sum, by providing a loan to the new coop.

The research looked in more detail at a case study that differed from the ones just described, mainly due to its links with social movements and to the fact that it did not use the state aid offered by the Marcora law. The people behind this initiative viewed current cooperatives negatively, and wanted to revitalize the original cooperative value of self-help. Since its birth in England in the 19th century, labor

cooperation has spread worldwide and, in the process, changed dramatically. In some countries, like Italy itself or Spain, workers' coops have reached great sizes, employing thousands of people. In such cases, solidarity has often been compromised. However, the presence of self-help as a core element of smaller workers' coops, like the one studied for this research, has been more easily maintained.

More than three decades ago, Thornley (1981) described new trends in the English cooperative movement that resonate closely with the case study in question. Thornley tracked the emergence of a new kind of workers' cooperative: small and dealing in services such as whole-food retailing, printing, bookselling and publishing, or with professions such as architecture and computing. According to her, this trend demonstrated a desire to provide new products and services, instead of just mimicking established economic practices in a cooperative form. This is reminiscent of the kind of activities that the Cool-Cars workers want to establish, and is the basis for their relationship with alternative food movements. Speaking of the politics of these new coops, Thornley writes: "[Members] ... want more control over their working lives. ... [They] are disillusioned by party politics or trade unionism, and have few links with these organizations or with the consumer co-operative movement" (1981:43). Again, the Cool-Cars people shared many of these characteristics. In the case of these smaller organizations, the essence of solidarity is maintained by the fact that they "aris[e] out of conditions of hardships or disillusion caused by capitalist development" (Thornley 1981:2). It is this condition that explains both their resistance and resilience.

Bibliography

- Abbate, Carmelo 2014. *Come ti salvo l'azienda dove lavoro*. <http://www.legacoop.coop/blog/2014/01/16/come-ti-salvo-lazienda-dove-lavoro-panorama/> (last accessed on 09/09/15).
- Alfieri, Marco 2012. *Le fabbriche salvate da chi ci lavora*. http://www.coopfond.it/it/Comunicazione/Rassegna_stampa/LE_FABBRICHE_SALVATE_DA_CHI_CI_LAVORA?index=4 (last accessed on 09/09/15).
- Amari, Giuseppe (ed.) 2014. *I consigli di gestione e la democrazia industriale e sociale in Italia: Storia e prospettive*. Roma: Ediesse.
- Ardenti, Erica 1994. *Salvarsi il posto in cooperativa*. http://archivioistorico.corriere.it/1994/febbraio/25/salvarsi_pos_to_cooperativa_co_0_94022512613.shtml (last accessed on 09/09/15).
- Azzellini, Dario 2014. ¿Si, podemos! Empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores en el hemisferio norte durante la crisis actual. *ORG & DEMO* 15 (1), pp. 9-36.
- Banca d'Italia 2009. *Relazione annuale*. Roma: Banca d'Italia.
- Barbera, Filippo, Alberto Lanzavecchia, Giulio Tagliavini and Vigliarolo Francesco 2013. *L'impresa recuperata: Dall'esperienza argentina alle politiche di supporto alle imprese colpite dalla crisi finanziaria*

- in Italia. www.insightweb.it/web/files/limpresa.pdf (last accessed on 08/09/15).
- Beccalli, Bianca and Enrico Pugliese 2013. *Prefazione*. In Marchetti, Aldo 2013. *Fabbriche aperte. Le esperienze delle imprese recuperate dai lavoratori in Argentina*, pp. 7-30. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Bianchi, Leonardo 2013. Fenici d'Italia. Come alcune imprese italiane sono riuscite a reinventarsi e sopravvivere alla crisi. <http://ilbureau.com/fenici-d-italia-come-alcune-imprese-italiane-sono-riuscite-a-reinventarsi-e-sopravvivere-alla-crisi/> (last accessed on 10/09/15).
- Bianchi, Patrizio 2013. *La rincorsa frenata. L'industria italiana dall'unità alla crisi globale*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Bryer, Alice 2010. Beyond bureaucracies? The struggle for social responsibility in the Argentine workers cooperatives. *Critique of Anthropology* 30 (1), pp. 41-61.
- 2012. The politics of the social economy: A case study of the Argentinean empresas recuperadas. *Dialectical Anthropology* 36, pp. 21-49.
- Carmosino, Gianluca and Gianni Belloni 2012. Fabbriche senza padrone in Italia. <http://comune-info.net/2012/07/fabbriche-senza-padrone-in-italia/> (last accessed on 09/09/15).
- Corona, Elvira 2014. *Lavorare senza padroni. Viaggio nelle imprese "recuperadas" d'Argentina*. Bologna: EMI.
- Coscia, Vanesa, Melina Perbellini and Elisa Spina 2012. *Ocupaciones de fábricas en tiempos de crisis: El caso italiano a la luz de la experiencia argentina*. Available on <http://comune-info.net/> (last accessed on 09/09/15).
- CECOP 2013. *Business transfers to employees under the form of a cooperative in Europe*. Brussels: CECOP.
- COOPFOND 2013. *Bilancio d'esercizio 2012/2013*. Roma: COOPFOND.
- 2014. TG1 e Unomattina scoprono i WBO. http://www.coopfond.it/it/Comunicazione/Archivio_news/TG1_e_Uno_Mattina_scoprono_i_WBO (last accessed on 07/09/15).
- Dandolo, Francesco 2009. *L'industria in Italia tra crisi e cooperazione: La partecipazione dei lavoratori alla gestione d'impresa (1969-1985)*. Milano: Bruno Mondadori.
- D'Alisa, Giacomo, Francesca Forno and Simon Maurano 2015. Grassroots (economic) activism in times of crisis: Mapping the redundancy of collective actions. *Partecipazione & Conflitto* 8(2), pp. 328-342.
- D'Arcangelo, Giancarlo L. 2014. *Invisibile è la tua vera patria. Reportage dal declino: Luoghi e vite dell'industria italiana che non c'è più*. Milano: Il Saggiatore.
- De Neve, Geert, Peter Luetchford, and Jeff Pratt 2008. Introduction: Revealing the hidden hands of global market exchange. *Research in Economic Anthropology* 28:1-30.
- De Peuter, G. and Dyer-Witthford N. 2010. Commons and cooperatives. *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action* 4(1), pp. 30-56.

- Dinerstein, Ana C. 2008. Workers' factory takeovers and the programme for self-managed work: Towards an 'institutionalisation' of radical forms of non-governmental public action in Argentina. *NGPA working papers series 8*. www.lse.ac.uk/ngpa/publications (last accessed on 08/09/15).
- Di Vico, Dario 2013. Salvare l'azienda? Ci pensano i dipendenti. http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2013/ottobre/27/Salvare_azien_da_pensano_dipendenti_co_0_20131027_ff21383c-3ed3-11e3-ab55-47afe0af906d.shtml (last accessed on 09/09/15).
- El-Najjar, Ziad 2009. *Argentina's worker-recovered factories: Strategies and survival*. Mémoire de recherche, Département de science politique, Faculté des arts et sciences, Université de Montréal.
- Evans, William T. 2007. Counter-hegemony at work: Resistance, contradiction and emergent culture inside a worker-occupied hotel. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 51, pp. 33-68, Special Issue: Globalization and Social Change.
- Faulk, Karen A. 2012. Stitching curtains, grinding plastic: The transformation of workers and things in Buenos Aires. In Joshua Reno and Catherine Alexander (eds.) *Economies of recycling*. London: Zed Books.
- Ferraris, Pino 2011. *Ieri e domani: Storia critica del movimento operaio e socialista ed emancipazione dal presente*. Bologna: Edizioni dell'Asino.
- Giachetta, Michela 2012. *Assalto al cielo: La classe operaia va sui tetti*. Roma: Fandango Libri.
- Grasseni, Cristina 2013. *Beyond alternative food networks: Italy's solidarity purchase groups*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Guadagnucci, Lorenzo 2007. *Il nuovo mutualismo: Sobrietà, stili di vita ed esperienze di un'altra società*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Healey, Stephen 2014. The biopolitics of communities economies in the era of the Anthropocene. *Journal of Political Ecologies* 21, pp. 210-221, Special Section: Non-capitalist Political Ecology.
- Hirtz, Natalia V. and Marta S. Giacone 2013. The recovered companies workers' struggle in Argentina: Between autonomy and new forms of control. *Latin American Perspectives* 191 (40), pp. 88-100.
- Holloway, John 2010. *Crack Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Holmström, Mark 1989. *Industrial democracy in Italy*. Brookfield: Avebury.
- Jossa, Bruno and Ernesto Screpanti 2014. *Un manifesto per l'autogestione*. <http://sviluppo felice.wordpress.com/2014/12/04/manifesto-per-lautogestione/> (last accessed on 08/09/15).
- Maeckelbergh, Marianne 2008. *The will of the many: How the alterglobalisation movement is changing the face of democracy*. London: Pluto Press.
- Marchetti, Aldo 2013. *Fabbriche aperte. Le esperienze delle imprese recuperate dai lavoratori in Argentina*. Bologna: il Mulino.

- Marcuse, Rachel 2005. "Occupy, resist, produce": Aspects of class consciousness and the Argentine movement of recovered factories. *Verstehen, the graduate and undergraduate sociology journal at McGill University*, N/A.
- Meriggi, Maria Grazia 2005. *Cooperazione e mutualismo: Esperienze di integrazione e conflitto sociale in Europa fra ottocento e novecento*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Merz, Ryan 2008. *Institutionalization of the recovered factory repertoire: Worker strategies at Talleres Unión*. School for International Training 'Argentina: Social Movements and Human Rights'.
- Minervini, Gustavo (ed.) 1980 *La crisi dell'impresa industriale. Ristrutturazione, riconversione, risanamento finanziario*. Napoli: Liguori.
- Monteagudo, Graciela 2008. The clean walls of a recovered factory: New subjectivities in Argentina's recovered factories. *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 37 (2), pp. 175-210, Special Issue: Newer forms of resistance to global economic restructuring.
- 2011. *Politics by other means: Rhizomes of power in Argentina's social movements*. Dissertations. Paper 420. University of Massachusetts-Amherst.
- Müntzer, Thomas 2014. La bussola dell'autogestione. In Ruggeri, Andres 2014. *Le fabbriche recuperate. Dalla Zanon alla RiMaflow, un'esperienza concreta contro la crisi*, pp. 7-24. Roma: Edizioni Alegre.
- Ness, Immanuel and Dario Azzellini (eds.) 2011. *Ours to master and own: Workers' councils from the commune to the present*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Ozarow, Daniel and Richard Croucher 2014. Workers' Self-management, Recovered Companies and the Sociology of work. *Sociology* 48 (5), pp. 989-1006.
- Palomino Héctor, Ivanna Bleynat, Silvia Garro and Carla Giacomuzzi 2010. The universe of worker-recovered companies in Argentina (2002-2008): Continuity and changes inside the movement. *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action* 4 (1), pp. 252-287.
- Pianigiani, Gaia 2015. *Italian artisans' revival after economic crisis reflects resilience of small industry*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/09/world/europe/italian-artisans-revival-after-economic-crisis-reflects-resilience-of-small-industry.html> (last accessed on 07/09/15).
- Rizza, Roberto and Jacopo Sermasi 2008. *Il lavoro recuperato: Imprese e autogestione in Argentina*. Milano: Bruno Mondadori.
- Rociola, Arcangelo 2014. La rivincita degli operai. <http://inchieste.repubblica.it/it/repubblica/rep-it/2014/03/11/news/operai-riaprono-le-aziende-fallite-in-italia-80716799/> (last accessed on 09/09/15).
- Rodotà, Stefano 2014. *Solidarietà: Un'utopia necessaria*. Bari: Editori Laterza.

- Ruggeri, Andres 2014. *Le fabbriche recuperate. Dalla Zanon alla RiMaflow, un'esperienza concreta contro la crisi*. Roma: Edizioni Alegre.
- Sitrin, Marina 2012. *Everyday revolutions: Horizontalism and autonomy in Argentina*. London: Zed Books.
- Thornley, Jenny 1981. *Workers' co-operatives: Jobs and dreams*. London: Heinemann Educational.
- Upchurch Martin, Anne Daguerre and Daniel Ozarow 2013. Spectrum, trajectory and the role of the state in workers' self-management. *Labor History* 55 (1), pp. 47-66.
- Ventrone, Oreste (ed.) 2007. *Senza padrone: Storie di fabbriche e imprese recuperate dai lavoratori*. Napoli: Gesco Edizioni.
- Vigliarolo, Francesco 2011. *Le imprese recuperate. Argentina: dal crac finanziario alla socializzazione dell'economia*. Milano: Altreconomia.
- Zarri, Francesca N/A. *Nuovi operatori, nuovi mestieri: Le Nuove cooperative di produzione e lavoro*. Roma: Associazione Nazionale delle Cooperative di Produzione e Lavoro.