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Co-design processes for the local development of neighbourhoods. The example of Quarticciolo, between selforganisation, university and institutions

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ABSTRACT

In the context of urban policies, in response to the failure of top-down approaches to participation in their intention to promote inclusivity and empower marginalized groups, new processes of co-creation and co-production have emerged, aiming to bring together a diverse range of actors—e.g. citizens, governments and universities—through horizontal relationships. In these processes, all participants contribute equally based on their unique knowledge and cultural perspectives to the definition of urban policies. Within Social Innovation Theory, co-creation is viewed as a tool that has the potential to empower communities and enhance self-organization processes, which plays an increasingly critical role in the development of cities.

This thesis adopts an exploratory approach to compare these processes through the case study of Quarticciolo, a suburban neighbourhood in Rome. For several years, Quarticciolo has been characterized by self-organizing initiatives designed to address the social needs of the area, which have also influenced its development through negotiations and dialogue with local institutions. Furthermore, the Municipality of Rome has established a "Neighbourhood Laboratory" over the past year, wherein local communities and university collaborate to create territorial projects aimed at fostering integrated local development, grounded in the needs and aspirations expressed by the neighbourhood.

In an effort to assess whether the activities within the laboratory align with the principles of co-creation, this research identifies its strengths and limitations. Additionally, it explores the alternative model of political participation presented by the Quarticciolo experience, highlighting the conditions and potential of territorial democracy.

SUMMARY

L'elaborato è stato strutturato a partire dalle seguenti domande di ricerca: Come si sviluppano le pratiche di partecipazione politica a Quarticciolo? Quali sono le caratteristiche principali di queste pratiche?; Possono queste pratiche essere classificate come processi di co-progettazione e co-creazione? ; Che tipo di partecipazione politica (territoriale) alternativa e di sviluppo locale rappresenta l'esperienza del Quarticciolo? Nel tentativo di rispondere a tali domande, il testo è suddiviso in 5 capitolo principali, seguiti da una sezione conclusiva.

Il *Capitolo 1* riporta la metodologia impiegata per svolgere la ricerca, la quale adotta un approccio di studio di caso, impiegando principalmente l'osservazione partecipante, basata sull'esperienza personale acquisita durante il tirocinio accademico in collaborazione con il Laboratorio di Quartiere. Il *Capitolo 2* offre una revisione della letteratura sui principali concetti teorici della tesi, con un focus su partecipazione, co-creazione e auto-organizzazione. Esamina le relazioni tra questi concetti, sottolineando la distinzione tra partecipazione politica tradizionale e co-creazione, e analizza gli attori coinvolti, nonché limiti e sfide della co-creazione. Il capitolo si conclude discutendo l'importanza dell'auto-organizzazione nello sviluppo di un modello di sviluppo territoriale aletrantivo a quello neoliberista dominante. Il *Capitolo 3* descrive il contesto territoriale del Quarticciolo, analizzando la storia del quartiere, concepito secondo espliciti intenti di marginalizzazione, e come questi continuino a influenzare l'area ancora oggi. Questo capitolo delinea anche il profilo demografico del quartiere ed esamina come si siano sviluppati ed evoluti i processi di auto-organizzazione. Il *Capitolo 4* si concentra sul caso studio, descrivendo il ruolo delle istituzioni nel quartiere e le varie iniziative dal basso guidate da attori locali auto-organizzati. Il capitolo analizza anche il lavoro del Laboratorio di Quartiere, riportandone I progetti, le fasi di attuazione in cui si trovano e i risultati raggiunti, fornendo una sintesi finale del suo impatto attraverso uno schema riassuntivo. Il *Capitolo 5* è dedicato alla discussione, in cui vengono affrontate le domande di ricerca. Utilizzando il quadro teorico, il caso studio viene analizzato per identificare la natura delle pratiche partecipative, esplorando se queste siano allineate ai principi della co-creazione. Il capitolo definisce inoltre il modello alternativo di democrazia territoriale e sviluppo locale integrato che si sta mettendo in pratica nell'esperienza del Quarticciolo.

INTRODUCTION

Top-down approaches to political participation, which have gained prominence since the 1990s on both national and international agendas - particularly in urban policy (Moini, 2007) and urban regeneration (Cellamare, 2022) - have largely fallen short in their potential to promote inclusivity and empowerment, especially for marginalised groups (Lund, 2008). In many instances, these approaches have resulted in practices that are limited to consensus-building or, at most, a consultative role (Cellamare, 2022), thereby concealing what Arnstein (1969) referred to as "tokenistic" participation processes. This failure has led to growing distrust among citizens and highlighted the inherent limitations of government-driven participation (Cellamare, 2022; Boonstra and Boelens, 2011). To address these shortcomings, there is a need to consider new spaces and forms of collaboration (Cellamare, 2023). One such alternative is co-creation, a process in which institutions facilitate citizen involvement in the development of services and infrastructures. This approach aims to create conditions where bottom-up organisations can truly self-determine and have a meaningful role in shaping social policies (Lund, 2018). The goal is to foster horizontal relationships among multiple actors—such as project designers (Sanders and Stappers, 2007), universities (Lund, 2018), individual citizens, or communities (Ansell and Torfing, 2024)—so that they can contribute equally to urban design and planning, drawing upon their own skills and cultural knowledge (Manzini, 2016). Examples of such practices include Living Labs (Lund, 2018), where these collaborations come to life.

Simultaneously, new forms of self-organisation have emerged in cities—specifically, civic-initiated actions that seek to influence the urban environment (Lund, 2008). These initiatives, on the one hand, address the failure of institutions to meet social needs, a consequence of the decline of the welfare state, by addressing issues related to social exclusion and marginalisation (Cellamare, 2022; Lund, 2008). On the other hand, these actions, often detached from market logics or critical of them (Moini, 2007), offer a localised alternative to the neoliberal development model, actively rethinking and re-experiencing public space. Through these processes they seek to counteract the growing privatisation of public space (Hou, 2010) and demonstrate significant transformative potential within the urban landscape (Rossi, 2004). Within the framework of Social Innovation Theory, co-creation becomes a process aimed at recognizing and valorizing

the work and potential of self-organised initiatives, with the state acting as an enabler. This presents an opportunity for institutional innovation.

The case study of this thesis focuses on Quarticciolo, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Rome. This area is characterised by numerous bottom-up initiatives through self-organisation, which play a crucial role in the neighbourhood's development. Additionally, one year ago, the Rome City Council launched the "Neighbourhood Laboratory," an initiative that fosters ongoing collaboration and dialogue between universities and local social actors, aiming to promote local development based on the needs and visions articulated by the community.

Within this context, the research questions guiding this thesis are:

Main Research Question:

How do political participation practices develop in Quarticciolo? What are the key features of these practices?

Sub-Questions:

Can these practices be classified as co-design and co-creation processes?

What kind of alternative political (territorial) participation and local development does the experience in Quarticciolo represent?

To address these questions, the thesis is structured into five main chapters.

Chapter 1 outlines the methodology, which adopts a case study approach, primarily employing participant observation, based on the personal experience gained through an academic internship in collaboration with the Neighbourhood Laboratory. *Chapter 2* provides a literature review of the key theoretical concepts of the thesis, focusing on participation, co-creation, and self-organisation. It examines the relationships between these concepts, emphasising the distinction between traditional political participation and co-creation, and considers the actors involved, as well as the limitations and challenges of co-creation. The chapter concludes by discussing the importance of self-organisation in developing an alternative territorial development model to the prevailing neoliberal one. *Chapter 3* describes the territorial context of Quarticciolo, detailing the neighbourhood's history, which has been shaped by processes of marginalisation, and how these continue to influence the area today. This chapter also outlines the demographic profile of the neighbourhood and examines how self-organisation processes

have emerged and evolved. *Chapter 4* focuses on the case study, describing the role of institutions in the neighbourhood and the various bottom-up initiatives led by self-organised local actors. This chapter also analyses the work of the Neighbourhood Laboratory, outlining its projects, implementation phases, and the outcomes achieved, providing a final summary of its impact. *Chapter 5* is dedicated to the discussion, in which the research questions are addressed. Using the theoretical framework, the case study is analysed to identify the nature of participatory practices, exploring whether they align with co-creation principles. The chapter further defines the alternative model of territorial democracy and integrated local development that are being put into practice in the Quarticciolo experience.

CHAPTER 1. METHODOLOGY: A Case Study Research

To answer the research questions, as written in the introduction, the text was divided into a theoretical and a case study part.

The methodology adopted for the theoretical part consists of a literature review of scientific texts, to provide a summary, evaluation, and critical analysis of existing studies on the concepts of participation, co-creation and self-organisation, with particular reference to these concepts in the context of territorial development and urban regeneration. In this way, the most relevant theories concerning the studies of these topics were identified, in order to give consistency to the theoretical frame through which the case study of the thesis will be analysed in the chapter dedicated to the discussion. In the analysis of the scientific papers, particular attention was paid to the date of publication, trying to consult both recent and older ones, in order to understand the conceptual evolution of the topics, but also to observe the most cited texts, the ones that are still considered fundamental when approaching the theme.

Given the empirical nature of this research, which stems from personal internship experience and thus direct participation in the context to which the thesis refers, it adopts the case-study as its approach and research method (a particularly useful reference text for understanding the functionality of the approach is Robert K. Yin's book 'Case Study research and applications', 2018). Indeed, the case study method is useful in illuminating why and how decisions are made and aims to "investigate a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world." (Yin, 2018: 45). This is why it was particularly suited to the subject of this thesis, which in fact aims to investigate how participatory processes develop in the Quarticciolo context, and thus how decisions are made regarding its local development. The approach employed was therefore an exploratory one, since the aim of the thesis was to compare the theoretical concepts set out in the literature review chapter with the concrete experience related to Quarticciolo. The exploratory character of the research is linked to the intention to test the (participatory) experience of Quarticciolo starting from the theoretical concepts. The latter therefore guided the analysis together with the research questions, which were formulated starting from theoretical propositions that seemed promising for what was intended to be investigated (Yin, 2018). Data collection occurred during the period of the curricular internship and the subsequent thesis writing, spanning from October 2023 to

October 2024. The processes discussed in the case study chapter—such as the projects developed by the neighborhood workshop—refer to this timeframe, up to October 2024. The research adopts a qualitative approach, aiming to explore the Quarticciolo context, its participatory dynamics, and the processes through which projects are developed. Quarticciolo is the sole case study considered in this research.

The case study method includes a number of ways of collecting data. The methods used in this thesis were: documentation, direct observation and participant observation.

In the case of the documentation, the following were used as texts: announcements and minutes of meetings (relating to neighbourhood assemblies or neighbourhood plenaries); formal studies on the same context (e.g. a previous master's thesis); progress reports (such as those drawn up by LabSu concerning the work phases of a project); newspaper articles; leaflets advertising a demonstration or event in the neighbourhood, or products for the dissemination of information from below. In addition, reference was made to the social pages of self-organised realities and institutional websites where a project related to the neighbourhood was announced.

Direct observation was undoubtedly a useful method for gathering information and accessing a series of documents within the context (in particular the Laboratory). Alongside this method, which prevailed in the initial phase of the direct experience at Quarticciolo, participant observation was the best way to access a significant amount of information. In fact, thanks to the internship experience, it was possible to experiment with this method, covering various roles within the neighbourhood and thus carrying out real fieldwork. On the one hand, specific formal activities related to the Laboratory were carried out, and on the other hand, casual and informal social interactions were experienced. In both cases, access was thus gained to otherwise unexplored events and groups, having as an opportunity the "ability to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone "inside" a case rather than external to it." (Yin, 2018: 168). The main sources of analysis were therefore the ethnographic notes collected through participant observation, accompanied by documentation on the individual projects. These two sources were combined in order to construct an overall narrative as comprehensive as possible on the individual projects and processes presented in the case study.

Regarding the case study, this was analysed by drawing up a final summary outline, which gave an overview of the main aspects six individual projects, i.e. the actors, the stages of implementation and the results achieved. As already written, the data collected in the

literature review was analysed by sorting and reporting the papers in chronological order, in order to observe the evolution of the concepts but also the most recent version of analysis. The concepts presented here were then compared with the Quarticciolo case study in order to interpret the latter and thus answer the research questions. To this end, after the case study was reported, the theoretical chapter was reread so that the concepts could be associated with the individual phenomena attributable to the case study experience. This led to discussions, set out in Chapter 5, in which the case study was associated with the theoretical concept.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW: Definition of Participation, Co-Creation and Self-Organization in the context of Urban Development

This chapter is dedicated to the definition of the concepts of (political) participation, co-creation and co-production and self-organization, with particular reference to the context of urban development. In recent years, the topic of urban regeneration has become increasingly popular in both public policy and academic contexts. As Cellamare (2022) argues, unlike the term 'urban redevelopment' (in italian 'riqualificazione urbana') which defines exclusively physical interventions to improve territories (particularly degraded and peripheral ones), the term 'regeneration' refers also to socio-cultural interventions, in an attempt to improve the general living conditions of territories and its inhabitans. This is why it becomes important, particularly in the context of spatial / urban policies, to think about forms of citizen involvement through which their needs are listened and their skills enhanced.

This involvement has taken various forms, ranging from consultation to forms of delegated power (Arnstein, 1969), but according to some authors (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011; Cellamare, 2022) top-down intervention processes tend to fail in terms of greater democracy and inclusiveness. This is why the concepts of co-creation and co-production have been developed, which in general identify processes in which all the actors involved, from institutions to citizens, bring their skills and knowledge to bear to contribute to a territorial project. Through these processes, the aim is to overcome the verticality inherent in traditional intervention processes, creating horizontal relationships in which citizens contribute to both the design and implementation of a project.

Alongside these institutional attempts to open up to local communities, more and more bottom-up initiatives have developed over the years (Cellamare, 2022; Rossi, 2004), forms of self-organization aimed at working for local development, particularly socio-cultural development of territories. This social fabric indicates that realities from the bottom, active citizens and their capacity of planning, already exist in many territories and at the urban level. So processes of co-creation should be conceived for creating synergy and collaborative paths with these realities, valuing and recognizing the contribution and instances that these actors bring at local level.

The following will be the literature review carried out to understand what is meant by participation, co-creation / co-production and self-organization, so as to have the

theoretical framework to support what is to be observed through the case study of this thesis.

2.1. Participation

2.1.1. Participation: History and Definition

Over recent decades participatory practices have spread widely within national and international governments and agencies, from radical NGOs to local government bodies to the World Bank (Cornwall, 2008; Pretty, 1995; Michels, 2011). Consequently, the concept of participation in the institutional setting has been increasingly investigated at the academic level, particularly by disciplines such as sociology, administrative sciences, development studies etc. In this regard, some authors call participation a buzzword (Kotus, 2016; Cornwall, 2008), a term used in extremely diverse contexts and by extremely diverse actors, to the point that it is difficult to identify a single, comprehensive definition. Many practices are labelled "participatory", but this term evokes different meanings depending on the actors who use it.

In this first part of the chapter, we are dedicated to unravelling these knots, reporting on how participatory practices were born and developed historically, how the concept of political participation has been defined in literature, what typologies have been created, and what actors are involved in these processes.

Participation in the political sphere developed around the 1960s and 1970s as a result of pressure from below from social movements. They demanded greater democratization of public choice (Moini, 2011), in terms of not only being participants in decision-making processes but being co-protagonists in the construction of society (Cellamare, 2022). This political pressure and vision was also formed in the context of urban development, and as Cellamare (2022) writes, citing Lefevbre, the 'right to the city' meant not only the ability to access or use certain urban services and infrastructure but to "contribute to the construction of the city, to the production of one's living space" (Cellamare, 2022, p.301). In 1990s, a new wave of participation exploded, particularly in the field of urban planning, at the international and national levels. At the international level, it was initiated by the Porto Alegre participatory budgeting experience (Cellamare, 2022; Bobbio, 2011), and in Europe in general, participation has become a standard underlying programs such as Urbact, Urban, Uia etc. (Cellamare, 2022). At the national level, in Italy, participation has been part of a broad process and attempt to innovate urban governments and has been

implemented through experiences such as urban laboratories, participatory budgets etc. At the root of this diffusion according to many authors (Moini, 2011; Bobbio, 2011; Fung, 2015) is the crisis of legitimacy of representative democracy. Participation therefore represents an attempt to provide a non-populist response to this crisis and to compensate for the failures of representative democracy and parties, in terms of both recovering legitimacy and making decisions that reflect the needs of citizens.

As Cornwall (2008) argues, "participation" in general can be defined as "anything that involves people" (Cornwall, 2008, p.269), and similarly Moini (2011) claims that a common characteristic attributed to participation "is the involvement of 'ordinary' people in policymaking" (Moini, 2011, p.149). The ways in which this involvement occurs determines the type of participation. In this sense then, participation, in addition to being a vague and inherently ambiguous term (Cornwall 2008; Bobbio 2011), refers to a wide range of practices varying from electoral participation to the development of social movements etc. Bobbio refers to participation as "the relation of society to institutions" (Bobbio, 2011, p.2), in which society operates in a direct way on the precesses of actions of institutions, playing an active role within the decision-making processes of the latter. These processes may arise from a demand or pressure from below (bottom-up process) but, according to the author, then involve a "form of active intervention by institutions" (Bobbio, 2011, p.2). According to Moini (2007), participation indicates an openness of governments to extra-institutional actors. This openness is structured in various forms, such as public-private partnership or concertation, through which local actors (e.g., trade unions or businesses) are recognized by institutions and participate in public decisions as representatives of specific local demands. Usually these relationships are structured to solve problems and initiate development of an economic nature. On the opposite side of these formal, non-conflictual relations, the author reports those involving the confrontation between institutions and "organized civil society". It is understood as the diverse set of actors, acting through claims or forms of self-organization based on a critique of existing models of development - competitive and neoliberal. So in general participation refers to the involvement people in the process of design and implementation of a policy. The process can be top-down, so initiated by istitutions or agencies such as NGOs , or bottom-up, as a demand from organized civil society. It has been developed particularly in the contexts of local development, such as that of urban (Arnstein, Cellamare, Bobbio at al) or rural planning (Pretty, 1995).

Beyond the different models of political participation, as some authors argue (Irving, 2004; Michels, 2011) participation is often accompanied by an inherently positive connotation. As Arnstein writes "The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you" (Arnstein, 1969, p.216). This idea is supported by claims such as: "It gives citizens a more direct say, it gives a voice to individual citizens and to minorities, it encourages civic skills and civic virtues" (Michels, 2011, p.276). In this way, public decisions are more based on citizens' preferences, needs and visions, making the relationship between them and institutions less divisive and conflictual. So, according to these arguments, citizen participation ensures more democratic and effective governance. In addition, regarding the positive aspects and effects of participation, one of the most cited is that it fosters or should foster citizen empowerment (Kamruzzaman, 2020; Arnstein, 1969; Irvin, 2004; Morgan 2016). As Morgan (2016) reports, participation is seen by many as a tool that helps the 'poorest' and 'most vulnerable' people and communities to be able to decide for their destiny and play a transformative role in society. In this sense, many development agencies and NGOs make themselves promoters of participation as a tool of empowerment for the communities in which they operate. Instead, Arnstein (1969), talks about "empowerment'' in the sense of ensuring a redistribution of power in favour of especially the have-not citizens, those most excluded from decision-making processes, so that they can contribute to decisions such as: resource allocation, setting public goals and policies etc. "In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reform that enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society" (Arnstein, 1969, p.216).

But some authors question these hopes for greater democracy, empowerment and the transformative potential of participation. Arnstein (1969) herself points to the rhetorical use of the word 'participation', arguing that without a redistribution of power, understood as the ability to affect the outcomes of processes, it is just an 'empty ritual' that produces no benefits for the powerless. The concept of empty ritual recalls what Morgan (2016) reports as "invited participation" that is a formal type of involvement that does not always produce a transformation of the political system. This typology differs from "claimed participation", which consists of people taking control of decision-making processes without necessarily being invited into dedicated spaces of participation. In this sense, another useful difference is between participation as an 'end' and as a 'means'. In the former, participation is seen as necessary in itself, as a way to transform the status quo by getting people to voice their demands, while in the latter, participation is an "apolitical

way to improve service delivery through listening to the voices of service users" (Morgan, 2016, p.4). "Invited-mean" participation refers back to a common criticism made of some participatory processes, particularly those of institutional origin or top-down type in general (Cellamare, 2011), namely that they are used to maintain the existing political system and to support the dominant idea of development, influenced by neoliberalism and the free trade (Morgan, 2016; Moini, 2007; Cellamare, 2011; Pretty, 1995). Opposed to this view - in which it is said that participation of institutional origin does not transform the status quo - is the one in which the basis of participation must be conflict and contestation (Cornwall, 2008, p.276). Moini (2007), citing studies conducted on European cities, reports that participation sometimes does not promote a transformation of the existing political system; on the contrary, it reinforces the current one and enshrines the centrality of government in decision-making processes, giving citizens only the illusion of having a role within decision-making processes.

2.2.2. Participation: Typologies

The following will be the types of participation identified by three different authors: Arnstein (1969), Pretty (1995), and White (1996). In this way the concept of participation will be "unpacked" (Cornwall, 2008) and the various types identified by the authors will be used to analyze from various perspectives the case study of this thesis.

Arnstein Ladder

Arnstein's Ladder of Participation was conceptualized and published by the author in 1969, nevertheless, in addition to being a seminal article with respect to participation studies, it is still a very useful tool for analyzing and understanding participatory processes. The scale, shown below, is characterized by eight degrees of participation, divided into three macro types of participation, ranging from non-participation, tokenism and finally citizen control. By participation Arnstein means 'Citizen Control', so the various levels of the scale indicate the extent to which citizens exercise this power vis-à-vis decision-making processes. It starts from the lowest level where they have no control and therefore no ability to influence decision-making processes, to the highest level where there is a redistribution of power in favor of citizens, particularly those whom Arnstein calls the 'have-nots'. Of all the typologies identified by Arnstein we will focus only on "partnership", since it is the one that comes closest to the case study to which this thesis is devoted. However, it is useful to mention the other typologies, both because they help to better understand how they differ from the one that is most important to us and because

they are still useful for interpreting some of the mechanisms identified in the case study. The lowest level is characterized by non-participation, which is manifested through 'manipulation' and 'therapy'. Through meetings that are illusorily defined as participatory, powerholds actually aim to educate or cure participants, who therefore hold an exclusively passive and listening position. People therefore are not involved to have a voice and power over processes but to confirm the power of those who have already decided what to do. In this sense, as the author reports, they are opportunities that elites use to build consensus and political support. The central level coincides with "tokenism" to which the types of informing, consultation and placation belong. As the term "tokenism" suggests, these are not forms of participation but could be first steps toward it, if they are not limited to being isolated cases and ends in themselves. Particularly in the case of "cosultation", the author reports some cases in which this has served solely as a smokescreen. People are invited to meetings in which they can express their opinions but then these produce no effect except to allow those in government to declare that they are open to the demands of citizens. As Arnstein points out, these meetings generate much frustration, disappointment, and discontent with participatory processes in the people who attend them.

Arnstein's Ladder (1969)
Degrees of Citizen Participation

Table 1 Arnstein's Ladder (1969)

The highest form of participation is called 'citizen-control' and includes the forms of partnership, delegated power and citizen control. All these forms of participation, unlike the previous ones, indicate some degree of citizen power within decision-making processes. Partnership indicates a redistribution of power based on negotiations between elites and citizens. In this negotiation process, rules and the respective responsibilities of the actors involved are established. According to the author, the basic ingredients to arrive at a negotiation with powerholds are: 1) an organized power-base in the community, which is able through good leaders to present its demands to the institutions; 2) the economic availability to pay the leaders and their efforts in terms of time and to pay their own technicians, lawyers and other useful figures.

Citing her own case studies, the author points out that processes of power negotiation usually result not from an institutions initiative but from 'angry citizen demand' (Arnstein, 1969, p.222). The author in this case argues that the anger stems from citizens' disappointment with participatory processes that have led to nothing. In this way therefore they want to make sure that their voice really influences the decision-making processes that affect them. Beyond what is the cause of angry citizen demand, this aspect points out that "in most cases where power has come to be shared it was taken by the citizen, not given by the city" and "historically it (power) has had to be wrested by the powerless rather than proffered by the powerful" (Arnstein, 1969, p.222). The aspect of anger and pressure from below in general underscores the importance of conflictuality as an ingredient, not unique, but necessary to witness truly participatory processes, confirming what Cornwall (2008) argued with the concept of claimed participation. What emerges from these concepts, then, is that the most functional participatory practices in terms of power redistribution are those that derive directly from citizen pressure and in which they position themselves as relevant actors in the decision-making processes that affect them.

The last two types of participation indicate greater citizen control and power over decision-making processes. Through delegated power, they have greater prominence than powerholds in program design and management. In the citizen control level, their power is total, so these are the cases where organized citizens (such as neighborhood corporations) directly govern a program or local institution.

Pretty's et al. Ladder

Another ladder was conceptualized by Pretty in 1995 and is very similar to Arnstein's. Like the latter's ladder, Pretty's also takes on a normative meaning, differentiating a bad type of participation-such as manipulative and passive-to a type considered good and positive, in which people have more control over decision-making processes. In this sense, another commonality between the two ladders is that they both describe a range from control by authorities to greater control by people and citizens (Cornwall, 2008). In the context of rural development, the author identifies two main approaches of development institutions or agencies to participation: participation understood as a means, to achieve efficiency or cost reduction goals, and participation as a right, whose goal is to mobilize collective action and empower people. The author differentiates seven types of participation. The first five coincide with the levels of non-participation and tokenism defined by Arnstein (1969), and they refer to a sham and passive participation, in which participants either have no voice at all, or witness one-sided announcements, or

are asked to tell their opinions but without having the certainty that they will actually be heard. Or, finally, participation is only a means to make decision-making processes more efficient in terms of cost and time spent, but this produces no benefit in terms of inclusion and empowerment of citizens and communities. The last two are called 'Interactive participation' and 'Self-Mobilization', and are those in which participation is understood as a right. The author points out that for a long time the first types of participation have been wrongly presented as participatory, but there would need to be a shift by institutions and people to the other two types.

Interactive participation is defined as participation in which people contribute to the development of action plans, taking control over decision-making processes and the use of available resources. This 'ceding' of decision-making power to citizens occurs with the aim of making participation an interdisciplinary process, in which a multiplicity of perspectives are sought and considered relevant. This occurs through 'structured learning processes' which, although not clearly defined by the author, refer to the importance attached to confrontation and learning as necessary elements in participatory processes. Finally, in the case of 'self-mobilization' the author refers to political participation that occurs by citizens independently of institutions. These are forms of participation from below, aimed at changing the system, which arise and develop autonomously, outside of institutional initiatives, but which nevertheless express needs and capabilities of citizens and local groups. Such groups interact with institutions only with the aim of obtaining the resources and technical advice they need to support their activities. This underscores that when we talk about 'political participation' we are not necessarily referring to top-down initiatives, but also to bottom-up processes that if supported at the institutional level can spread and produce positive effects at the local level, fostering the democratic and inclusive character that participation should have. According to Aazami (2016), because Pretty talks about participation as a right and as a means, and because the author argues that 'self-initiated mobilization may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power,' the *motivation* of those who adopt and practice participatory methods is a very important factor, if not the only, in shaping interventions and action plans.

White Table of Participation

Another distinction of various types of participation comes from author White (1996). Her scheme is very useful because it distinguishes types of participation according to the *interests* of various actors, helping to understand what conflicting ideas are behind participatory processes. The author identified four types of participation represented in a table (shown below) along with their main characteristics. The first column of the table represents the forms of participation: nominal, instrumental, representative, and transformative. The second column shows the interests toward participation from a top-down perspective, the ones of those who design and implement the programs. The third shows the interests from a bottom-up perspective, thus those of who participate (citizens, communities etc.). Finally, the last column shows the general function of the different types of participation.

With regard to the first two types of participation, on the one hand the nominal one is more a pretence, through which institutions and development agencies aim to show themselves open in order to gain people's consent, and on the other hand the 'instrumental' one has the function of making a program more cost-effective. In contrast to these, in the last two types, people's voices assume more importance in terms of influencing participatory processes. In the case of 'representative' participation, the goal from a top-down point of view is to give rise to policies and programs that, being based on people's needs and skills, are sustainable in the long run, making people independent of institutions once the project is initiated. At the same time, people in this sense have the opportunity

Table 1 Interests in participation			
Form	**Top-Down**	**Bottom-Up**	**Function**
Nominal	Legitimation	Inclusion	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency	Cost	Means
Representative	Sustainability	Leverage	Voice
Transformative	Empowerment	Empowerment	Means/End

Table 2 S. White (1996): Interests in participation

to voice their demands and be able to truly influence policies. Finally, in 'transformative' participation the main goal is empowerment, both from a top-down and bottom-up perspective. The overall function of this participation is both to be a means of empowering people to make decisions and take action, and an end to strive for so that the process of empowerment does not stop. In describing this typology, the author emphasizes a point mentioned earlier, namely that participation understood as

empowerment is a process that comes from below, from the claims of the people themselves, from their becoming aware of the role they want to play in the design and implementation of the programs that concern them. In this dynamic, as the author writes, "outsiders can only facilitate it, they cannot bring it about." (White 1996, p.146). At the same time, however, White points out that sometimes empowerment processes can also be a top-down interest of those institutions or agencies that work in solidarity with the poor or disadvantaged people in general. Sometimes these people (disadvantages) are not in a position to think about empowerment, as they have more immediate and tangible goals. In this sense, the work of some external actors in the territories, such as NGO's etc., can be very inspiring for these categories of people to think about the importance of an empowerment process understood as taking their voice and demanding that it be heard.

2.2. Co-Production and Co-Creation

2.2.1. Definition

This section is devoted to defining the concepts of co-production and co-creation and in particular how they differ from the broader concept of 'participation', what are the theoretical foundations on which they are based, what actors are involved, and also limitations, strengths and examples of these processes. Consulting the literature, it emerges that there is no clear, univocal and shared definition of the terms co-production and co-creation (Brandsen, 2018; Nabatchy, 2017). While they have become very popular and widely used concepts, at the same time the diversity of fields and disciplines from which they are studied has generated much confusion in both their definition and application, making it more difficult to capture the transformative potential of these processes and generating an underestimation of their impacts (Nabatchy, 2017). To provide some clarity, it is useful to review the historical evolution of these concepts and the theoretical foundations on which they are based.

As argued by some authors (Ansell and Torfing, 2021; Lund, 2018), the term co-production derives from the private sector, where it refers to the process of involving users in the production of a good, starting from the observation and assumption that their contribution ensures the effectiveness of the product. This assumption was later applied in the public sector as well, particularly in a period characterized by fiscal cutbacks, strained public budgets. The goal was to make services more effective by harnessing the resources of civil society (Lund, 2018). This period coincided with the spread of New

Public Management, which implied not only large cuts in public spending but also new forms of partnership between public and private entities, which were presented as opportunities for collaboration and inclusion of different actors in service production but which, according to some authors, reproduced neo-corporative principles and generated more marginalization of disadvantaged groups (Ansell and Torfing, 2021; Lund, 2018; Nabatchy, 2017). At the side of innovative private sector theories and the corporate dynamics of New Public Management, according to Lund (2018) another theory on which the concept of co-production / creation is based is the Social Innovation Theory. According to this theory, civic-initiated actions and self-organized territorial realities are able to contrast social exclusion and marginalization of certain categories, and represent a counter-hegemonic and alternative response to the dominant neoliberal discourses. In this context of recognizing the transformative potential of self-organized realities and bottom-up processes, the state becomes an 'enabling' and 'activating' state in the sense that it has to create infrastructures that enable citizens to take more and more control over policy making cycle. In this sense, co-production / creation is characterized as a process in which institutions enable citizens to engage in the creation of services and infrastructures, in which they create the conditions for bottom-up organizations to truly self-determine and have a say in shaping social policies. Co-creation thus becomes not only a matter of civic resource exploitation, as in the original vision proper to the private sector, but also of empowerment of disadvantaged groups.

Consulting the literature, it seems that the concepts of co-production and co-creation are sometimes used synonymously, interchangeably (Bradsen, 2018), sometimes they are mentioned individually, and sometimes their differences are emphasized. In this regard Bradsen (2018) argues that it is useful to distinguish them for a deeper understanding of certain social mechanisms and to avoid calling very different practices by the same name.

The author reports that first of all, co-production and co-creation have a different tradition; co-production is a term that has been employed for many years within the public sector and therefore its meaning is more crystallized and shared, while co-creation is a newer term and only recently has been employed to refer to public policy. In any case, both terms have to do with concepts such as collaborative governance, community involvement, participation and civic engagement. At the conceptual level what makes them similar is that they both refer to the direct and active input of citizens (as individuals or as a community) in decision-making processes and the production of outcomes (Ansell and Torfing, 2021; Brandsen, 2018). The input is active in the sense that they are not just

beneficiaries of a product but collaborate in the creation or implementation of it. They are seen as valuable partners in public service delivery and there is always collaboration between them and professionalized service providers (Brandsen, 2018; Voorberg, 2015). In terms of differences, as Brandsen (2018) argues, the most widely shared concerns the stages of a project to which the two concepts refer. Co-production generally refers to citizen input in the final stages of decision making, those of implementation and service delivery, stages in which the form of the project has already been conceived and created. In the case of co-creation, citizens are present at all stages, from conception to implementation, covering a role at the strategic level. To this definition Ansell and Torfing (2021) add that while co-production is an exchange relationship between private users and public providers, co-creation involves a diverse set of actors "involved-ideally on equal footing-in a collaborative endeavor to define common problems and design and implement new, better, yet feasible, public solutions" (Ansell and Torfing, 2021, p.6). This definition seems to underscore what Voorberg (2015) argues, namely that co-creation literature tends to emphasize this concept as a value. This different kind of citizen presence according to Ansell and Torfing (2021) also emphasizes the kind of power relationship that characterizes these processes. In co-production the relationship is vertical and asymmetrical, such that citizens have no power over the initial stages of a project, whereas in co-creation their presence in all stages implies horizontal and interdependent relationships.

According to Ansel and Torfing (2021) co-creation is defined as a more complex process (than co-production) which aim is to achieve innovation, considered increasingly an important aspect of public sector agenda. To this end what co-creation add to the more general concept of participation is a collaboration at all stage of a project, in which any actor has a fundamental role for the entire project. In this sense Gouaghe (2021) conceptualized a new Arnstein ladder, shown in *table 3*, in which he added, together with the forms of participation defined by the author, a new different type defined 'co-creation'. It identifies a type of participation in which citizens collaborate with other stakeholders in the identification and ideations of action plans for a project or public policy (Gouache, 2021). At this level of participation therefore, there is no dominance of power of one actor over another as in cases of 'tokenism' or 'citizen control'.

According to some authors (Gaete Cruz, 2022; Leino and Puumala, 2020) the objective of co-creation is to contribute to solve the complex problems that nowadays affects particularly the urban space (Leino and Puumala, 2020). So co-creation is a process of
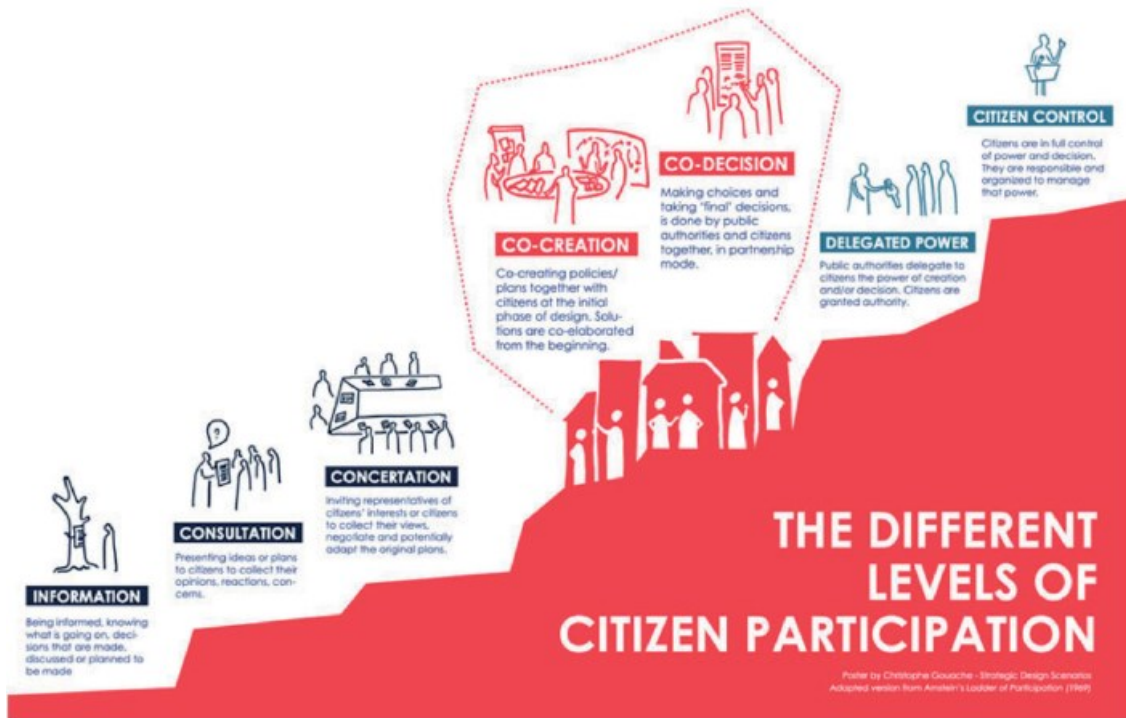
Table 3 Adapted model of Arnstein's participation ladder by Christophe Gouache (2021)

collaboration, seen as a way to find common solutions to complex problems. It is often underlined that, since co-production and co-creation are more forms of collaboration than form of what is traditionally defined participation, they implied an overcoming of the hierarchical relations of power between the different actors, and also of the dualism of top-down or bottom-up processes. According to Leino and Puumala (2020) they guarantee a more horizontal than vertical relationship between public authority and citizens and "advocate the importance of equal relations between service users and professionals" (Farr 2017, p.626).

So according to this literature co-creation has the implicit intention and also capacity to overcome traditional power relations, but this should not taken for granted, since power is a very delicate aspect when the involvement of citizen in public choices occur. To this aspect and to the barriers to co-production and co-creation is dedicated the sub-paragraph "Limits and Barriers of Co-Production and Co-Creation".

2.2.2. Actors and Roles

As written earlier, co-production and co-creation processes involve a plethora of actors (Ansell and Torfing, 2021) and imply a new allocation of the roles of these various actors, who mainly are: planners, public authorities and citizens (Lund, 2018). First of all, citizens play a more active and central role, and this can be either through self-organizing

activism realities or through institutional initiatives, such as living labs. In this sense Voorberg (2015) distinguishes three types of citizens (participation), based on *when* and *how* they are active in the various stages of a project: citizens as co-implementers; as co-designers; as initiators. Citizens as co-implementers collaborate in getting a decision or a project implemented. In the case of citizens as co-designers they collaborate in the design of a service. So in both cases citizens take voice and are active when the foundational decisions have already been made, unlike the case where they can be identified as co-initiators. This typology is very important for the case study of this thesis as it emphasizes the role of citizens as formulators of instances and initiators of projects from below. In this dynamic, citizens are initiators and government and institutions as follow-on actors. Moreover, as Rossi (2004) argues, this dynamic emphasizes the fundamental contribution that citizen initiatives and mobilizations from below sometimes have in the dynamics of space production, triggering processes of change at the urban level.

Alongside citizens, Lund (2018), as written above, identifies planners and public authority as key actors in co-creation processes. But what, according to the author, is the role of these two actors? Planners play a role that moves from being experts in developing action plans and strategies for a given area, thus offering the technique expertise needed for a spatial project, to being facilitators of processes aimed at linking local and urban actors and networks and creating new ones. They thus seek to create a dialogue between different actors, building networks between them. The goal of these networks is to collectively identify certain problems and think about possible solutions, bringing together different knowledge and skills. Bon (2023) adds that the role of designers (referring more to co-design processes than co-creation) is to "mediate among different interests, thus, again, amplifying individual interests into public interests by using their (the designer's) specific competencies." (Bon, 2023, p.59) According to the author, co-creation processes are agonistic in nature, thus implying, by involving different actors, conflicts and disputes due to different interests. Planners, who in Bon's case are designers/architects, mediating between different interests, thus seem to have a neutral role, one that is exclusively technical rather than political. While the main role of public authority is to be an 'enabling state' (Lund, 2018, p.10). The state should therefore facilitate co-creation processes by providing the opportunities, arenas, and power for civic networks to form and act. This ability is especially important because, as argued by Sirianni (2009), civic activity in the form of political parties, associations has declined over the years, leading to an erosion of the civic infrastructure for collective action.

To end, the type of actors and the different type of citizen highlighted by Voorberg (2015) is important because it tells us the different origin of the co-creation process. If citizen are co-implementer is clear that the process is initiated by a planner or public authorities and this could reproduce power dynamics that don't alterate power relations. While if the citizen are initiator is more probable that a dimension of agonism and of conflict, together with the cooperation, is still present in the relation guarantying a more democratic and bottom-up dialogue and the effective empowerment of citizens.

2.2.3. Limits and Critical Issues

Some authors indicate what are the possible barriers (Ansell and Torfing, 2021) to co-production and co-creation, others what could be the critical issues of this processes in terms of power relations between different actors (Farr, 2017) and of depoliticization (Lund, 2018).

According to Ansell and Torfing (2021) there are several barriers to co-creation, which prevent its effective implementation as a collaborative process characterized by horizontal relationships among various actors. First, one barrier is the traditional perception of local leadership. For some politicians, their authority and decision-making power is legitimized by the political mandate obtained through elections. In this view, local politicians may be reticent to initiate co-creation processes, for fear that the involvement of small groups of citizens will undermine their authority and legitimate decision-making power. The traditional view also relates to the notion that policymaking means prioritizing public solutions according to the available budget and that therefore open dialogue with citizens would create in them the illusion that they can get everything they want, regardless of the limited budget.

Another interesting barrier is the lack of institutional arenas that involve both political authorities and citizens. According to the authors, it is difficult to create arenas that engage citizens but do not produce some form of social exclusion and the "participatory selection biases that undermine democratic legitimacy." (Ansell and Torfing, 2021, p.7). As written by Leino and Puumala (2020) "With participation becoming more polarized (Griggs et al., 2014), a critical reflection on who participate in co-creative processes, whose voices and views get heard through them, is called for. After all, citizens are diverse and some of them have more resources – time, energy, information, and networks

– to participate in co-creative processes than others" (Leino and Puumala, 2020, p.783). As the authors argue, the presence of these barriers requires a strategic management of the transition to co-creation. Strategic management refers to the importance of considering what are these barrieres to co-creation in order to prevent it from being a "locus of destructive conflicts or idle talk leading to the co-destruction of value" (Ansell and Torfing, 2021, p.8)

According to Farr (2017), on the one hand co-creation advocates for equitable relationships between citizens/service users and professionals, but on the other hand these relationships imply power dynamics that need to be deepened and understood, again from the perspective of what Ansell and Torfing call "strategic management of the transition to co-creation" (Ansell and Torfing, 2021, p.8). Farr's analysis starts from the assumption that power dynamics in co-creation can both reproduce relations of domination and be potentially emancipatory. Here the focus is on the power as domination, while its emancipatory effects will be presented in the next paragraph, dedicated to the strengths of co-creation. Farr (2017) reports three dimensions of power to analyze how it can influence co-creation processes. The first dimension is power as domination and as legitimate power. These forms of power has always been challenged by social movements, which generate, out of institution, great alternatives, challenging hegemonic power and the status quo. Conversely, if co-creation takes place within institutional frames, it could obscure the conflictual aspect between the parties, which is fundamental to a democracy and critical to make the voice and action of citizens and service user movements truly autonomous and innovative. The second dimension concerns the hidden omission of alternative, a very important aspect of neoliberal rhetoric, through which aspects such as service efficiency and effectiveness and cost reduction have become the sole goals of public policies. When developed in this framework, the process of co-creation, by putting service improvement exclusively first, risks hiding or weakening democratic contestation, thus maintaining power relations rather than creating peer-to-peer confrontation. Another dimension refers to power as a constitute of social life in the sense that subjectivities can be mobilized and shaped through discourses and through certain ways of governing. Co-creation in a neo-liberal frame, may be at the discursive level a tool used for the empowerment of civil society, but in reality this is only used to maintain cohesive relations thus avoiding forms of conflict and contestation. In this sense co-creation is a way to "regulate subjectivity and reproduce relations of domination" (Farr, 2017, p.627). So it risk to reproduce power dynamics that have domination effects

on citizens, reinforcing inequality among actors, despite the fact that they talk about collaboration. As the author writes, however, co-creation is also a moment of social interaction, involving a sharing of power that could generate positive and emancipatory effects. This aspect will be elucidated in the section dedicated to the 'strengths' of co-creation.

Another very interesting analysis of what the critical issues of co-creation processes may be is presented by Lund (2018). According to the author, if individuals participate only as bearers of knowledge, resources, and not as representatives of groups and collective instances, the risk is that co-creation becomes a de-politicized process, in which therefore people participate as individuals useful to an end, not as collectivities that have a political character. The risk of engaging solely on the basis of expertise is to shift the focus only to the ability to solve problems and find solutions to urban life, moving away from the importance of the right to influence political arenas and change them. The issue of depolitization doesn't matter if the perceived problems of citizen are solved thought the process of co-creation. The point stressed by the autor is if these problems are these of the most marginalized poeple or these defined by the powerful. As Lund writes "it is important not to forget issues of power and inclusion in co-creation processes, particularly as they relate to the identification and prioritisation of problems, after which, when coming up with solutions to these collectively identified problems, such issues may recede in importance" (Lund, 2018, p.12).

To end the analysis of limits and barriers to co-creation, as Leino and Puumala write "Researchers have made critical remarks on the objectives and usefulness of top-down led co-creation processes, where a clear mission or well-thought agenda is missing. There is a risk that co-creation will represent more a trend of participation for participation's sake, rather than an avenue for a radical change within urban development" (Leino and Puumala, 2020, p.782). This point stress the importance of a 'mission' when processes of co-creation are developed. It is important to have in mind why is fundamental a collaboration with citizens, with social organizations and bottom-up realities.

2.2.4. Strenghts and Potential

Along with the limitations and critical issues that characterize co-creation and co-production, it is also necessary to identify what are the strengths and potentials of these processes.

As Leino and Puumala (2020) argue, advocates of co-creation claim that this process challenges the traditional way of making policy and conceiving of public policy, characterized by public services monopolies and public private competition. Co-creation therefore challenges the perception that public policies are implemented through authoritative processes, and, by proposing a collaborative model, breaks down the hierarchical and linear conception that involves only top-down or bottom-up processes. So one of the most frequently cited potential, as Leino and Puumala (2020) write, is "based on its promise to break down hierarchies between local government, business, universities, citizens, and other stakeholders. It is neither a top-down, nor a bottom-up process, but involves a multi-directional approach to problem solving." (Leino and Puumala, 2020, p.785) Another important aspect of co-creation is that, according to the authors, it could also challenge traditional participatory processes where, as was written in the section on participation, these are only opportunities to consult citizens' vision but do not produce any real results or change. Co-creation therefore could go beyond participation as a formal process and identify itself as a more substantive process that produces real transformations in terms of "producing knowledge with residents" (Leino and Puumala, 2020, p.788), of social justice and promoting inclusiveness. The aspect of real and substantive transformation ties in very much with what Farr (2017) writes about when discussing Realist Social Theory.

As Farr (2017) argues, power dynamic that is present in co-creation process could produce domination effects but also emancipatory effects, if all parties benefit from its exercise. These positive effects of shared power are mentioned in Realist Social Theory. According to this theory, social interactions can generate substantial changes in power structures and in those who exercise it. When interacting, people exchange ideas, viewpoints, social or political positions, and this can generate reflections that lead them to and question their roles and ideas. In this sense, interactions produce change first at the personal level and then, potentially, at the structural and cultural level. These effects are associated with the concept of "power with," or the collective power that emerges from the ability to work together. In this sense, shared power can generate transformation, emancipation and not domination. From this perspective, co-creation becomes an occasion in which shared power means giving space for social interaction, confrontation, real listening to the voices involved and thus being a truly emancipatory tool.

2.2.5 Challenges

As written by some authors (Ansell and Torfing, 2021; Brandsen, 2018) co-production and co-creation are innovative processes that aim to overcome the hierarchical dynamics inherent in decision-making processes by creating horizontal, dialogic relationships among a diverse set of actors (Leino and Puumala, 2020). This multi-actor, multi-sectoral approach creates very important challenges for co-creation. The following are the challenges identified by some researchers that are considered important for the purpose of the subject of this thesis.

First of all, as Bon (2023) reports, because co-creation involves the engagement of actors who have very different backgrounds, knowledge, and social positions, it is inevitable that conflicts and battles related to such diversity will arise. So, the challenge and difficulty lies in aligning diverse interests in a goal that is common to all. Quoting Manzini (2016), the author reports this definition of co-creation:

"A complex, contradictory, sometimes antagonistic process, in which different stakeholders (design experts included) bring their specific skills and their culture. It is a social conversation in which everybody is allowed to bring ideas and take action, even though these ideas and actions could sometimes generate problems and tensions" *(Manzini, 2016, p.).*

In this definition, therefore, the importance of antagonism, conflict and tension between the parties involved emerges as characteristics that on the one hand determine the democratic potential of co-creative processes and on the other distinguish co-creation from other types of participation. In a similar vein to Ralist Social Theory, the author argues that the encounter of different points of view, the exchange between actors with different backgrounds allow new ideas to emerge, challenge the dominant consensus and "promote a more vibrant and democratic public sphere" (Bon, 2023, p.59). In addition, from a democratization perspective, it is important to move from antagonism to agonism so that co-design is not identified only as the presence of conflict for its own sake, but as an effort to find common solutions and create a sense of shared ownership.

Always approaching the Realist Social Theory described by Farr (2017) Leino and Puumala (2020) list the challenges associated with co-creation starting with defining it as: "a more creative and interactive process which challenges the views of all parties and seeks to combine professional and local expertise in new ways" (Leino and Puumala, 2020, p.793). What challenges does a process defined in this way pose? The authors

report three major challenges, namely: participants' different social worlds and resources; the difficulty to model co-creation due to its context specificity; and the gap between knowledge creation and knowledge use. The first challenge refers to the issue of equal access that co-creation advocates for but which raises two important issues to consider. First, the authors argue that the traditional conception linked to institutional figures can demoralize other actors to take part in processes where they have to confront them. In addition, the presence of highly divergent social worlds and the heterogeneity expected from co-creative processes require great care regarding the accessibility of certain categories. There is a need for awareness on the part of co-design promoters-institutional figures, planners etc.-that people who are in a non-privileged and marginalized social position are disadvantaged in accessing these processes. It is therefore necessary to find strategies to reach these groups as well if such processes are to be truly equitable in terms of accessibility. The second challenge relates to the need to consider the contextual specificity of co-creation processes. The ways in which this process is developed, the type of actors who are involved, the ways in which the dialogue between them takes place, cannot be the same for every territorial context, but rather depend on it. Moreover, co-creation requires a lot of effort in terms of time on the part of all actors. And this presents a challenge not only because it is not taken for granted that participants-including citizens-have enough time to devote to these processes, but also because current institutional practices tend to be focus on short-term efficiency, stable operations, and risk elimination. The last challenge is related to the power disparity aspect, which plays a very crucial role if co-creation is to be made a vehicle for participatory democracy. Co-creation is not a neautral process that works on its own, as if it were a magic formula. As was written in the section on participation, again co-creation can only work if those who advocate for it promote it from a participatory democracy perspective and keeping in mind that there is an imbalance of power that needs to be re-settled.

2.3. Self-Organization

Boonstra and Boelens (2011) before giving a definition of the concept of self-organization, write that participation in spatial planning has failed in terms of increased inclusiveness, democracy and representativeness of the most disadvantaged groups in civil society. There are mainly two reasons for this failure: first, because participatory

processes take place within context and under institutional control, and because governments tend not to be open and adaptive to civil society initiatives, proving unable to cope with the increasing complexity that characterizes today's society. So, although participatory forms have evolved over the years from consultation, collaboration to forms of delegated management, they have not changed one important aspect, which is that they are subject to conditions and rules imposed by governments. Even planners, aimed at working on the ground and with citizens, are often engaged by institutions, thus presenting the limitation of being subject to government authority and serving the political interests of incumbent governments. Another critical issue with top-down participatory processes is that they favor more 'professionalized citizens' i.e., citizens more familiar with governmental processes, and with more energy in terms of time and dialogical skills, at the expense of more disadvantaged groups. According to the authors, faced with the failures of top-down participation, it is necessary to find theoretical alternatives regarding the way space and society are conceived and that support new tools for thinking about participation. First of all, it is necessary to recognize that institutions are not the only actors operating in terms of planning in territories; there are other actors, in business or civil society, acting in this sphere outside institutional control. Urban space therefore is characterized by a multiplicity of actors, who experience and conceive of it in different ways, making it a place of "acute struggles over whose 'reading' of space should take priority" (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011, p.108).

In a complex society characterized by the interaction of people and places, self-organization is associated by the authors with movements that arise spontaneously outside of state control. It thus arises from the emergence of social structures that are independent of external agents. In this context, the authors define self-organization as: "initiatives that originate in civil society from autonomous community-based networks of citizens, who are part of the urban system but independent of government procedures." (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011, p.99) What distinguishes participation from self-organization is that the former occurs within an institutional context, where the initiators are the governors, while the latter occurs outside of state control, and is characterized by activities, goals, and visions that are established by citizens for citizens. In the classical notion of government versus civil society, self-organization is identified solely as a form of countervailing power, in an exclusively conflictual relationship with governmental logics. New urban projects in Europe in which self-organized realities play an important role show that there can be an alternative to this dichotomous view, in which institutions adapt to bottom-up

initiatives and in which associations themselves benefit from this openness. According to the authors, forms of self-organization are not always born with grand claims or ideas about how to do politics or the importance of self-determination. Rather, they arise, as written above, spontaneously, as a natural consequence of social interaction between actors who share spaces, needs and desires. So self-organization is something that either happens or does not happen. But the moment it arises it expresses socio-spatial urgencies and needs that have no place outside of it. To prevent participatory processes from continuing to be used only instrumentally by government and to ensure that they truly become processes that guarantee a democratic dialogue between government and civil society, participation must become a process of openness to the demands and initiatives that arise from below, making self-organization the "next step in the process of embedded spatial planning." (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011, p.117) It must therefore be protected, recognized and made a protagonist in the planning processes of cities. To work in this direction, the figure of planners must also change, in terms especially of independence from institutional figures and greater involvement with territorial realities. They should follow the realities from below with an open and judgment-free lens, and become a member respected by citizens and associations.

Cellamare (2022) also traces the spread in recent years of forms of self-organization as a response to the failures of urban planning and the inability of governments to respond to the needs and complexities of today's society. For this reason, forms of associationism or spontaneous participation are increasingly present in cities, giving rise to social laboratories through which they contribute to the urban regeneration of often degraded contexts. Such laboratories are characterized as tools of aggregation, of planning, contributing to the transformation not only physical of territories but also anthropological. In this text Cellamare, speaking of self-organization and urban regeneration, makes particular reference to the context of Rome, pointing out that it is in the city's suburbs that one finds more and more forms of self-organization, bottom-up welfare, and mutual aid realities. There are two aspects that most characterize self-organization and socio-territorial bottom-up initiatives in general. On the one hand, they respond to the absence of institutions in territories, to their inability to respond to social needs, partly due to the rise of neoliberal policies that have undermined the existence of the welfare state. They therefore respond to social needs, taking on a 'substitutive' role, as they fill gaps that other actors actually have to take care of. This aspect can be problematic, as it draws attention to the distribution of responsibilities in spatial and social planning. On the other

hand, however, these realities represent great planning capacities of bottom-up initiatives and show viable alternatives for local development. In concrete terms then, self-organized realities operate forms of urban regeneration, recovering spaces that they give back to the community, carrying out cultural activities and creating sociality and aggregation. Because they respond to the institutional absence, the abandonment by governments of the most peripheral and marginalized areas, the relationship and dialogue with these figures is often conflictual. In this sense, according to the author, self-organization and what it produces must be recognized, protected and valued by the istitutions even if at present co-creation pathways aimed at creating synergies with these realities are hardly built. This represents, as also argued by Boonstra and Boelens (2018), an open challenge for urban public policy.

In the article 'Multiplex City: the process of urban change in the historic center of Naples,' Rossi (2004) analyzes the urban development that has taken place in the historic center of Naples in recent years, focusing on which local actors have contributed to this process. To this end, Rossi (2004) introduces the concept of Multiplex City, through which he identifies the city as a place where a multiplicity of actors live and act, producing change. The author has elaborated a scheme, shown below, in which he represents the dynamics of the multiplex city, characterized by actors acting from above, namely political elites and judges, who represent legitimate power, and actors from the bottom, namely social
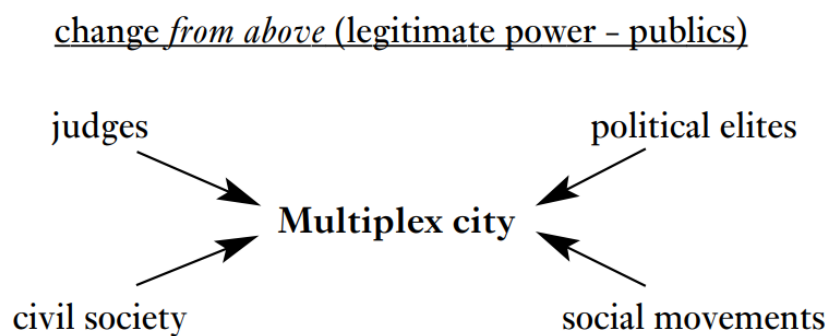
Table 4 The Multiplex City, Rossi (2004)

movements and organized civil society, holders of constituent power, whereby their

decision-making capacity is not formalized at the institutional level but nevertheless trigger processes of change in the city. Similarly, Fraire, cited by Rossi himself (2004), offers a distinction between 'publics,' represented by actors who have a dominant position in society, and 'counter-publics,' represented by subordinate actors.

Through this scheme and through the case study, the author aims to highlight that local governments and governments are not the only actors that have a transformative impact within cities. Rather, alongside them, actors operating from below produce as many outcomes, triggering dynamics of change in urban contexts and actively contributing to their development. These actors are represented as written above by institutionalized civil society and urban social movements. While the former is characterized by institutional support and recognition, the latter tend to have a conflictual relationship with 'legitimate power' and to be spokespersons for anti-systemic and alternative visions to the dominant urban development models. So, on the one hand what differentiates these two bottom-up actors are their strategies of actions and ideologies, but on the other hand they act in the common goal of making the public sphere more democratic. Because this section is devoted to self-organization, it is important to focus on what characterizes urban social movements.

In analyzing the way the historic center of Naples has changed over the past decade, the author reports on the role and influence that urban movements have had in this process. These movements have first and foremost been spokesmen for criticism of the development model that has characterized the transformation of the historic center, a model based on commercialization and privatization of public space, which has exclusively favored the opening of commercial activities at the expense of places of sociability and aggregation. With this consciousness, urban movements are acting to reverse this trend, the cause according to them of the degradation of the historic center. They not only raise political issues, but actively work by creating development alternatives and an 'alternative sociability within public space'. In Rossi's case study, they did so by occupying abandoned spaces, reclaimed to provide services to citizens, but also by reappropriating and revaluing public places whose access was previously denied. While acting confrontationally to institutional power, denouncing their actions, in recent years social movements have been open to a dialogue with institutions, hoping to arrive at negotiations that would recognize and protect their actions. These negotiations in the case considered by Rossi did not produce positive results, and this may be indicative of a 'persisting institutional inertia' (Rossi, 2004, p.166), which refers to the inability of institutions to open up to civic demands from below (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011) and the absence of institutional pathways to create synergies with social realities active in the territories (Cellamare, 2022).

In this article, the author by referring to social movements traces the spread of grassroots movements in the historic center to both the concentration of lower class people in this area and the increasing presence of students, who have been key players in social and political mobilizations since the 1970s. Of course, this thesis does not refer to these actors, however these references are indicative of how certain dynamics from below are highly specific, contextualized in historical and spatial contexts all different from each other. Therefore when interpreting dynamics from below, processes of self-organization cannot be used as ascribed categories with their own characteristics, but must be understood in relational terms (Boonstra and Boelens, 2011) to the dynamic context (Cellamare, 2022) in which they develop.

As Horelli (2015) argues, today's society is influenced by global forces and dynamics, such as climate change, financial crises etc., that disorient people in local communities, and there are those who react by raising their voices, claiming social justice, and those who take a step back, adapting to the dominant development models. Two main avenues open up in response to this complex social situation. First, governments and urban planners must find new ways to support local communities and thus are called upon to open up to the demands and capacities of civil society. This openness has been characterized by a period of top-down participatory processes, but these, as the preceding authors also wrote, have not led to great results in terms of sustainability and real social inclusion. Alongside these attempts at government openness, new forms of urban culture have developed "characterized by glocal efforts of self-organization around different issues, whether ecology, civil rights or living conditions." (Horelli, 2015, p.1) According to the author, there have been intents by some governments to move toward urban planning based on the experiences of the self-organization of groups, associations and social networks already present in some urban contexts. So far, however, these have only been intentions that have not led to meaningful collaborations and synergies between formal urban planning and self-organization. In any case, some bottom-up initiatives are becoming stronger and stronger, and the development of new techonologies is very useful in fostering activities and the impact they have at the local level. This underscores that there are conditions for urban planning based on self-organization; it is up to governments to decide whether to open themselves up to these realities. This openness would foster truly democratic processes, creating mixed-spheres in which local people and representatives of public institutions meet and collaborate. When self-organization intersects with urban planning, because of the proximity between local governments and

citizens, it is easier for this dialogue to take place. In this sense, urban planning is a very useful ground for observing how the relationship between formal and informal spheres develops and the importance this has at the level of democracy and social justice. So the importance of self-organization in urban planning is that it bring new actors and thoughts promoting an alternative territorial solution and challenging traditional exercise of power in city. Self-organization has increased but nevertheless the impact that "those who have no voice" have on policy is still a very important challenge.

So far, we have seen how self-organization tends to develop at the spatial level addressing social issues and challenges, related to the marginalization of disadvantaged groups and the individualism of globalization. Hou (2011) introduces this theme by talking about the erosion of public space and public life. At the socio-cultural level there has been a tendency to put private interests before public issues, and this aspect of today's society is recognizable both in architecture characterized by few spaces aimed at social aggregation and in urban planning increasingly based on the construction of buildings such as supermalls and megastructures "that have supplanted traditional streets and disciplined their spontaneity." (Davis, 1992, p.155) This tendency to privatize space through exclusively commercial activities has implication at the political level as well, as opportunities for confrontation and collective discussion diminish. So public spaces are never guaranteed, but are always the result of a concerted struggle between different actors with different interests. According to the author, public space is in a continuous state of emergency, and is a battleground characterized by those who want to defend it, and those who want to take it away from the community. When socio-territorial movements and forms of self-organization occupy abandoned spaces, streets, places they are carrying out actions aimed at opening public space, giving back to communities something that has been denied to them to further someone else's private interests. One example is the Critical Mass movement, a movement of bicyclists occupying city streets to claim the right to the street by these individuals as well and denouncing the exclusive use that has been reserved for cars instead. These uses of space mean that they become a symbol of social struggles.

Alongside actions similar to demonstrations or momentary occupation of public space, the author also mentions citizen initiatives that move on a more everyday level. Through them, people generate new uses of public space and transform urban space by making it "a site of potentiality, difference, and delightful encounters." (Watson, 2006, p.19). Everyday practices, such as community gardens, seem not to be radical forms of

insurgency, as mass protests such as Critical Mass mentioned earlier may seem, but some results of reclaiming spaces and places would not be possible without the battles and clashes that initiatives on this level also generate. As Hou writes, the world and cities are populated with struggles by individuals and communities such as activists, architects and landscape architects, community organizers, grafiti artists, homeowners, immigrants, parents, planners, sex workers, squatters, students, teachers, and urban farmers etc. All these actors do not necessarily fit into Fraser's 'subaltern counter public' in terms of resistance to hegemonic regulations of public space but nevertheless become active participants in a 'discourse of contestation.' In this sense Hou speaks of 'insurgent public space' to identify all those actions from below that represent a contestation but also an alternative use of public space and how it is conceived in the era of globalization.

To conclude this chapter, what emerges from the literature on participatory processes is that motives, interests and extent of citizen control over such processes (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995; White, 1996), affect interventions and their effects. Hence, top-down participation tends to favor the interests of those who already have decision-making power (institutions), which are to make projects more cost-effective and to build and strengthen ties, and thus consensus, with people. Bottom-up participation, on the other hand, tends to question the status quo, the distribution of power, and claims the importance that people affected by policies have in the decision-making processes that coinvoloute them and the development of the areas where they live. Co-production and co-creation seeks to go beyond these top-down or bottom-up processes and are described as processes in which relationships are horizontal and in which each person, from political actors to citizens, contributes according to their skills and expertise. They are multi-actor processes, in which an important role is also played by figures defined in the literature as 'planners' (architects, urban planners), who act as mediators or offer their expertise in dialogue with citizens and the demands they express. So it is necessary to recognize that institutional figures are not the only ones operating in the territories or having a say in defining their development. over the years, in response to a shift of institutions away from the territorial dimension and global dynamics that favor a privatized use of space, in which the centers of aggregation are commercial centers and not the squares and streets, movements have developed from below that redefine the use of space and offer socio-cultural services that would otherwise be absent. This represents both the presence of an alternative in the way of thinking about urban development, in which proximity, recuperation, aggregation and political confrontation are privileged, and the design

capacity of citizens and self-organized realities. These realities must therefore be protected and recognized through collaborative pathways, potentially represented by co-production and co-creation processes.

CHAPTER 3. TERRITORIAL FRAMEWORK: Past and Present of a *Borgata*

This chapter is dedicated to the territorial framework of Quarticciolo (a suburban district in the south-east of Rome), which represents the territorial context of the Case Study of this thesis. This chapter presents the history of Quarticciolo in order to observe how the processes of marginalisation of the neighbourhood - which derive from the fascist period and the urban planning that had been carried out of the suburbs - still characterise it. In addition to the history, its current demographic, social and economic characteristics will be described and the main actors that move in this context will be introduced, thus offering a framework to understand what will be addressed in section 4 of the case study.

3.1. Quarticciolo: History of a *Borgata*

Quarticciolo distric ist located in the south-east of Rome. It is a Borgata, a term that offers a more specific connotation of the suburban concept. The history of the birth of the Borgate and in particular the Borgata Quarticciolo is summarised hereafter.

Quarticciolo is part of the Borgate Ufficiali, an urban planning programme for residential housing implemented by the Istituto Fascista Autonomo Case Popolari (IFACP) in 1930. The Borgate Ufficiali differed from the first-generation Borgate which represented an emergency response for the placement of the 'evictees', i.e., the poor people who lived in shacks in the city centre, who were progressively driven out during the Fascist twenty-year period according to the political intentions of a new public and urban order (Olcuire, 2019; Nardis, 2022). At that time, the Borgate were any place outside the centre of Rome, but they did not represent a specific type of locality, nor was there a structured plan for this de-localisation of evictees (Nardis, 2022). Therefore, the criteria that guided public housing policies were of an emergency nature as they were dictated exclusively by needs such as maintaining public order and marginalising critical social classes, but lacked a real urban design and were characterised by poor building quality (Cianfarani, Porqueddu, 2012).

With the birth of the IFACP there was a shift from an emergency response to a structured response. In fact, the institute, unlike the bodies[1] that previously dealt with public housing, operating from the perspective of realising the fascist city, approached the issue of building new neighbourhoods for social housing by posing questions, namely: how to

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[1] That is, the Governatorato (governorship), direct executor of Mussolini's will (Cianfarani, Porqueddu, 2012)

mitigate the confinement of the social classes forcibly expelled from the city, making acceptable a process that is actually coercive; how to provide an image of indigenous rural life; how to provide an urban scene that has isolated building nuclei (Cianfarani, Porcheddu, 2012).

The institute tries to answer these questions with a hybrid architectural style, in which the modern movement[2] is combined with the Roman tradition. The inspiration from the modern movement makes explicit the intention to proceed with the construction work of the Borgata through criteria of functionality and low cost, which are therefore reflected in an instance of strict economy, a standardisation of construction elements and a reduced timeframe of the work. On the other hand, the Roman tradition is visible in a preservation of the autochthonous character of the building types already constructed in the Roman landscape (Cianfrani, Porcheddu, 2012; Nardis, 2022). Thus, the precise intent of the institute is to build neighbourhoods outside the city that respond to the housing emergency with a plan that holds together the low cost of construction, short timeframes and also a preservation of the Roman style. In this way, the political intentions of marginalising 'unsavoury' categories are held together, but also the illusion of those who live inside the suburbs of being inside Rome, while remaining outside of it and yet being totally isolated from the centre.

Figure 1 Picture of Quarticciolo with borders highlighted. Imagine elaborated by the author.

Where previously the term Borgata referred to extensive nuclei of families in semi-detached houses, it now indicates an area peripheral to the centre that is compact and has a semi-rural vocation. In this sense, as Cianfarani and Porcheddu (2012: 111) write, the institution of the Borgate responds 'to the political need to build isolated but strongly compact satellite

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[2] The Modern Movement in the history of architecture was a period between the two world wars, aimed at renewing the character, planning and principles of architecture, town planning and design. Its protagonists were those architects who based their projects on criteria of functionality and new aesthetic concepts. Source: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movimento_Moderno

neighbourhoods. questionable resolution of the problem of increasing urbanisation through the building of self-sufficient rural outposts.' Rome, with the construction of the borgate, was thus constituted by the historic city enclosed and studded with borgate scattered in the countryside. This isolation of the Borgate makes two aspects clear: the process of marginalisation of these places and those who inhabit them, and their autarkic character, which reinforces the intent of marginalisation. The marginalisation of the inhabitants, as already mentioned, responds to the intention to deprive the historical city of the poorest and most disadvantaged sections of the population. This is a real spatial segregation, and Quarticciolo is an exemplary expression of it (Brignone et al., 2022). Quarticciolo is in fact bounded by wide streets, namely by Via Prenestina to the north and Viale Palmiro Togliatti to the west.

3.2. Quarticciolo today

Today, following the urbanisation process of the areas around Quarticciolo and the extension of the city, the neighbourhood can no longer be considered physically and geographically peripheral, but rather incorporated into the city of Rome. Despite this, Quarticciolo is still in a state of social distress and marginalisation.

Quarticciolo is part of Rome's Municipality V, specifically zone 7b Alessandrina. This area of Rome is characterised by high population density, a high percentage of foreign population and intensive and social housing. It is a particularly poor quadrant, characterised by a very low average income that places it second to last in the capital (Brignone et al., 2022). In particular, the Alessandrina area, which includes Quarticciolo, is made up of a high number of people who are considered 'non-labour force' (i.e. 10,416 out of 17,078 individuals), i.e. housewives, pensioners and students. This high unemployment rate makes it sometimes necessary to rely on illegal forms of support, which in particular make Quarticciolo a district with an intense drug dealing activity. As Alessia of the neighbourhood committee said during a public meeting held in the neighbourhood[3] there is a vicious circle. In fact, the neighbourhood is poor in public

Figure Picture of Quarticciolo with borders highlighted. Imagine elaborated by the author. Source of map: Google Earth

services and commercial activities, so there are not many job prospects for those who live there. This is why illegality represents an attractive alternative, which reinforces it, also increasing the perception of insecurity and

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[3] Round table held at the Neighbourhood House on 2 March 2024 in Quarticciolo. It was a public meeting with actors involved in local development.

discomfort in the neighbourhood. This picture is confirmed by the Index of Social and Material Vulnerability, which for 2011 stands at 105.04, placing it in the highest range in the city of Rome (Brignone et al., 2022) and by the Index of Social Discomfort (IDS)[4] (Nardis, 2022), which in Quarticciolo is 3.9, a very high value that is second only to that of Tor Bella Monaca, another neighbourhood in the city of Rome.

The schooling rate, as calculated in the IDS, is also worrying. In fact, alongside a high level of school drop-outs, according to the graphs in Nardis' text (2022: 117), 60 per cent have a low to medium level of education and only 23 per cent have an upper secondary school diploma. Moreover, the picture is particularly problematic when compared to other neighbouring neighbourhoods, demonstrating the spatial segregation of an ERP[5] neighbourhood such as Quarticciolo.

In such a poverty-stricken context, as written in Networks of Mutualism and Civic Poles (2022) there tends to be a conflict between two distinct poles, namely between those who consider themselves to be the legitimate inhabitants of that place and those who, coming from outside, are considered to be too much. By people from outside, we mean people who for various reasons, such as ethnicity, or simply excluded from the labour market and affections, tend to move away from the city centre and to the more peripheral, but also more invisible, areas. In this situation of hardship and in a small area such as Quarticciolo, therefore, 'the spatial order contributes to the stigmatisation of certain subjectivities, identified as the main cause of the area's degradation.' (Brignone et al., 2022: 93)

In addition, today, according to Nardis (2022), there are a number of problems affecting Quarticciolo, which contribute to a situation of discomfort and isolation. A first problem relates to the overcrowding of housing, as few (council) houses are allocated. Therefore, some large families find themselves living in very cramped quarters[6]. Another housing discomfort is related to the fact that some basements, which should be used as business

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[4] 'To obtain the Index of Social Inconvenience an average is made between the values of specific indicators (which are the employment rate, the youth concentration rate (population under 25), the schooling rate (high school diploma or degree), compared to the average municipal values, which for the Municipality of Rome as a reference value was taken as zero.' (Nardis, 2022: 116)

[5] ERP stands for Public Residential Housing

[6] This aspect was extensively covered in a service of the programme 'Propaganda Live' on Quarticciolo. In the report, a video was shown in which an inhabitant of the neighbourhood showed the house and its (small) size in which he lived with his family during the Covid period, a size which also aggravated the safety condition with respect to contagions at that time. Link: https://www.la7.it/propagandalive/video/reportage-di-diego-bianchi-dal-quarticciolo-periferia-di-roma-19-10-2020-345448

premises, are occupied for housing purposes, but do not have the appropriate hygienic conditions for this purpose.

Another issue is the poor connection with the rest of the city because the perception of the neighbourhood is of an unsafe and, above all, desolate place that tends not to attract people from outside. The perception of insecurity is certainly also fuelled by poor lighting, as well as the scarcity of activities open until late. Finally, ERP is supposed to be a transitional system, supporting people in an initial phase of economic housing need. Instead, such a system tends to make the position of people living in ERP neighbourhoods stale because, as there are no favourable working and social conditions, they remain in their economically disadvantaged position without any possibility of mobilisation. In this sense, ERP neighbourhoods like Quarticciolo tend to become nuclei of residential segregation.

So, Quarticciolo today is still characterised by a spatial marginalisation of those who live there, by a concentration of poverty and scarce social mobility. This spatial segregation is palpable by physically crossing the neighbourhood. Quarticciolo in fact lies a stone's throw from the Centocelle district, and is separated from it only by the Togliatti road. Centocelle has been involved in a process of urbanisation for some years now, favoured by the growth of commercial premises and the future opening of a metro station, which connects it directly to the city centre. It is therefore an inhabited, lively and therefore safe neighbourhood. In spite of this lively situation, leaving Centocelle behind and crossing Togliatti, Quarticciolo seems to be delimited by a boundary line which, when crossed, leads to a place of its own

At first, Quarticciolo appears as desolate, silent, crossed only by those who live in the neighbourhood. It is as if it were immediately recognisable who is 'inside' the neighbourhood and who comes from 'outside'. But, despite this initial sensation, as soon as this line is crossed, the neighbourhood presents a very 'human-scale' architecture and structure (Brignone et al., 2022). The courtyards of the buildings stand out to the eye where it is possible to sit on benches, on walls or where children can play. They catch the eye because one might expect tall, grey buildings next to each other in a residential neighbourhood to create an aseptic dimension. This is not the case in Quarticciolo, where the buildings reach four or five storeys (on average), the colours are warm and the large courtyards make the neighbourhood easily accessible to pedestrians. There are many green areas, proportionate to the size of the neighbourhood but generous considering that it is a residential and urban neighbourhood, and tree-lined streets. All these elements

contribute to a pleasant and human-friendly neighbourhood, integrating housing and private spaces with public ones - parks and courtyards. If it were not left to its own devices, in terms also of the ordinary maintenance of greenery and cleanliness, it would give back to the city a *sui generis* local context not because it is abandoned (as written in the first analysis) but because it is still uncontaminated by the negative effects of urbanisation based on building speculation (figures at the end of this chapter gives a visual idea of this description).

To end, despite the beauty of the place, it appears desolate. Indeed there are not many open businesses or meeting places, except for a few spaces kept active by the self-organisation, a process that has contributed a great deal to a turnaround for a neighbourhood that seems alien to the interests (public and otherwise) of making it more liveable and safe. This process will be reported in the following section.

3.3. The development of grassroot movements and the arrival of new local actors through the squatting of the former police station

The main actors in the process of self-organisation will be described and their activities and contribution to the local development of the neighbourhood will be explored in the chapter on the case study. Here we confine ourselves to describing how these actors have become involved in the neighbourhood, in order to make clearer what will be reported in the chapter just mentioned.

An initial social movement is represented by the Movimento di lotta per la casa Romano[7] (Roman housing struggle movement), which since 1998 has occupied the former police headquarters, located in the central square of Quarticciolo, which had been in a state of neglect for years. Subsequently, the activists of the Degage[8] collective, as reported by Nardis (2022), inserted themselves within this housing occupation with the precise aim of diverting their activism from the central areas of the city to the periphery. This desire, this need, was triggered by one affair in particular involving the Tor Sapienza neighbourhood. The facts of Tor Sapienza refer to a real revolt that some inhabitants of

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[7] As Nardis (2022) reports, the occupation of premises for housing purposes is a consolidated practice in Quarticciolo. Such occupations respond to different situations of housing hardship, from those who cannot obtain housing allocations, to the homeless, etc.. Occupation for housing purposes is thus an early form of self-organisation that developed in Quarticciolo, so much so that according to a testimony reported by Nardis (2022: 119) already after World War II, some people who had lost their homes due to the bombings moved to Quarticciolo where 'there were houses'

[8] Degage is a social movement that arose from the occupation for housing purposes of a student residence in Rome

the neighbourhood carried out against a reception centre for foreign minors, demonstrating that conflict, mentioned earlier, between those in the suburbs (in this case in the Borgata) who consider themselves legitimate inhabitants and those who are not considered such, in this case migrants and people of different ethnicities. This particularly violent episode shone a light on this conflict and made the movement reflect on the conditions and state of tension in the suburbs of Rome. They thus decided to settle in the former police headquarters (in fact, Quarticciolo is located 1 km away from Tor Sapienza), where the first social space for the neighbourhood, Red Lab Quarticciolo, was created. This space was created with the clear objective of carrying out work on and with the neighbourhood (Brignone et al., 2022), to respond to the stigma of living in a peripheral context and to find solutions to the lack of commitment of the institutions (Nardis, 2022).

According to what they learnt from their personal experience as trainees in the neighbourhood, the occupiers, in their intention to work on and with the neighbourhood, never placed themselves in a position of superiority over the neighbourhood, or in a position to offer solutions for the social malaise characterising it that were not based on the will and needs expressed by the inhabitants themselves. Aware of the conditions in which the neighbourhood found itself, they slowly inserted themselves, creating social relations and mutualism, which in the first moments were realised as simple good neighbourly relations. Alessia of Quarticciolo Ribelle and the neighbourhood committee[9] said[10], for example, that the first few times they had taken up the habit with their neighbours of having breakfast together, or of preparing a meal for the whole neighbourhood. Another activist and inhabitant of Quarticciolo reported that another early habit of building relationships with the neighbourhood was to watch matches together, for example by going to the house of one of the inhabitants. It was on these occasions that Red Lab activists made themselves known and in turn came into contact with the neighbourhood's inhabitants, particularly the needs and issues they raised about living in a neighbourhood like Quarticciolo. In particular, as a movement for the right to housing, an initial objective was to offer help with issues related to the housing question, what rights were linked to this question, what requests could be raised to the institutions and so on, thus offering their expertise and knowledge in this area. Slowly this

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[9] All these actors will be reported in chapter 4 dedicated to the case study

[10] Information that emerged during one of the weekly meetings of Quarticciolo Neighbourhood Laboratory (16/01/2024)

confrontation led to a series of initiatives, of activities, led to the opening of a series of structures (the popular gymnasium, the after-school club, the quartiere house, etc.), which without these actors would probably never have opened.

Of the actors in this process of self-organisation, which from below has slowly given rise to paths of animation and activation of the territory, thus counteracting the desolation and segregation that characterises Quarticciolo, there are both historical inhabitants of the neighbourhood and, as written, people who come from outside (but who have now lived in the neighbourhood for decades[11]). 'From the Borgata for the Borgata' (figure 7) is the slogan that sums up the work of Quarticciolo Ribelle, a network of the neighbourhood's self-organised realities, and is indicative of the importance that these realities attach to the neighbourhood's history, a history, as has been written, of poverty and marginalisation, but also of rebirth and claims from below.

Figure 2 Picture of Quarticciolo today

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[11] Source: Venti anni di occupazione al Quarticciolo: intervista a tre occupanti storici. Link: https://www.infoaut.org/approfondimenti/venti-anni-di-occupazione-al-quarticciolo-intervista-a-tre-occupanti-storici

Figure 3 Quarticciolo residents in a courtyard. Source: facebook page Quarticciolo Ribelle

Figure 4 Photos of a courtyard

Figure 5 Facade of a palace, a style reminiscent of the fascist era during which the Borgata was conceived

Figure 6 Photo showing the warm colours of some of the buildings in the Quarticciolo

Figure 7 A sign outside the former Red Lab space. Translation 'Taking care of the Borgata'

CHAPTER 4. CASE STUDY: Analysis of how territorial projects are born and how they develop in Quarticciolo: role and relations between institutions, self-organisation and university

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the case study and the territorial context of Quarticciolo. It aims at presenting the actors that are the protagonists of local development processes and projects in Quarticciolo - local institutions, self-organisation, university - and what kind of relationship exists between them. First of all, it will be reported how local institutions operate in the neighbourhood, what intervention plans they have envisaged for its development, how they have carried them out, and how they have involved citizens. Then the role of self-organisation will be reported, a fundamental actor in the local development of the neighbourhood, capable of responding to its needs and of being able to accompany the conflict with the often absent institutions with high levels of consultation with them. Finally, the role of the university, which has become involved in the neighbourhood through the establishment of a Neighbourhood Laboratory, in which the university and local actors collaborate, will be reported. The projects carried out by the Laboratory will be presented and shown in a final summary scheme.

4.1. Government intervention in Quarticciolo

The aim of this section is to understand how the public is present in the neighbourhood and also how this presence is perceived by local inhabitants and associations. As reported in the text Networks of Mutualism and Civic Centre (2022), the public is strongly perceived as absent by these latter actors, an aspect that can be seen in the announcements and flyers dedicated to the appointments of neighbourhood assemblies or initiatives, parts of which will be reported in the concluding section of this section. The public interventions planned in the neighbourhood, their results, limitations and potential will be presented below. The local public actors mainly involved in local development processes in Quarticciolo are: Municipality of Rome, City Hall, ATER (the agency for public residential buildings in the Rome municipality)

4.1.1. Quarticciolo Theatre-Library: a community service in Quarticciolo

An exception of public initiative in the neighbourhood is the Quarticciolo Theatre-Library, a structure inaugurated in 2005 and born from the transformation and recovery of the former neighbourhood market. Since 2015, the theatre has been part of the 'Theatres in Common' system, which aims to create a chain of cultural garrisons in the municipality of Rome[12]. The structure is designed to house the theatre on the ground floor, the library on the upper floor and a refreshment area in the outdoor area. In an interview, an inhabitant of the neighbourhood describes it as the only real transformation that has taken place in the neighbourhood in terms of regeneration and recovery (Nardis, 2021). It represents a very important resource for the area, as it attracts spectators from all over Rome, as well as students who come to the library, making it traversed and experienced, thus combating social and cultural desertification. At the same time, however, it is not a structure capable of intercepting the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who do not consider it a place to meet or to frequent (Brignone et al., 2022). Moreover, the theatre on the first floor organises many performances, to which, however, there has been a decline in spectators over the years.

As for the library, when it was opened, it had the characteristic of offering a very inclusive schedule, so much so that it was also open on Sundays, a day when it attracted students not only from the eastern quadrant of Rome but from all over the city. Today this is no longer the case; on the contrary, in addition to being closed the entire weekend, it has very limited hours during the week. This change has undoubtedly made it much more deserted, less frequented, and also leads one to question the public's ability to build a space in the neighbourhood that is frequented by the inhabitants, capable of representing a cultural garrison in contact with the surrounding area. In this regard, the owner of the dining area, according to what emerged during an informal interview concerning the problems of keeping a business open in Quarticciolo, claims that the structure has not been adequately defended and safeguarded by those who opened it (i.e. the institutions). 'The library has not opened up to the neighbourhood but has closed in on itself. The library director is supposed to come here to see how it is going and what problems there are, but instead I haven't seen her for a year. A girl who used to work in the library came back and said she did not recognise it so deserted. Did you put in a structure? Did you remove a market to build it? Then defend it.' This statement, as well as the reduction in the

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[12] Source: https://www.teatriincomune.roma.it/teatro-biblioteca-quarticciolo/

library's hours that took away the special feature that allowed it to be frequented, reflect a lack of connection of this public facility with the neighbourhood. While the library, the theatre and its respective refreshment area represent a very important public initiative and a positive intention of the institutions towards the development of the neighbourhood, at the same time it seems that it has not been able to open itself up to the inhabitants to such an extent that it can be frequented or considered an alternative, safe and pleasant place to go.

What emerges from the owner's words regarding how the structure has changed over time, getting worse, highlights an important aspect. A single intervention, in this case the opening of a Theatre-Library, is not enough in itself to solve a given social problem plaguing an area. Perhaps it is necessary to develop projects that create real synergies with the surrounding area and that are characterised by structured paths, intentionally aimed at reaching the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. In any case, although the theatre has many limitations as has been written, over time it has proved to be a very useful structure for developing projects in collaboration with local associations. Several initiatives have been developed over time. The most recent one in which I personally participated was the 'Stories on the Margins' initiative, which consisted of a series of meetings with artists of various kinds - a photographer, a writer, a cartoonist, etc. The meetings were held in the Neighbourhood House and this undoubtedly allowed the theatre to contaminate another area of the neighbourhood, to give space to the narrative that the Quarticciolo Ribelle wanted to give of the neighbourhood, and to give value and visibility to a place considered very important by the inhabitants and the associative realities that pass through it.

4.1.2. The project 100 Squares: an open-air yard lasted twenty years

Another experience of public initiative in Quarticciolo is represented by the 100 Squares Programme, launched in 1995, which had the objective of widespread urban regeneration, based on the recovery of strategic areas for sociality, i.e. squares. The project is part of a set of public initiatives aimed at urban regeneration, especially of suburban areas, launched in the 1990s and all characterised by the attempt to implement such projects through participatory processes (Tonini, 2011). Therefore, the Quaricciolo square was one of the 100 squares selected for the programme, for which an office (in Italian: Ufficio Cento Piazze) had also been created to listen to and welcome citizens' proposals, to oversee the planning and mediate between the various actors involved: local administrations, professionals and citizens. The project was initiated by the then Mayor

Rutelli, who described it as follows: 'An urban transformation on a human scale. Not just street furniture, but meeting and exchange places: as squares have always been. [...] A way to redevelop degraded areas. The strategic revitalisation of one of the places that make up a city, not only responds to the need to redevelop it urbanistically, but also to the need to give people back areas for meeting and possible dialogue (http://archiviostorico.corriere.it)' (Girardi, 2017).

Despite the project's positive intentions in terms of redevelopment, not only urban but also social, the project in the Quarticciolo square has had very negative consequences for the neighbourhood. According to the words of Alessia Pontoriero, reported in the text by Nardis (2021), a representative of the neighbourhood committee and activist of the Quarticciolo Ribelle collective, the project soon turned into an open-air construction site, making it inaccessible for 20 years. This caused the closure of some businesses that overlooked the square and above all deprived the people who frequented it, especially young people, of a place to meet and socialise, contrary to the initial intentions of the project. Work on the square was therefore completed only in 2015. Visiting and crossing it today, the square is desolate and not very frequented. So, as in the case of the Library Theatre, the results of the project did not coincide with the initial objectives of 'urban regeneration', of creating a place for socialising, the development of which was based on citizens' demands. Interviewing the shopkeepers overlooking the square, they describe it as a failure rather than a successful project, making it one of several unsuccessful attempts at public action in the neighbourhood.

4.1.3. The 'District Contract': unfinished works and potential

As reported by the Ministry of Infrastructure website, Neighbourhood Contracts were first launched in 1992 and then confirmed with a new programme in 2002[13]. They represent the most significant line of intervention in urban regeneration, a line dictated by the recognition of the state of degradation in which some urban spaces find themselves, in terms of lack of infrastructure and reduced urban quality. 'The programme's priority objective is to trigger, with particular reference to public housing settlements, processes of transformation of those areas neglected by urban restructuring operations due to the

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[13] Source: https://www.mit.gov.it/progetto/contratti-di-quartiere

lack of interest on the part of real estate operators, superimposing measures oriented at increasing employment and reducing social discomfort on construction-urban planning interventions.' The objective, therefore, is not only to redevelop physical space, but to combine it with interventions that act on the social dimension by tackling problems related to: poor social cohesion, unemployment and housing hardship. In this sense, neighbourhood contracts are developed according to a logic of both welfare, in which the state intervenes where 'real estate operators' do not act, and urban regeneration, whereby urban development is based on interventions that are not only physical but also socio-cultural (Cellamare, 2011). Therefore, with this in mind, the call allocated 60 percent of resources to residential construction and 40 percent to urbanisation works. Given the long lead times for the implementation of the interventions envisaged by the neighbourhood contracts in the various localities for which they were intended, it was only in 2014 that a document was approved that 'identifies operational modalities aimed at the conclusion of the programme', so that initiatives that had been underway since 2006 could be brought to a conclusion within a reasonably certain timeframe.

As reported in the text 'Guidelines for the participatory construction of neighbourhood contracts' produced by the Laboratorio per la Sussidiarietà (Labsus) association, the Neighbourhood Contracts programme has peculiarities that make it very innovative in the field of urban regeneration projects. Among these peculiarities the text reports:

-*involvement of all actors* operating within neighbourhoods, from administrations to citizens;

-support for *experimental building projects*, linked to forms of bio-architecture and urban ecology, saving resources and improving environmental quality;

-the need for a *process of choices*, which means abandoning the rigidity that often characterises national programmes and making room for on-site verification of the feasibility of the choices made;

-adopting *participatory methods* so as to make citizens active subjects during the implementation of programmes. In particular, this point refers to the fact that some urban regeneration projects concern the renovation of buildings inhabited by elderly residents or those in situations of hardship, others concern the use of abandoned public spaces to be used for craft activities. These intervention strategies necessarily require constant dialogue with the people who live in and directly use certain spaces and environments;

-*inter-sectorality* in the choices of the local authority, for which 'it is necessary to flank the manager with an interdepartmental working group to which he/she will entrust the coordination of the various policies (social, school, mobility, green, environment, networks, etc.) and the responsibility for respecting the timeframe.

What emerges both from the description of the Neighbourhood Contract on the institutional sites and from the peculiarities analysed by the text taken into consideration is therefore a complex and innovative plan, because it does not only focus on physical redevelopment but also takes into consideration other aspects, social or concerning green areas for example. In fact, importance is given to the need to involve professionals dealing with these areas and also to the importance of constant dialogue with residents. In this respect, however, no clear and structured pathways are indicated. In order to better understand the effects of the programme, the way it was implemented in Quarticciolo, the results obtained and the actors involved will be analysed below.

With regard to Quarticciolo specifically, according to what is written on the institutional website of the Municipality of Rome[14], the objectives of the Neighbourhood Contract were:

-to increase the urban quality of the area through the improvement of hygienic aspects and regulatory compliance;

-promote the creation of green areas in the different parts of the neighbourhood to be connected with the urban environmental system;

-fostering social integration (redevelopment of areas and squares) in the different parts of the neighbourhood by also promoting social participation;

-restructuring buildings with green building techniques and materials.

To this end, the planned works concerned: inhabited buildings (lots) in a state of decay; the park in Via Trani (today Modesto di Veglia Park); the nursery school; a pedestrian and bicycle connection with the Alessandrino Park, etc. The total funding for all these works amounted to 10 million euro. In spite of these objectives, 20 years later many of these works have not been completed, others have started but then been suspended, and others have never started. Furthermore, as far as the participatory process is concerned,

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http://web.archive.org/web/20070701042413/http://www2.comune.roma.it/uspel/printegrati/schede%20c dq%202/QUARTICCIOLO/scheda%20quarticciolo.html

what emerges from the report on participation[15] is that it took place in a merely consultative form, without any structured cooperation between the various actors. As written in the report, a workshop was organised during which citizens were given questionnaires to express their opinion on decisions that had already been outlined from above. The Neighbourhood Contract for Quarticciolo was undoubtedly a missed opportunity in terms of institutional intervention and thus also important funding for an urban regeneration process. It is often cited in the documents drawn up by the committee as an institutional intervention that has, however, demonstrated the scant interest that this actor shows and continues to show in the neighbourhood. Over the years, residents and associations have often drawn attention to unfinished works, demanding answers, and over the years their pressure has succeeded in getting some works completed. The following paragraphs will show the evolution of these works, and the important role that both the associations and the Neighbourhood Laboratory have played in drawing attention to them.

To conclude this first section of the fourth chapter, the contract represents an opportunity and a very important institutional tool to implement an idea of development that is integrated, not based on spot interventions, based on collaboration and recognition of the importance of social aspects as well. The fact that the works envisaged in the plan are unfinished or never started demonstrates the little attention that the institutions devote to Quarticciolo and gives an explanation for the discontent that emerges with them in the communiqués issued by the neighbourhood committee and associations.

This discontent can be seen in the documents drawn up by the neighbourhood committee. One example is the 'Public Letter to the Administrations', published in October 2023 following a neighbourhood assembly, in which they report on the state of neglect in which the neighbourhood finds itself, due to too many abandoned spaces, projects begun and not finished, and commercial premises becoming fewer and fewer. In this letter, they describe the responsibilities of the administrations to allocate the planned funding for projects and to finish the construction sites of works that have been started. In other documents, what emerges is the rhetoric of the media and institutions related to the degradation of the neighbourhood, which, however, is not accompanied by effective public interventions, and that many interventions do not take place through a structured

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http://web.archive.org/web/20070818175623/http://www2.comune.roma.it/uspel/printegrati/schede%20c dq%202/QUARTICCIOLO/partecipazione%2quarticciolo.html

co-planning process, which is what the local actors demand. Despite the discontent, the local actors show an openness to collaborate with the institutions and together with the laboratory develop project ideas, many related to the work under the neighbourhood contract, to present to them. Before touching on this point, the role and work of the Neighbourhood Workshop will be presented in the next section.

4.2. Self-Organization: between reaction to institutional absence and transformative capacity

In the previous chapter, a deliberate retreat (Brignone et al., 2022) of institutions towards the neighbourhood was observed. Many promised works have not been started or completed, others have had negative repercussions for the neighbourhood, and still others, although completed, have not been accompanied by an overall project for it. The abandonment of the institutions, leaving the development of the neighbourhood alone to its fate, makes it necessary to provide an autonomous response to daily needs. If, on the one hand, such a response in Quarticciolo is often intertwined with the illegality of organised crime[16], on the other, the void left by the institutions is filled by self-organisation, which does immense and fundamental work for Quarticciolo.

This work will be presented by listing the leading actors and the needs, ignored, to which they respond and the places they recover, namely:

Actors & Needs / Desires:

- Political framework in which these realities move → *Quarticciolo Ribelle (Rebellious Quarticciolo) 'from the Borgata for the Borgata'*

- Sport and community → *Community Gym*

- School drop-outs → *After School*

- Housing and Welfare → *Committee*

- Health → *People's Health Clinic*

Places & Needs / Desires

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[16] Quarticciolo is considered one of Rome's major squares for dealing (especially hashish and cocaine), along with Tor Bella Monaca, San Basilio, Ponte di Nona and Primavalle (these are also suburban districts) (Brignone et al., 2022)

- *Neighbourhood House* □social & community hub

- *Micro-Printing* □ local economy

- *Brewery Laboratory* □ local economy

They will be presented taking into account the evolutionary phases of self-organisation, to observe how the development of territories has its own historical and spatial specificity, and how step by step self-organisation has contributed to the change of the neighbourhood, demonstrating a great generative and transformative capacity, as well as a high level of consultation. As Nardis (2022)[17] writes, these actors represent the 'signs of the future', that is, 'those realities that through capillary interventions have been able to intercept a wide range of Quarticciolo residents, and weave together with them strong relations of mutualism and sharing' (Nardis, 2022, p.123). Together with the actors, the places they have managed to recover will also be reported, and a map of them (elaborated by Labsu) will be shown to give a visual idea of the spatial evolution they have achieved. The types of assemblies envisaged by the associations will also be reported, to give a picture of their political and organisational capacity as well. The aim of this section is not only to observe how self-organisation has responded to the abandonment and institutional vacuum, but also to offer a picture of the context in which the Neighbourhood Laboratory, in particular the university, moves and the learning posture it assumes towards 'what is already there', the starting point of its work with the neighbourhood.

4.2.1. Quarticciolo Ribelle. The political framework behind the self-organised realities: 'Leave no one behind'

Quarticciolo Ribelle is a collective that today represents a cluster of self-organised actors that animate the neighbourhood. They share a common vision, i.e. to ensure that Quarticciolo is not treated by the institutions as a 'Second Class Neighbourhood'[18]. The collective was founded in 2017 and became part of the neighbourhood through the occupation of the ground floor of the former police headquarters where it set up a social space (at the time Red Lab Quarticciolo). In particular, the collective spent its energies in

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[17] The quoted text is a master's thesis written by Nardis Chiara, who was a participant in the Neighbourhood Lab together with LabSu

[18] This expression often emerges as a slogan during events organised by the neighbourhood realities, in communiqués announcing the appointments of neighbourhood assemblies, or on occasions (such as interviews) when Quarticciolo Ribelle reports on its work. The slogan is intended to underline the lack of attention and the different treatment that Quarticciolo, as a peripheral, public housing district, receives compared to central areas.

Quarticciolo also following the events of Tor Sapienza, which were considered an indicator of the state of tension in the suburbs. In this sense, as reported in Mutualism Networks and Civic Poles (2022), these young people found themselves 'electing this area of eastern Rome to try to put into practice autonomous, self-managed and self-financed forms of weaving social relations and caring for the territory, devoting themselves to filling the enormous void of public policies left by the institutions. (Brignone et al., 2022, p.96)

From the beginning, the collective's goal was to work on and with the neighbourhood. To this end, it slowly established relationships with the inhabitants, through good neighbourly relations and mutual aid[19]. They wanted to get to know and make themselves known, creating trust with the neighbourhood and offering their resources, particularly in the area of housing rights, to support those of the inhabitants who did not have those resources. As already written, Quarticciolo Ribelle has become over time the political framework that supports and encompasses the other self-organised realities. It represents a compass, the principle that moves the self-organised realities to work for the neighbourhood, linked to bringing attention to Quarticciolo, its inhabitants, and above all to 'leaving no one behind'[20].

4.2.2. Community Gym: doing sport to make community

The popular gym was born in 2015, when the collective and some Quarticciolo residents got together in an attempt to improve living conditions in the neighbourhood. The experience of the popular gym thus began with the occupation and recovery of the former boiler room, a room that had been in a state of neglect for about 20 years. The process of recovering and renovating the building lasted a year and was carried out completely independently, in terms of resources and physical renovation, by the young people involved in the idea. The duration of the renovation gives an idea of the disastrous condition of the building, but also of the determination and energy that characterised the boys. From the beginning, the gym's main sport has been boxing, a choice that was inspired by some Brazilian experiences in which boxing was identified as a sport for

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[19] As it was possible to learn personally, the guys in the committee's first period of residence in Quarticciolo adopted a series of practices that helped them get closer to the inhabitants. One practice indicative of this slow weaving is the habit they adopted of watching the matches of the local football team (Roma) together with the inhabitants in their homes.

[20] Fonte: https://www.ondarossa.info/newsredazione/2024/10/conosciamo-dopo-scuola-quarticciolo

building social bonds. Also linked to the Cuban school is the political intent, namely to make sport 'popular' and therefore accessible to all but guaranteeing quality ('Popular Sport means the best within everyone's reach'[21]). After the renovation work was completed, the gymnasium was immediately successful and was also very well received by the inhabitants. As Emanuele (trainer of the popular gymnasium) reports in an interview,[22] the inhabitants of the neighbourhood were wary at first, and this is attributable to the many broken promises in the neighbourhood in terms of planning and 'regeneration', but the completed works and the tireless activity of the gymnasium's trainers made them think again. The success is probably also attributable to the closure of the municipal blue swimming pool, which occurred close to the opening of the gymnasium, which represented the only sports space in the neighbourhood (Brignone et al., 2022).

The intention of the project was to do politics and improve the living conditions of those living in the neighbourhood. In this sense, the popular gym demonstrates that the opening of a sports space is not just about physical activity. Sport means sociability, community, and the guys at the popular gym have always worked in this direction and succeeded. The gymnasium is not just about boxing, but a place for sharing, where one can talk about the problems of the neighbourhood. This is why, in Emanuele's words, 'we consider the work of the popular gym to be linked to goal 11 of the UN 2030 Agenda: sustainable cities and communities'. In this regard, the palestra after four years received recognition of its 'social value' from the Lazio region, obtaining regularisation of the building and activities. In this sense, the gymnasium represents an example of urban regeneration from below, combining physical intervention with social impact. The social impact in the case of the Quarticciolo is not only to give the neighbourhood a space for aggregation, which is necessary for a high quality of life anywhere, but also, as is often emphasised by the gymnasium, to give young people an alternative to 'those shortcuts that - at times - turn out to be the only viable road' (Nardis, 2022, p.126).

In 2022, the new gymnasium was inaugurated, demonstrating the transformative capacity of grassroots planning, which can also be seen in the inclusion of new sports within the gymnasium.

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[21] Instagram post from Palestra Popolare Quarticciolo (Community Gym) page. Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/CaCD30VNIxy/?img_index=1
[22] Source: http://www.fightnews.it/2022/02/16/palestra-popolare-quarticciolo-la-forza-di-una-borgata/

4.2.3. Afterschool: combating school drop-outs

Quartocciolo is characterised by a worrying school drop-out rate. Most children do not continue with university studies, while some drop out of school even after middle school. This is the background against which the Dopo Scuola (Afterschool) Quarticciolo was developed, which was founded in 2018 and is based on the ground floor of the former police headquarters. Initially the collective's aim was to offer children a place to meet and where they could spend their afternoons in an alternative way. At a later stage it was structured to give a concrete hand to children up to 13 years old in terms of homework help and organising recreational activities. Over time, the association organised workshops, a particularly significant one being 'stories of a borough', created in collaboration with the Pirotta school, a reference point for children and young people in Quarticciolo. The aim of the workshop was to bring the history of Quarticciolo told by the children into the school, so as to create contact with it.

In addition to the high school dropout rate, there is now the 'threat'[23] of the School Dimensioning[24], which could cause the Pirotta school to close. The Dopo Scuola has protested against this measure on several occasions, on the grounds that 'the cuts were decided without involving Roma Capitale, municipalities and the metropolitan city and without taking into account the specificities of the territories involved'[25]. This could exacerbate the school dropout rate, and at the same time be another sign of the abandonment of Quarticciolo by the institutions and their lack of commitment to a fundamental right that is access to education. It would also be a sign of the continuing absence of an overall plan of action in Quarticciolo, where institutional interventions continue to be only 'spot' interventions[26].

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[23] Interview by After School representative Eddi Marcucci on Radio Onda Rossa. Link: Source: https://www.ondarossa.info/newsredazione/2024/10/conosciamo-dopo-scuola-quarticciolo

[24] 'Through the dimensioning plan, the Region carries out aggregation, suppression and transformation operations of educational institutions'. Link: https://www.regione.lazio.it/cittadini/scuola-universita/istruzione/dimensionamento-scolastisco#:~:text=Per%20dimensionamento%20delle%20Istituzioni%20scolastiche,Titolo%20V%20della%20Costituzione%20(L.

[25] Fonte: https://www.romatoday.it/politica/dimensionamento-scolastico-roma-nuovi-tagli-2025.html

[26] Self-organisation often defines institutional interventions in the neighbourhood as 'spot' interventions, in the sense that they only act occasionally and in order to show that they have done something but without any real interest in the overall well-being of the neighbourhood.

4.2.4. People's Health Clinic: for an accessible healthcare

The People's Health Clinic was established at the beginning of 2023, when it was first housed in the Neighbourhood House, before moving this year to the Ex Boiler Room. The condition of the building, despite having been recovered from the popular gymnasium, still presented many problems related to the structure. For this reason, the work took about a year, and was partly supported thanks to the 5x1000. In the year of renovation, during the 'Serrande Aperte' (Open Shutters) day, the outpatient clinic organised a grassroots project, 'The outpatient clinic I would like', to collect ideas, needs and suggestions on how to organise activities, how to structure the work and also what the most perceived health problems were. In general, the objective of the outpatient clinic is to offer a proximity and free health service, trying to remedy the problems and limitations of the national health system (as well as those of the private sector mainly related to high costs) linked to waiting times and costs, and which continues to suffer cuts that aggravate its efficiency.

The outpatient clinic also contributed to the production of a leaflet denouncing the abandonment of the Azzura 7 pool[27] and calling for its reopening, emphasising the importance of sport, in this case swimming, for health. It also emphasised the absence of a number of sports and health facilities capable of responding to the pathological conditions faced by many of the people in the neighbourhood, who only now, thanks to the outpatient clinic, have the possibility of receiving basic diagnosis and care for their health.

4.2.5. Neighbourhood Committee: "From the Borgata To the Borgata"

The neighbourhood committee was created in 2018 following the eviction of a boy from the popular gymnasium and his family from the basement where they were living. This incident raised the importance of creating a Neighbourhood Committee, which could dedicate itself and be a reference point with respect to housing issues. The committee's role is to collect people's requests and to act as an intermediary with the housing authority, Ater. It also monitors the conditions of the buildings and those who live in them. In

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[27] In April 2024, the Municipality of Rome approved the plan for the recovery and enhancement of the structure. The project planned for this structure will be reported in section 4, dedicated to the Neighbourhood Laboratory projects. Link:
https://www.romatoday.it/zone/centocelle/quarticciolo/piscina-quarticciolo-via-manduria-quando-riapre-aggiornamenti.html

particular, a struggle, and in part a victory, of the committee concerned the renovation of the favelas, i.e., the blocks of flats in Via Ugento, so called because they are considered a particularly run-down place in the neighbourhood. In this process, the committee collaborated with Ater for the 'census of the occupants, their socio-economic conditions and accompanying them in the process of regularisation or assignment of other accommodation.' (Brignone et al., 2022, p 97) In 2021, work began and this milestone is definitely the symbol and demonstration of the transformative potential on the territory accompanied by another element that characterises the particularity of the committee and of the self-organisation of the Quarticciolo, namely a high level of consultation, both within the organisation itself and with external actors (in this case Ater). 'Not only has the group been able to bring to light the needs and concerns of the inhabitants, but in the course of its two years of activity it has managed to become a valid interlocutor. By imposing itself within the decision-making arena, it has succeeded in directing Ater's lines of action and attention towards families in housing emergency and the serious problems affecting the neighbourhood' (Davoli et al., 2020, p.102).

4.2.6. Neighbourhood House: a landmark for the neighbourhood

The Neighbourhood House was inaugurated after months of work on 5 February 2022 and was recovered thanks to the contribution of the Charlmagne Foundation[28]. This new space, located in via Ugento, opposite the aforementioned favelas and next to the Modesto Di Veglia Park[29], houses the new headquarters of the Community Gym, the Solidarity Emporium of the Free Age association, the Neighbourhood Committee desk, which also alternated with the services of the popular outpatient clinic before it was relocated, and the weekly meetings of the Neighbourhood Workshop. It is therefore a multifunctional place, designed above all to be a point of reference for the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, encouraging sociability and strengthening the sense of community and belonging to a space.

But that is not all. The Neighbourhood House, as it was possible to observe first hand, also hosts Neighbourhood Assemblies, meetings with institutional figures, identifying

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[28] Foundation that accompanies Third Sector realities towards growth and sustainability by providing financial support and management know-how, in full respect of their way of operating. Foundation website: https://www.fondazionecharlemagne.org/azione/

[29] The Modesto Di Veglia park is currently undergoing a redevelopment process, the development of which will be reported in section 4

itself as a space of and for territorial democracy. For the self-organised realities listed above, it is a place of confrontation, where ideas and the seeds of projects come to life and where these are followed up and monitored. In this sense, reference is made to the work of the Neighbourhood Laboratory, whose headquarters is the Neighbourhood House

Figure 8 . Picture of neighbourhood house. It is also the neighbourhood laboratory headquarters.

(figure below), but also to other experiences. Meetings are organised here with other actors, often linked to the sphere of local development and urban regeneration, in order to create opportunities for self-training, of returning the work of individual projects, and of exchanging information.

An example is the round table organised on 2 March 2024, the day on which the 'Serrande Aperte' ('open shutters') event was organised. On this day, all the spaces recovered by the various self-organised realities opened their shutters at the same time, to allow people to get to know these realities and to show the commitment of the realities from below to the development of the neighbourhood and to give an idea of the type of local development they propose. The day ended at the neighbourhood house, where a round table was organised in which the theme was local economies and the aim was to exchange views and information.

In this sense, the neighbourhood house represents the importance of a space to support activities, to give rise to meetings and contamination, triggering a virtuous process that has positive repercussions on the entire neighbourhood. It represents a neuralgic place and also for this reason has been thought of as the starting point of a possible Civic Pole in Quarticciolo, a theme that will be reported in the fourth paragraph.

4.2.7. Brewery Laboratory and Micro-Printing Shop: The seeds for a model of local economic development

The Brewery and the Micro-brewery are two places that it is useful to mention because they represent the intense activity of self-organisation also in the context of what Alessia and Pietro of Quarticciolo Ribelle, during a meeting with other universities[30], called 'micro-credit economy'. These two projects are located in two spaces, which together with the spaces mentioned above, represent the 'open shutters', that is, all those places recovered from below that oppose desertification, and that 'open where everything closes'[31]. As written, these are two commercial-type activities, but they have in mind a type of economy that supports the neighbourhood.

The micro-print shop was inaugurated on 17 July 2023, as a project created thanks to funding accessed by responding to a youth policies call[32], and it is located in one of the 15 Ater premises mapped out by the Neighbourhood Laboratory[33]. The micro-print shop is a space dedicated to self-publishing, printing and screen-printing as well as to the realisation of workshops, seminars and public initiatives. The first workshop was held with primary and secondary school children and after-school students, demonstrating the social and contextual work the space aims at. As written by the members of the micro-print shop themselves, it is defined as 'an open laboratory that also aims to activate working economies within the territory in which it is located: the MicroPrint resides in Quarticciolo, a suburb in the eastern quadrant of Rome, where the project was born in continuity with other social realities and training experiences in the neighbourhood such as the Educating Community, the After School Centre, the Theatre, the Library and the Popular Gymnasium.' [34]In this sense, the print shop supports the activities of the other local actors, devoting itself to posters, flyers, brochures, etc. It is not an isolated space, but one that is connected to other local actors, which gives the idea of the local

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[30] Reference was made to the 'Prin looking into the dark - 4th meeting Roma 10-12 October 2024', a project financed by the European Union, which involved La Sapienza University of Rome, Milan Polytechnic and IUAV in a moment of knowledge on the realities that animate certain territories in the eastern sector of Rome and the activities that Labsu carries out in these contexts. 11 October was dedicated to Quarticciolo, where the universities not only got to know the Neighbourhood Laboratory, but also the work of self-organisation.

[31] Source: https://www.instagram.com/quarticcioloribelle/p/DAGFVjttfxE/

[32] Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cu38yjKNX-a/?img_index=1

[33] The mapping of Ater premises is part of a larger project that will be reported in section 4 on the work of the Neighbourhood Laboratory

[34] Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cuy9jVZNbjl/?img_index=1

development (circular and integrated) to which they are dedicated and which represents one of the 'open shutters' against the desertification of Quarticciolo.

The brewery was also presented as one of the open shutters against desertification. It is 'a project linked to the production of beer, which is of good quality and with controlled ingredients'[35]. The aim is for the brewery to finance the social activities that animate the neighbourhood, creating a circular economy that is also implemented through organic cultivation, in an area close to Quarticciolo.

4.2.8. The Quarticciolo assemblies: an example of self-produced territorial democracy

An added value of the self-organised realities of Quarticciolo is its political organisation. Local actors are periodically involved in assemblies of different levels and discussions. In fact, in addition to the internal assemblies of the single realities, there are others in which they meet and discuss.

First of all, the committee holds its weekly assembly, a particularly important moment because the committee has about one hundred members and because it is here that the demands and needs of the inhabitants (i.e. those who are not strictly part of the self-organisation) are collected. What emerges during these meetings is usually reported in the Neighbourhood Assemblies, which are held about twice a month, on Sundays, and to which the institutions, i.e. Ater, the Municipality and the City Hall, are also often invited. Other important meeting opportunities are the Plenaries, assemblies that are organised twice a year, where all self-organised realities meet to report on their victories, difficulties and future goals. They serve to exchange visions, to hold these realities together, and to coordinate on future actions based on what has been experienced in the past six months.

This political organisation of the Quarticciolo represents a form of self-produced territorial democracy (Cellamare, 2023), in which self-organised realities are able to relate to the contexts and dynamics of people's lives.

This section has provided an insight into a fundamental approach in Quarticciolo development process: self-organisation, which in this neighbourhood on the one hand responds to an institutional void and on the other, in responding to this abandonment, gives rise to transformative processes. The actors of self-organisation, starting with the

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[35] Description given by a young man who is part of the project in a video summarising the 'open shutters' day. Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/C4I_W4cNg8n/

community gym and Quarticciolo Ribelle, have established personal relationships with the neighbourhood, have come into contact with their living conditions, with their needs, doing, as Cellamare claims[36], what the public administration should do.

'From the Borgata for the Borgata' summarises the bottom-up work represented by self-organisation and the importance given to have interventions in the neighbourhood that are based on the visions and capacities of the neighbourhood itself. In asserting its demands, self-organisation creates a relationship as much of conflict as of confrontation and collaboration with both institutions (particularly local ones) and other bodies (of the third sector). It proves capable of negotiating with the institutions, to the point of bringing them back to their duties and responsibilities towards the neighbourhood, and obtaining a series of results that today have led to the 'open shutters', a day dedicated to the simultaneous opening of all the places recovered from below and some of them thanks to the processes of concertation with the institutions. The Quarticciolo experience demonstrates that the periphery, left to itself, is a place of planning that allows us to rethink the way politics is done and conceived. In this articulated relationship with the institutions and in this context of planning capacity is the university, whose role and work in and with the neighbourhood will be presented in the following paragraphs

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[36] Reference is made to the interview given by Carlo Cellamare, professor of urban planning at La Sapienza University, for episode 3 'Carlo Cellamare and the Vital City' (May 2022) of the spotify podcast 'The Dialogues of Creativity'. Link to the episode: https://open.spotify.com/episode/1Q8lSs3iP7J1x7GPABm9S4

Figure 9 This map was used to publicise the 'open shutters' day and represent all the premises involved. All the spaces recovered by the self-organised realities are represented here, so the map gives a visual idea of the impact and evolution that these realities have managed to achieve over time. The shutters represented are: Micro-Printing Shop; Community Gym; After-School;People's Health Ckinic; Brewery Laboratory

4.3. Description of the Neighbourhood Laboratory

4.3.1 The Neighbourhood Laboratories project in Rome

According to what is written on the institutional page of the Municipality of Rome[37], the Neighbourhood Laboratories originate from a broad Urban Regeneration project promoted by Roma Capitale (Municipality of Rome). The objective is to favour a regeneration characterised by bottom-up urban transformation processes, carried out through the involvement of different policies, practices and actors: citizens, profit enterprises, non-profit organisations, local administrations and informal groups. In this context, therefore, the Neighbourhood Laboratories constitute a fundamental contribution. These have been activated by the Administration in collaboration with the Universities, in particular the realisation of the Neighbourhood Laboratory of Quarticciolo was born out of the collaboration between the Municipality and La Sapienza University, where the Department of Civil, Building and Environmental Engineering (DICEA) has set up LabSU - a urban studies laboratory - to coordinate the Neighbourhood

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[37] Source: https://www.comune.roma.it/web/it/notizia/presentati-laboratori-quartiere-roma.page

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Laboratory. As written on the website, "it is not possible to give a single definition of the regeneration path initiated by the Laboratories", since their work is strongly anchored to the specificities of the place where they are located. In general, what characterises them is an action of redevelopment of spaces, in which value is given to the physical dimension of Rome's peripheral places, but which is also part of a path of economic, civil and social development, capable of also regenerating the social relations of a community. 'In this sense,' the text continues, 'the lab dimension and the involvement of the community that emerge from these experiences make it possible not only to find a new meaning to the places but also to rethink the mechanisms of participation and governance of the local networks.'. The aim is to contribute to urban regeneration through a model of governance shared between various institutional actors - municipality, municipality and region - and which has as its starting point the contribution of local communities in the co-design phases. The explicit objective therefore is to develop choices and policies that are not only shared and accepted but also felt to be their own and defended by the inhabitants. This point could mean an acknowledgement by institutions of the limits of participation as merely consultative, and support for a higher level of participation in which it is the citizens who define issues and courses of action and thus in some way have control over them (Arnstein, 1969).

In this sense, the Neighbourhood Laboratories can lead to the creation of real yards of civil society participation and not only to the improvement of technical and social infrastructures.

Three are the most important cornerstones of the experience of the Laboratories

- knowing and giving value to what already exists;

- gaining experience and being in places with participatory processes (constant presence in the field, which fosters learning-based collaboration, is therefore recognised as fundamental);

- thinking of tools that can foster co-planning and co-designing on the civil economy and sustainable development of the city of Rome.

4.3.2. Quarticciolo Neighbourhood Laboratory

The Quarticciolo neighbourhood laboratory is therefore one of these laboratories financed by the Municipality of Rome. In particular, the laboratory, as written above, was set up

in collaboration with the DICEA Department of the Sapienza University of Rome, which gave birth to LabSu - a Laboratory of Urban Studies - which deals with studies on the suburbs through a method of action-research and interdisciplinary and field research. The Quarticciolo laboratory was conceived with this methodology. In the instant-book of the Municipality of Rome's website, where the activities of the laboratories in the territories are reported and updated, it is possible to read what are identified as the objectives of the Quarticciolo Laboratory: to contribute to the definition of policies related to urban and social regeneration, with a view to integrated local development, which is understood as 'an approach that aims at the social promotion and overall local development of neighbourhoods' (Cellamare & Troisi, 2020, p.30); to actively collaborate with local realities in order to identify needs, desires, criticalities and potentialities of the neighbourhood; to support the municipal technical-administrative structures in formulating concrete proposals to be presented in order to obtain funding from existing opportunities. In addition, the text indicates that in the first year the lines of action were mainly aimed at the realisation and regularisation of the Neighbourhood House - realised thanks to the support of the Charlemagne Foundation, while regularisation at present still seems difficult to obtain - and of a Civic Centre (which will be better described in the next paragraph); at the elaboration of global proposals for urban regeneration that would find concrete realisation through a newly conceived Neighbourhood Contract; at interventions aimed at promoting the local economic development of the neighbourhood.

As for the Neighbourhood Contract, from the outset LabSu declared its intention to take it up as an institutional instrument with which and on which to work for several reasons: to take up the unfinished works; to leverage the intentions of the Neighbourhood Contract, i.e. to adopt an integrated approach, which coincides with the vision of both LabSu and the self-organised realities of Quarticciolo; for the collective definition of an experimental Neighbourhood Contract based on the Master Plan produced by the neighbourhood committee. As was reported in the section on the Neighbourhood Contract, this presented many limitations on various fronts. LabSu's objective is to overcome these limitations and elaborate an innovative version that starts from making the co-design of interventions truly participatory.

A first opportunity of collaboration between Labsu and Quarticciolo is represented by 'We have a plan', i.e. a mapping carried out by activists of the self-organised realities with the informal support of LabSu, which at the time was not officially engaged in the neighbourhood with its own workshop (Olcuire, 2023). This was a bottom-up mapping

of interventions – a Masterplan[38] - considered necessary for the urban regeneration and integrated development of the Borgata and was in some ways the basis for the work of the Laboratory, which offered technical support for the implementation of the mapped interventions. So the Masterplan is a basis that is acting as a catalyst for further co-design paths; at the same time, it is the basis for developing collaboration paths between the local community and external actors/operators, institutions, private entities, etc. who are interested in realising new innovative and multi-directional synergies.

The Laboratory, once established, found in the Neighbourhood House a place to meet, work and co-design. This aspect characterises another important element of the laboratory, namely its constant presence in the field, which is represented not only by the weekly meetings planned by the laboratory but also by its participation in neighbourhood assemblies, plenary sessions and initiatives organised by the associations. These are very important moments to weave stable and trusting relationships with the territory in which the laboratory operates and to understand its needs and desires. Plenary meetings are also meetings in which all the organisations operating in the neighbourhood take part and in which everyone's work is reported. Here the laboratory reports on the work carried out during the semester, the difficulties and the results achieved. At present, the laboratory is coordinated by Serena Olcuire from La Sapienza University and Alessia Pontoriero, an activist and representative of the Quarticciolo Neighbourhood Committee, and is also traversed by students, researchers and trainees from various disciplines.

According to a presentation of the laboratory, the main activities listed are:

-dialogue between bottom-up practices and top-down policies;

-building new knowledge about the neighbourhood;

-technical assistance;

-promotion of new projects;

-finding funding channels;

-translation of local demands.

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[38] A Masterplan can be understood as a plan referring to a complex programme or initiative that can be broken down into projects and sub-projects. Source: https://www.humanwareonline.com/project-management/center/master-plan-cose-e-quando-serve/#:~:text=Spesso%20il%20termine%20Master%20Plan,articolata%20in%20progetti%20e%20sottop rogetti.

This work is based on the recognition of the importance that self-organisation plays within the neighbourhood. In this sense, the laboratory has a 'learning posture' with regard to self-organisation and local actors, which for many years have been carrying out a contribution and work from below that is fundamental to the development of the Borgata and to the fight against the economic and social desertification to which it is induced, also due to the absence of public intervention. Through this posture, the workshop bases its work on the same principles that guide self-organisation, i.e. *starting from what already exists*, enhancing it and imagining its development (Olcuire, 2023). This point is important because it puts the two actors involved, self-organisation and the university, on a truly horizontal level, which coincides with the concept of co-designing as analysed in the first chapter of this thesis, and thus a policy-making process based on collaboration between actors with different responsibilities, skills and resources.

With regard to the resources and actors involved in territorial processes, what emerged through my experience at the neighbourhood Laboratory and what emerges from the documents describing the role of the Quarticciolo Laboratory (Olcuire, 2023), an important aspect linked to its work falls within the relationship it has with the local administration, which it is called upon to support. In this sense, the laboratory seeks to 'build a hinge role between local authorities and the neighbourhood, bringing together the self-generative capacities of the borough with the possibilities of the institutions' (Olcuire, 2023, p. 167). In this sense, the workshop therefore attempts to 'approach' funding, and this is another important function of the laboratory, linked to monitoring institutional availability and resources and using them to carry out local development works (which will be reported in the following section) based on the neighbourhood's expressed desires and needs, giving support to the project capabilities expressed by the neighbourhood. In this way, the Laboratory represents a tool that can shorten the distance between citizens and the local administration.

In conclusion, the Neighbourhood Workshop consists of a collaboration between the university and the self-organised realities of the neighbourhood - that is, the 'Quarticciolo Ribelle' committee and network. In this relationship, the university's role is to seize institutional opportunities and exploit the relationship with the administration to obtain funding to support the self-organisation's project capabilities based on the needs expressed by the neighbourhood. The aim is to initiate comprehensive regeneration processes oriented over the long term, with a view to integrated local development.

4.4. The Neighbourhood Laboratory projects

4.4.1. Modesto Di Veglia Park: a first milestone of the Neighbourhood Workshop

A very important project that involved the Laboratory is related to Modesto Di Veglia Park. This small park was one of the intervention areas envisaged by the Contratto di Quartiere II (Neighbourhood Contract II) and in particular its recovery was part of the general objectives of promoting the creation of green areas to be connected to the urban environmental system[39]. Despite these objectives, the work remained unfinished, so much so that for many years the park was an uncultivated, abandoned and unlit space, to the point of being avoided or in any case not frequented. In a report on the park written by the Neighbourhood Laboratory, it is reported that in a mapping carried out by the after-school club, the children represented and identified it as a 'black hole'. The same opinion emerged in the committee assemblies in which the park was described as an 'open-air dump' and a drug-dealing centre. In 2020, the Educating Community was born from the union of a number of local associations. Among its various objectives was to find an open space to dedicate to outdoor education, which it identified in the park in question, which in 2021 was renamed 'Modesto di Veglia Park'. In an interview, a representative of the Educating Community, Pietro Vicari, reports that the recovery of the area responded to two needs in particular: to allow the activities of the Neighbourhood Popular Gymnasium, the Theatre Workshop and the after-school activities to be carried out safely during the Covid period; and to intervene in the urban context, recovering a green area located in a strategic position in the neighbourhood. In fact, the park is located next to the Neighbourhood House and in front of the buildings known as 'favelas' - as they are considered the most degraded area of the neighbourhood - where the Neighbourhood Committee has started a path of co-participation with the administration for architectural redevelopment. It is therefore part of a context of social and urban transformation, which, if recovered, would represent a green and lively place both for the new families who will stay at the favelas, and for all those who pass through the Neighbourhood House.

In spite of the work of the self-organised realities, the park still lacks adequate lighting and periodic maintenance to enable it to be used and crossed, and public resources are needed for these aspects. In fact, the park was listed among the unfinished works of the

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http://web.archive.org/web/20070701042413/http://www2.comune.roma.it/uspel/printegrati/schede%20cdq%202/QUARTICCIOLO/scheda%20quarticciolo.html

bottom-up mapping and, among these works, it was one of the first to be supported and collaborated with Labsu. These resources were obtained thanks to participation in the 'Dateci Spazio' (Give Us Space) call, a project launched by Roma Capitale for the construction of inclusive playgrounds. For this occasion, the workshop created a bottom-up design process (called in the poster 'Il parchetto che vorrei - Dalla Borgata per la Borgata' - 'The little park I would like - From the Borgata for the Borgata'), which consisted of a day dedicated to gathering suggestions, needs and desires of the inhabitants (including children) for the creation of the 'inclusive park'.

In the bottom-up design dossier[40], the steps that accompanied this process are outlined. The first phase identified the criticalities and wishes of the inhabitants with respect to the park. Among the critical issues, the most frequently mentioned were maintenance and lighting, while the wishes indicated were: drinking fountains; a stage for cultural initiatives; a play and sports path; a barbecue and picnic area, etc. In the second phase, a collective drawing of the space was drawn up in which the areas of the park designated for the various desired activities were represented (*Figure 6*). This bottom-up design process constituted the proposal that the workshop presented to the institutions by participating in the call for proposals through which it managed to obtain funding (500,000 euros). In spite of this, there are currently critical issues related to the timing of the start of work on the park, so it has not yet been fully completed. Work should have been finalised by 31 December 2021. The associations are currently considering possible ways to manage the park, and they are taking into consideration the instrument of Collaboration Agreement[41]. Through the pact, the local actors decide how to divide up the management of the park, between maintenance, which according to the workshop should be the responsibility of the municipality, and activities, which could be held by the various local actors. This pact could be an opportunity to strengthen relations between these realities, in particular to give continuity to the Educating Community (an initiative that aims to intercept the various realities that are active for/in the territory to share

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[40] The Dossier is a document developed by LabSU. Dossier title: Modesto Di Veglia Inclusive Park. Design from below: the results. Update dossier on the design process in response to the Interministerial Decree Programme 'Dateci Spazio'. Quarticciolo neighbourhood laboratory and LabSU DICEA Sapienza University of Rome / meeting of 4/7/2023

[41] "A Collaboration Agreement is the agreement through which one or more active citizens and a public entity define the terms of collaboration for the care of tangible and intangible common goods. In particular, the agreement identifies the common good, the objectives of the covenant, the general interest to be safeguarded, the skills, competences, and resources of the signatories (thus including public subjects), the duration of the covenant, and the responsibilities". Source: https://www.labsus.org/cose-un-patto-di-collaborazione/

experiences and provide tools to activate projects to be done together). Among the actors involved are, for example, the Library Theatre, the Committee, the After-School Club etc. While the implementation pace - due to administrative delays - was relatively slow, the Modesto Di Veglia Park represents a first achievement of the collaboration between local actors and the university, and of the support and technical help that the latter offers to the former. Regarding this, Serena Olcuire in an interview for the presentation of Laboratory Projects said "Let's hope that the small park will also be the excuse to set off a spark of regeneration in this area".

Figure 10 A moment of discussion during the workshop aimed at bringing out what were the critical issues related to the park and the desired services. Source: Dossier by LabSu about the bottom-up design for Modesto Di Veglia Park "Il parchetto che vorrei"
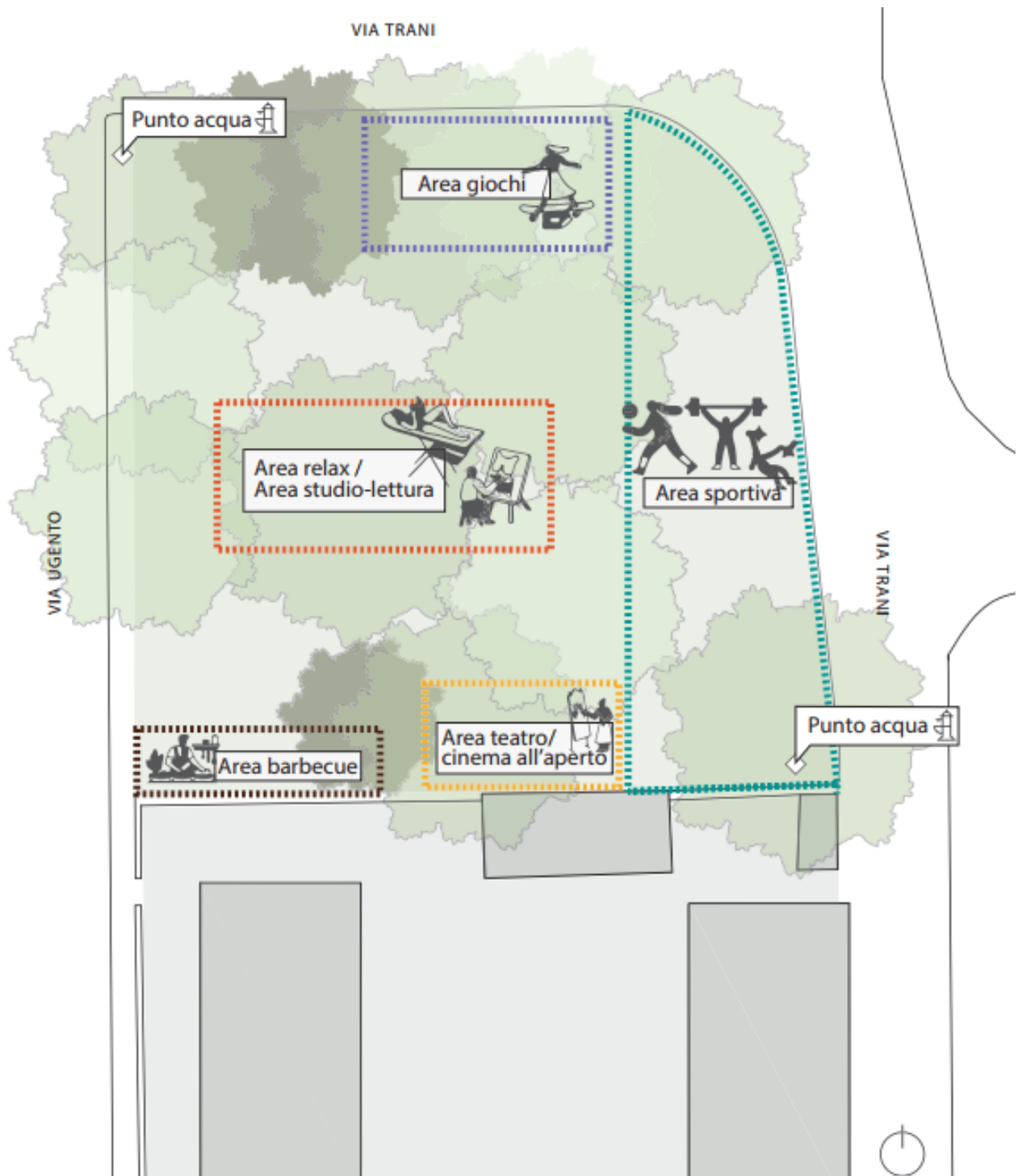
Figure 11 Collective design of space, subdivision into functional areas. Translation of entries from top to bottom: water point, play area, relaxation/study area, sports area, barbecue area, theatre/open air cinema area, water point Soruce: Dossier by LabSU about the bottom-up design for Modesto Di Veglia Park "Il parchetto che vorrei"

4.4.2. Activating Local Economies: local economy based on existing capabilities and desires

Another important project that the workshop has been carrying out for a couple of years now, and which I personally have had the opportunity to follow thanks to my internship experience, is related to the activation of local economies, also referred to by the workshop as 'Activation of Community Production Paths'. This project stems from the economic and employment conditions that have become particularly critical in Quarticciolo over the years. In fact, in the memory of the neighbourhood's inhabitants, it used to be characterised by many neighbourhood businesses, making it a popular and lived-in area. Over time, this situation has radically changed. The local market, which also attracted people from surrounding neighbourhoods, has disappeared, the large-scale distribution linked to supermarkets has established itself, and, in addition, the redevelopment works in the central square, as already written, have caused the closure of some activities and premises that overlooked it. Slowly, therefore, many premises have emptied and remained in a state of neglect and disuse.

In order to combat economic desertification and the high rate of unemployment in Quarticciolo, which affects women in particular, the workshop decided to map all the uninhabitable Ater premises in a state of disrepair, to be assigned to those in the neighbourhood wishing to start a business. The project was characterised by an initial mapping phase of the premises identified in the lists issued by the Ater, 15 in all, which were visited to observe their condition. In addition, a round of interviews was carried out on the skills of the inhabitants who could not find work in the neighbourhood, also collecting their suggestions on how to use the mapped spaces. This mapping was then presented to the Ater, which was open to consulting the proposal but declared the suitability of only 3 of the 15 premises identified by the workshop. As a result of this meeting, the Ater was willing to put the premises out to tender, but the manner of allocation presented several limitations and critical issues for the assignees.

First of all, the assignee must take responsibility for all irregularities, both administrative and building-related, in the property. Regarding the administrative ones, for example, it emerged that a shopkeeper was asked to settle a past debt that previous traders had accumulated against the Ater. Another limitation is related to the condition of the premises, which is often disastrous. In addition, the rent, however low, is often too high to open a business in a complicated neighbourhood like Quarticciolo. Lastly, another critical issue that characterises the assignment process envisaged by the Ater is linked to

the auction, which is neither announced nor publicised, nor does it take place alongside a co-planning process. In this regard, the laboratory accidentally found on some property sale sites the announcement of the auction of one of the premises that had been approved by Ater for the tender. This makes it difficult for people to intercept the auctions, particularly those with no experience or no well-defined initial project, who are automatically excluded from the allocation. These limitations make the project more complex than it already is, if not impossible.

-In this sense, what the self-organisation and the laboratory are relying on is that there is a need for public and social planning to accompany such a delicate economic path, in order to achieve the main objectives of this project, i.e.: to make the public space alive and crossed and to give space to commercial activities that are based on the existing capacities of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. At this stage of the project, the Laboratory is working together with the local actors to underline the challenges related to the assagnation. Confrontation with the Ater authority is difficult, despite the fact that on meeting occasions, which are often postponed, it is welcoming towards the proposal. At the moment, with regard to offering the spaces at lower prices than those envisaged, an agreement is underway with Ater, which has suggested that the Laboratory look for regulations and experiences similar to the one it intends to pursue with the commercial premises on which it can leverage and which can be brought back to the Quarticciolo context.

4.4.3. Theatre Factory Project: a project initiated by institutions which represents possibility of a collaborative pathway

A third project that the Neighbourhood Workshop is working on is called 'Theatre Factory'. It envisages an articulated programme of urban regeneration of a historic building compendium owned by the city along Via Prenestina, adjacent to the Quarticciolo neighbourhood, which is the area involved in this project initiated by the Roma Capitale administration (Municipality of Rome). It is therefore a slightly different project from those previously presented, as it sees the institutions as initiators and not the local actors and the laboratory, which are in any case called upon to contribute to the definition of how part of the space to be recovered will be used and managed. The institutional website of Roma Capitale[42] speaks of 'an ambitious project of urban regeneration, economic revitalisation and reuse of abandoned public real estate, which

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[42] https://www.comune.roma.it/web/it/informazione-di-servizio.page?contentId=IDS1126980

will be implemented over the next seven years.' Approximately 4,416,160.00 euros are earmarked for it and the intervention is included in Priority 7 of the Operational Plan of the PN Metro 21-27 of Roma Capitale, which envisages the enhancement of metropolitan

Figure 12 Top view of the complex (seganto with circle) to which the 'theatre factory' project refers and the distance from Quarticciolo (seganto with rectangle, portion of the neighbourhood)

suburbs in economic and social terms. As stated in a presentation of the project, the aim is to bring together the need for urban regeneration emerging from the suburbs, particularly in this case from Quarticciolo, and the spread of cultural offerings in Rome. It is therefore a contextual intervention, in which the work on the building is combined with the territorial context in which it is located and the needs it expresses.

The interventions envisaged by the project are the restoration, seismic adaptation, demolition and reconstruction of some pavilions currently used as storage for the disassembled sets of the Opera House. The intention is to give life to a 'citadel of arts and crafts', whose main activities will be: theatre productions, craft workshops, digital fabrication workshops, temporary exhibitions and conference rooms. The aim is to create a project and a structure that will have positive repercussions at the local level, connecting the surrounding neighbourhoods - together with Quarticciolo there are: Centocelle, Tor Sapienza, Alessandrino - and thus counteracting the spatial segregation that characterises Quarticciolo - despite its no longer strictly peripheral location. In this sense, the structure identifies itself as a possible city Civic Pole. The Civic Pole is a process that has been

carried out by the neighbourhood and the Laboratory for several years. Therefore, according to the Laboratory, this would be an opportunity to formalise this process and to draw the attention of the institutions that have so far been the missing piece in strengthening and systematising this instrument. The civic pole, whose space could be one of the structure's small sheds, would have the function of fostering participatory democracy, connecting the territory with local institutions. Through it, information desks could be activated in agreement with local bodies such as Ater, Asl, the Municipality and the City Hall, and partnerships could be strengthened with the university and third sector bodies that already work with the neighbourhood.

Another important aspect of this project relates to the creation of a Hub for the local economy dedicated to Quarticciolo. Through it, permanent training activities will be set up to facilitate territorial micro-projects; a business start-up desk, technical assistance, and accompaniment for vat holders and small business start-ups will be activated; new projects and collaborations between small businesses and/or with the Opera Theatre and other local and metropolitan authorities will be identified; and a mapping of municipally owned spaces to start up commercial and productive activities will be activated. In this way, the project would respond not only to the demand for urban requalification coming from Quarticciolo but also to the need for spaces for micro-business that local actors, as seen in the previous project, express. In this sense, what emerged in the Laboratory, it is important that some spaces be dedicated to the valorisation of latent capacities in the area, to new emerging needs and to the recovery of its productive vocation. An example of an activity to be supported according to the Committee and local networks is training dedicated to the opening of a brewery, an initiative already launched in the neighbourhood, as written in the second section of this chapter.

4.4.4. Civic Centre: a tool for integrated local development and territorial democracy

The Civic Centre project is the object of analysis of the research 'Networks of Mutualism and Civic Centres in Rome' by the Department of Civil, Building and Environmental Engineering (DICEA) -University of Rome 'La Sapienza' and the Fairwatch Association (2022).

The idea of the civic pole stems from the recognition of an intense political and social activity that in the suburbs in particular has as its protagonist the self-organisation, which through practices of mutualism, seeks to cope with spatial injustice and inequality, exacerbated by the pandemic crisis of 2021, proving capable of developing transformative economies and generative processes. Within this framework, the civic poles aim to valorise these experiences and go beyond the concept of urban regeneration, understanding it as a process in which the physical interventions are integrated with the dimensions of work, local economies and services to the territory. Therefore, in general terms, the Civic Centre is an instrument whose activities are aimed at the integrated development of territories. In a power point presentation elaborated by Labsu, civic poles are theoretically described as a network of third sector and self-organised realities characterised by co-planning paths. There is no one type of civic pole that is the same for any territory because it is strongly linked to the context in which it is located, but at the same time its establishment would make it resistant to political and administrative changes.

Labsu's hypothesis of a Civic Centre at Quarticciolo is part of this research, a hypothesis that was also elaborated and accepted by the Neighbourhood Committee and which later represented the line of action to which part of the Neighbourhood Laboratory's work is dedicated. Given the strategic nature in terms of local development of the Civic Centre, the Neighbourhood House was chosen as the starting point for hosting its main activities, since it represents a nerve centre of the neighbourhood. As a matter of fact, as seen in the section on Self-organisation, it hosts a series of activities that make it traversed by many different inhabitants and people. In any case, the aim of the civic centre is not to be a place and instrument closed in on itself, but to have a positive impact on the whole neighbourhood. To this end, the Neighbourhood House represents a starting point, but the aim is to recover other places that perform some of the functions of the pole, creating a network of spaces that can enable not only the local development of the neighbourhood but also represent 'innovative forms of building a territorial democracy' (figure 13 is a representation of this idea) (Brignone et al., 2022, p.100).
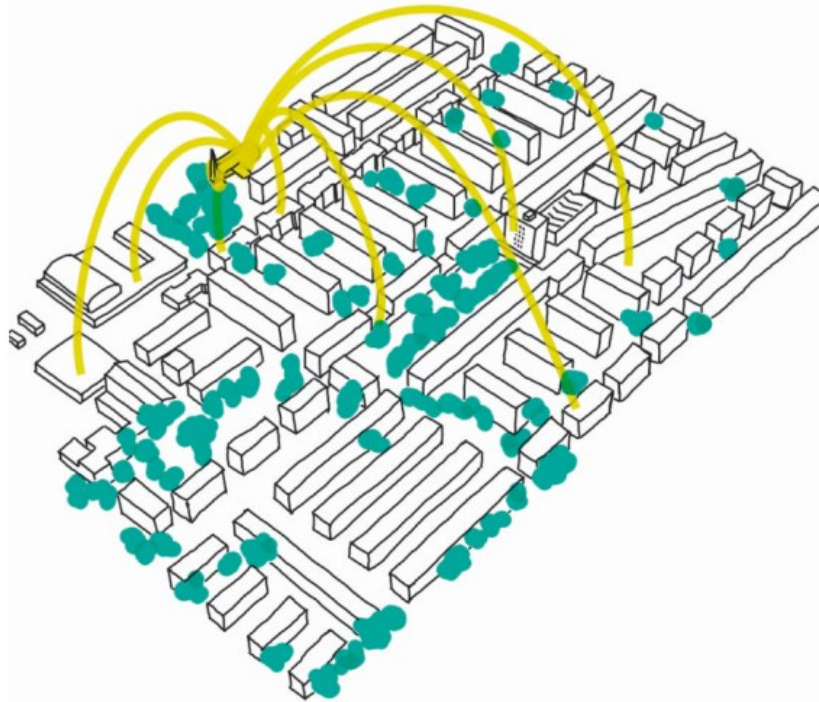
Figure 13 This figure has been elaborated by LabSu and reported in the e-book 'Networks of Mutualism and Civic Centres in Rome'. It gives the idea that Neighbourhood House could be the staring point of civic centre but it's objectives is to recover others buildings currently disused and return them to the community. It also gives the idea of the function of civic centre, so not to be a closed place but one with a positive spill-over effects on the rest of the territory

As stated in the text, drafted before the neighbourhood laboratory was formally active, the Civic Pole in Quarticciolo has three objectives:

1) To make the process of co-designing physical interventions truly participatory, going beyond the limits of the Neighbourhood Contract. Here reference is made, as written in the second paragraph, to the collaborative processes envisaged by the Contract, which, however, consisted in mere consultation on decisions already taken from above;

2) Reconnecting institutions and the territory, performing a mediating and facilitating function between social demand and the supply of services, particularly with regard to the housing issue, which in Quarticciolo is a problematic issue for many inhabitants;

3) Favouring employment and local entrepreneurship, combating social unease, school drop-out and thus the rooting of organised crime in the social fabric of the neighbourhood.

Three main functions and activities of the Civic Pole correspond to each of these objectives. They are:

1) The Laboratory

2) The Help Desk

3) Local Economy Hub

The Laboratory, as was the case when it was set up, has the objective of drawing up an innovative Neighbourhood Contract together with the neighbourhood, based on the Master Plan created by the Committee. It also has the function of defining material and immaterial interventions and accompanying their implementation. Finally, the workshop promotes territorial projects through participation in calls for tenders and intercepting funding opportunities that can support these activities, organising moments of confrontation and restitution at city level. The centre responds to the objective of connecting citizens and institutions, and consists of offering basic services for citizens that meet social and especially housing needs. Finally, the hub for the local economy, as has been partly written about the 'theatre factory' project, performs the functions of recognising existing skills in the area, promoting vocational training and activating spaces for the production of local handicrafts, providing assistance and advice for access to funding.

4.4.5. The "Sport Road": linking sporting realities for safe and illuminating streets

The 'sports street' is a project idea born from the Neighbourhood Workshop. The idea is to connect different sports spaces located in the same area, creating a sports pole. These spaces, represented in figure 9, consist of the Palestra Popolare, the Modesto Di Veglia Park where an area dedicated to physical activity is planned, the Azzurra 7 municipal swimming pool, and a football field located across Via Prenestina, which borders Quarticciolo. The idea is that the opening of these sports spaces will make it possible to cross the road, which is currently considered unsafe also due to poor lighting at night. The opening of these spaces would therefore mean the presence of people and lighting, which would reduce the perception of insecurity in the neighbourhood in general and in that area in particular. The basic assumption is that exclusive policing is not conducive to safety, while social presence and the opening of activities would be a real alternative to the perceived lack of safety in the neighbourhood.

Figure 14 Top view of the 'sports road' project area. The road and the sports buildings involved are outlined with the yellow line. Image elaborated by the author.

The idea was undoubtedly stimulated not only by the success of the popular gymnasium and the immediate planned work on the park, but also by the importance that the neighbourhood has always attached to the Azzura 7 swimming pool. In fact, it is a municipal swimming pool that was closed eight years ago, in 2016, following renovation work on the ceiling, but has not been open since. The inhabitants of the neighbourhood have always campaigned for its reopening and plans have been submitted for its financing[43]. The swimming pool is in fact one of the unfinished works listed in the Masterplan 'We have a plan'. This is also due to the fact that the pool was the only sports facility in the neighbourhood and was also very popular. Despite mobilisations, the institutions for many years gave no sign of moving towards its reopening. For this reason, since the Laboatorio has been present in the neighbourhood, it has often thought of ways to access funds that would allow it to reopen.

This year, the municipality of Rome has finally approved the plan to recover and upgrade the abandoned structure. The technical and economic feasibility project envisages a total investment of €1.5 million and was presented by the new company Azzurra 8 Nuoto,

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[43] Source: https://abitarearoma.it/precisazione-sulla-piscina-di-via-manduria-21-ex-azzurra-7/

founded by former employees of the pool[44]. 5 April 2014 was the day when the councillor for Great Events, Sport, Tourism and Fashion, Alessandro Onorato, announced the approval of the project by visiting the pool. Many people from Quarticciolo were present at this event, demonstrating the importance of this facility in the neighbourhood. The work will last 12 months and the goal is to make the pool available again by mid-September 2025. The swimming pool will once again be a sports facility that will have regulated prices, thus recognising its social value and the difficult context in which it is located.

4.4.6. Final Scheme of Laboratory projects

Below is a diagram summarising the projects presented above, showing the project initiator, the actors involved, the sources of funding, the role of the actors involved, the focus and the current stage of the project. The aim is to summarise the content and work carried out so far by the neighbourhood laboratory, which is the fruit of constant collaboration with local self-organised realities and institutions.

	Bottom-Up design of Parco Modesto di Veglia	Activating Local Economies	Theatre Factory Project	Civic Pole
Initiator	Quarticciolo neighbourhood laboratory	Quarticciolo neighbourhood laboratory	Municipality of Roma	Quarticciolo neighbourhood laboratory
Other actors involved	-Self-Organised realities -Citizens -Town Hall	-Self-Organised realities -ATER	-Neighbourhood Laboratory; neighbourhood inhabitants	-Laboratory (particularly university-LabSu) -Local institutional bodies: Municipality; City Hall; Ater
Main funding source for implementation	Municipality of Rome	No special form of financing is required, other than the granting of capped rental	European financial fundings	

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44 Source: https://www.comune.roma.it/web/it/notizia/quarticciolo-approvato-progetto-recupero-piscina-comunale-.page

		prices for premises		
Role of the actors (ideation; design; implementation; financial)	*Laboratory* ⯈ bottom-up design organisation

Self-Organized realities ⯈ Make a program of activities

Town Hall ⯈ ensure redevelopment works | *Laboratory* ⯈ mapped empty Ater premises; interviews with inhabitants to identify latent capacities; interviews with shopkeepers to identify current business issues

Self-Organised Realities ⯈ implementation of commercial activities that support the self-organised realities of the neighbourhood (e.g. brewery workshop) | *Laboratory* ⯈ participation in the definition of project activities; | Self-Organised Realities (particularly the Committee)⯈ elaboration of the definition of how to realise the civic pole at Quarticciolo and which needs should meet |
| **Focus and Aim** | Redeveloping the park on the basis of the criticalities and desires that emerged from the bottom-up design process | Recovery of empty premises for commercial activities that coincide with territorial capacities, fostering a local economy | -To build a new community centre that generates positive spill-over effects at the local level, in the areas of training, social inclusion and access to employment for young people

-Specifically make the Fabric an hub of local economy and a Civic Centre | Making the co-planning of neighbourhood interventions truly participatory; reconnecting institution and territory; fostering employment and local entrepreneurship |

Results / Current Phase	Work is scheduled to start in October 2024		Design and Planning	Project design

Conclusion

This Chapter (4) was dedicated to the Case Study, namely to the way in which territorial projects are developed in Quarticciolo and to the actors that are most involved in these processes. It shows how institutions have progressively abandoned the neighbourhood, despite the ambitious urban regeneration programme envisaged by the Neighbourhood Contract Program. Planned public interventions have not been completed, some never started. In response to this progressive backwardness of the institutions, a series of self-organised realities have made room, which have filled the institutional gaps, responding to the neighbourhood's most urgent problems and needs, namely: sport (community gym), school (after-school), health (people's health clinic), mutualism, listening and support for the inhabitants' difficulties - particularly with regard to the housing issue - (Quarticciolo Ribelle and the Neighbourhood Committee). In this context, the university fits in with LabSu, which in 2023, in agreement with the administration (Municipality of Rome), structures the relationship with the territory through the Neighbourhood Laboratory, which consists of a collaboration between the university and local actors. Given the mature context from the point of view of regeneration from below, the university assumes a learning posture towards 'what already exists', the starting point of the lab's work. The neighbourhood laboratory represents both an ongoing collaboration between the university and local actors and also an opportunity for greater dialogue between territory and institutions, exploiting the collaborative link with the administration that financed the laboratory. In this intertwining of relations between the university, local actors and local institutions, this thesis aims to understand what kind of participation we are talking about in a context such as Quarticciolo, whether it is possible to speak of co-designing processes - as defined in the first chapter - and what kind of 'doing politics' a complex and articulated reality such as Quarticciolo represents, in which, unlike other areas, self-organised realities are so strong and politically structured and rooted in the territory

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION: an in-depth analysis of the case study to answer the research questions

This chapter is dedicated to the discussion of the thesis. The aim is to answer the research questions. To this end, the theoretical framework of Chapter 2 will be used to review the case study set out in the previous chapter.

5.1. The failure of top-down approach to participation and the dominance of political participation from below

How do political participation practices develop in Quarticciolo? What are the observable key features of such practices?

To answer the first question, and thus what types of participatory practices we are witnessing in Quarticciolo context, it is possible to reply that there have been and still are both top-down and bottom-up processes.

The first case (*top-down approach*) is first and foremost represented by the neighbourhood contract, which, however, as we have seen, consisted in a simple *consultation* (Arnstein, 1969), in which citizens only had to accept or reject proposals already defined from above, without therefore having any real control over either the decision-making phase or the implementation of the planned interventions. The neighbourhood contract was in fact developed in the 1990s and 2000s, years in which, as seen in the historical excursus on participation (chapter 2), this was seen by institutions as an 'intrinsically positive' practice, but in reality was reduced to *invited-mean* participation (Morgan, 2016), i.e. one-off appointments useful more to the government to show itself open than to an effective redistribution of power in favour of citizens (Arnstein, 1969). The failure of the neighbourhood contract makes us reflect on the limits of a type of participation unaccompanied by a critical view of the dynamics of power it entails. This is what the self-organised actors, who, with bottom-up thrusts, then realised a bottom-up masterplan based in fact on the never completed (some never started) interventions of the neighbourhood contract, have claimed. The realisation of the master plan, but in general the activities developed over the years in Quarticciolo (from the people's gym to the neighbourhood house) demonstrate a strongly *bottom-up participation*. In particular, this is what Morgan (2016) calls *claimed* participation, since

local actors became active regardless of institutional initiatives, which were very scarce after the neighbourhood contract attempt. It is also the kind of participation that Pretty (1995) equates with *self-mobilisation*, since the local actors of Quarticciolo, by mobilising themselves, managed to attract the attention of the university and then of the institutions, which decided to formalise the presence of the former with the neighbourhood workshop, thus also demonstrating the transformative potential (White, 1996) that characterises self-mobilisation in Quarticciolo.

But self-mobilisation does not coincide with total citizen control over public policy. Going back to Arnstein's (1969) ladder, which distinguishes types of participation in relation to the degree of citizen control over decisions, it seems that the experience of participation in Quarticciolo is close to the form of *partnership*, which in fact indicates a negotiation between citizens and institutions. Such a negotiation has in fact taken place for many of the projects reported in this thesis, first and foremost for the renovation of the buildings in via Ugento, which was initiated by the institutions after important citizens' protests. However, they have no control over the works, which in fact tend to be longer than the promises made from above. The same applies to the Modesto Di Veglia Park, for which the citizens had the power to define what to build in the park with the help of the Laboratory, but then they have not received any updates on what will actually be built, and the timeframe for the start of the work has so far been postponed. Thus, control over the political processes and projects, although often initiated thanks to pressure from below, is partly citizens' but not entirely (which is why we speak of partnership and not citizen control). In any case, as Arnstein reports, the basic ingredients for partnership are an organised power base, something that exists in Quarticciolo and is represented by the local network Quarticciolo Ribelle, and funding, which is instead lacking because it is all on a voluntary basis or on forms of self-financing.

Quarticciolo Ribelle poses itself as a relevant actor, declaring and claiming that it is directly 'from the borgata' that comes solutions and projects 'for the borgata', and that the main subject in a process concerning the development of a territory is the one who lives there. Perhaps this force of self-organisation in Quarticciolo can really question the distribution of power in decision-making processes, since as Arnstein writes 'in most cases where power has come to be shared it was taken by the citizen, not given by the city' and 'historically it (power) has had to be wrested by the powerless rather than proffered by the powerful' (Arnstein, 1969: 222). To quote Moini (2007), we are talking about organised civil society acting with forms of self-organisation based on a critique of

the neo-liberal system (Moini, 2007), which in Quarticciolo is implemented through the recovery of abandoned buildings, through the construction of mutual aid relations, through the critique of the abandonment of a neighbourhood considered second class because it is degraded and therefore not entitled to institutional attention. Cities also tend to develop on the desirability of certain areas for property speculation, and this tends to favour the development of some areas to the detriment of others. It is this neo-liberal outlook, in which it is the laws of the free market that decide for cities and their inhabitants before public intervention, that the self-organised realities of Quarticciolo oppose, emphasising the marginalisation of a neighbourhood such as Quarticciolo, whose inhabitants and structures (commercial and residential) are totally left to themselves.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that participation in Quarticciolo is mainly bottom-up, although there are top-down approaches, represented today by the Theatre Factory project, but also by the activation of the Neighbourhood Laboratory. Regarding this point, it is actually more correct to say that the activation is top-down, since it is done by the institutions, but the work is collaborative, so perhaps in this sense we are approaching a collaborative initiative, which is more hybrid than a distinctly top-down or bottom-up process. The second research question attempts to unravel this issue.

5.2. Co-creation processes between the university and local actors

Is it possible to define these practices as co-production and co-creation processes?

As Lund reports, an increasingly popular form of civic engagement that enables citizen-centred co-creation is the 'living labs', which "are understood as both a method and an arena for innovation in which multiple actors collaborate to innovate on services and the creation of public value" (Lund, 2018: 6). There is no clear definition of 'living labs', but in general they are experiences in which citizen involvement is central and innovation occurs as a result of the combination of knowledge and skills deployed. The Quarticciolo neighbourhood laboratory seems to be an experience that goes in this direction. As we have seen, the Laboratory has been activated by the institutions with the aim of fostering local development processes based on knowledge of the territory and the needs it expresses. To this end, it envisages constant collaboration and dialogue between the university, citizens and local organisations. Since the neighbourhood workshop was activated from above but is nevertheless a space in which the actors involved have an equal role and contribute equally to the development of decisions and that it fits into a

neighbourhood characterised by a strong self-organisation, the aim here is therefore to unravel this double dynamic and understand how we can talk about co-creation.

We have seen that the processes of co-production and co-creation, although referring to different phases of design, recall concepts and processes such as collaborative governance, community involvement, participation and civic engagement. Certainly the experience at Quarticciolo and in particular the work of the Neighbourhood Laboratory reflects these processes. In fact, both institutions, citizens and universities are involved in local development processes, hence different actors with different competences. But how are they involved? Do these modes reflect what are called co-creation and co-production?

The state, through the activation of the Neighbourhood Workshop, seems to play the role of *enabling state* (Lund, 2018). So its role is to create the conditions for self-organised local actors, having recognised their value in terms of combating marginalisation, to operate and for territorial policies to be developed from the bottom up, thus starting from the design capacities expressed by the territory. This is the case where co-creation falls within the social innovation theory, whereby the state must enable processes of self-organisation. On paper, the municipality of Rome coincides with this role of enabler, which favours co-creation in which there is direct citizen input (Brandsen, 2018) on territorial policies. In practice, however, outside the institution of the laboratory, projects a year after its inception, have not yet been completed due to the delay in the implementation phases (e.g. the renovation of the Modesto di Veglia Park, the buildings di Via Ugento, etc.) that are the responsibility of the institutions (i.e. Ater, the Municipality and the City Hall). In this sense, the municipality created the conditions for co-creation, but still does not seem to be totally responsible when it comes to the completion of the works and when it therefore has to play its part in the co-creative process. With regard to the role of the Quarticciolo citizens, in the distinction made by Voorberg (2015) their role is that of *co-initiators*, since they are the ones who formulate the requests and demonstrate strong planning capabilities from below, an emblematic example being the realisation of the Masterplan. This definition emphasises the impact that self-organised citizens have in the production of space and their ability to trigger processes of urban change. In Quarticciolo, citizens were the initiators of processes of change in the territory from below and the state an actor 'following' these processes. Although the realisation of the Laboratory therefore came from above, in reality this was more a formalisation of what was already present in the neighbourhood, which was already informally collaborating with the university. As far as the university is concerned,

its role is that of *planner/facilitator* (Lund, 2018), since among the various objectives the university has in the Lab, one is to create a bridge between citizens and institutions, thus acting as a 'hinge' between them. The university, in particular LabSU, offers its technical expertise to support the projects, wishes and needs expressed by the local area. Looking at the work of the Neighbourhood Laboratory, it is clear that there is a direct input of citizens in the production of territorial projects whereby they are not only beneficiaries but also decision makers. In this sense, as written, we witness a co-creation that, in line with the Social Innovation Theory, sees the state as an enabler, citizens as co-initiators and the university as a facilitator. The process coincides with the levels of Gouache's ladder that correspond to co-creation and co-decision, whereby citizens collaborate with other stakeholders and contribute to project definition and decision-making.

Given the multitude of actors involved, it is possible to speak of collaboration between them in the production of territorial policies, but not really of co-creation and co-production. In fact, there are open questions concerning the overcoming of a verticality and the realisation of a real horizontal and equal relationship between the actors, which these processes promote. Certainly the relationship between the university and Quarticciolo is horizontal, in the sense that everyone contributes to the process according to their skills and knowledge. The relationship with the institutions actually seems more vertical, since they have the last word on the possibility of realising projects (an example is the call for tender for the renovation of the park, and the call is an emblematic tool in terms of the verticality of the process and communication between the parties) and also total control over implementation, which is also not accompanied by transparency on the status of work on a given project. As already written, in fact, many works are postponed and often citizens, if they do not mobilise themselves for information, do not receive updates on their status. In this power dynamic, when the works are delayed, conflict ensues, while when they arrive or when the institutions are open to dialogue, the local actors demonstrate their concerted capacity.

In this sense one can speak of co-creation, but only in part. In fact, the institutions have put in place the conditions for a constant presence of the university in the area, but they are absent in the policy formulation phases, except in cases where they present calls for proposals in which the area can participate. Moreover, on the one hand, the municipality has activated the laboratory, thus formalising the work that the university partly carried out at Quarticciolo, but with little long-term planning and security, so much so that this year (2024) it is still in doubt whether the contract for the laboratory will be renewed. So,

apart from a clear identification of participatory practices at Quarticciolo with co-creation processes, the final research question aim to understand what alternative the experience at neighbourhood provides.

5.3. What alternative from the quarticciolo? Territorial democracy and integrated local development

What example/alternative of political (territorial) participation and local development does the experience in Quarticciolo provide?

Self-organisation in Quarticciolo responds to the marginalisation of a peripheral neighbourhood such as Quarticciolo and its inhabitants, and in this response develops an alternative way of acting in the territories, based on mutual aid, but also on the valorisation of the territory's history as a way of creating a bond and sense of belonging with it[45]. As Cellamare (2023) writes, local actors are (self-)organised in such a structured and serious way as to give rise to a *self-produced territorial democracy*. This territorial democracy is visible not only in Red Lab's explicit intention to work on and with the neighbourhood starting from creating social ties with its inhabitants, but also in the high number of social activities that animate the area and their internal organisation and coordination. The groups as a whole are part of the Quarticciolo Ribelle network (formerly Red Lab) which encapsulates the political intent that moves them (from the Borgata for the Borgata and leaving no one behind). We saw in chapter 4 that there are internal assemblies of individual organisations, committee assemblies, scale assemblies, neighbourhood assemblies where institutions are often invited, and plenaries between the various local actors.

Although not all territories, be they neighbourhoods or small towns, are endowed with a grassroots organisation of citizens so present and determined in intentions (including political ones), the one in Quarticciolo is nonetheless an experience that brings to mind the need for a territorial democracy, an alternative to the representative one based exclusively on consultation and participation through voting and elections, 'that relates to the contexts and dynamics of the lives of people and social groups. (Cellamare, 2023: 38) As written, creating a form of territorial democracy characterised therefore by direct contact with the territory, by a representation based on proximity and not on election, has been the intention of the social actor Red Lab from the outset and could be an example of how do politics in urban contexts. Since the entry of this new social actor in

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[45] As seen in chapter 2 for the 'Storia di una Borgata' project

Quarticciolo to date, new formal and informal groups have sprung up, demonstrating how these movements from below are capable of generating socio-spatial changes, triggering dynamics of change in urban contexts and actively contributing to their development (Rossi, 2004).

As Bonstra and Boelens (2011) write, self-organisation either exists or it does not, it is a spontaneous process that spontaneously arises in order not to leave people behind, fill institutional voids or give alternative answers to social problems. Where it does not exist, perhaps we should learn the lesson of Quarticciolo, namely that the neo-liberal culture that wants to break ties (Cellamare, 2023) must be answered by reconstructing them slowly, between people and between people and the territory in which they live. As written earlier, co-creation - in a Social Innovation Theory theoretical frame - understood in a critical way (Brignone et al., 2022) - is an (institutional) tool that enables, where there are, project energies expressed by the territory, and the neighbourhood laboratory represents, albeit with its limitations, a step in this direction.

To answer the second part of the question on the type of local development that the neighbourhood presents, local actors as well as the university (LabSU) often emphasise and claim the need for structural interventions that take into account an overall and integrated development of the neighbourhood, which is not achieved only with spot interventions or one-off interventions. An integrated development takes into account the various dimensions that characterise the life of a person and the place he or she lives (e.g. school, sports or cultural or recreational activities of any kind, the urban and environmental quality of the place where he or she lives, etc.). All these aspects are not isolated from one another, and it is not by acting on just one of them that the criticalities of problematic places (on various fronts) such as Quarticciolo are resolved. For example, the Modesto di Veglia Park, if renovated, would certainly be a positive initiative for the neighbourhood, but it would remain isolated and an end in itself if not accompanied by other necessary interventions for the Borgata, such as the renovation of the neighbourhood nursery school, the activation of local economies, the redevelopment of public housing and the protection of the right to housing for people in economic difficulty. Development must take into account various rights and various aspects of the territory, otherwise spot urban redevelopments are made that are only useful to the government to say it is open to citizens' demands. The bottom-up master plan, as well as the work of the workshop, goes in this direction, considering the various areas of need and all the comprehensive interventions the neighbourhood needs to meet them.

Finally, LabSU's work on the neighbourhood represents a type of approach to the territory that can be considered for those working in this area. It is a situated approach that at Quarticciolo translates into starting from what is already there in order to imagine what will be. Knowing the territory, relating to it with a learning posture, is useful to understand not only its most urgent needs and requirements, but also to enhance existing capacities, to support the activities already carried out by social actors, and thus seek sustainable solutions that coincide with and emerge from the territory itself.

CONCLUSION What emerged: an approach to city building between territorial democracy and integrated local development

This research thesis was structured around the following research questions:

Main Research Question: *How do political participation practices develop in Quarticciolo? What are the key characteristics of these practices?*

Sub-Questions: *Can these practices be classified as co-design and co-creation processes? What kind of alternative political (territorial) participation and local development does the Quarticciolo experience represent?*

In order to answer these questions, *Chapter 2* provided a literature review on the concepts of participation, co-creation, and self-organisation. The review revealed that at the academic level, there is a consensus on the failure and inherent limitations of top-down approaches to participation (Arnstein, 1969; Cellamare, 2022; Lund, 2008) within urban governance. Such approaches have often been reduced to consultation processes, or even mere attempts at consensus-building (Cellamare, 2022). On one hand, these strategies have failed to fulfil their promises of empowerment and inclusion, and on the other, some scholars (Arnstein, 1969; Cornwall, 2008) argue that initiatives promoted from above are unlikely to result in a genuine redistribution of power to citizens, particularly in terms of control over decision-making processes. This failure has led to growing mistrust among citizens toward government-led participatory practices, increasing the need for new forms of collaboration that can overcome these limitations. This is where co-creation enters the picture: a process in which multiple actors engage in decision-making, characterized by a horizontal relationship where each participant contributes fairly based on their expertise. Co-creation is realized through a variety of practices, including Living Labs. In addition to these two processes, the increasing role of self-organisation within cities has been observed, operating on two fronts: addressing social needs unmet by institutions or current urban policies, and offering an alternative to the dominant neoliberal development model by reclaiming public spaces and fostering social bonds. Within the framework of Social Innovation Theory, co-creation becomes a process aimed at recognizing and valorising the work and potential of self-organised initiatives, with the state acting as an *enabler*.

These processes—the failure of government-led participation, the rise of self-organisation, and the new political practices of co-creation—were compared with the territorial context of Quarticciolo, a neighbourhood in the eastern suburbs of Rome. The methodology employed two main tools: bibliographic research on Quarticciolo, focusing on its history, and participant observation. The latter included informal conversations with residents and participation in initiatives promoted by social organisations, confrontational moments with institutions, and workshop activities, which were facilitated by personal experience as an intern at the neighbourhood laboratory.

In retracing the history of Quarticciolo, presented in *Chapter 3*, it became evident that it is a Borgata (a working-class neighbourhood), intentionally designed to marginalise and isolate the area, characteristics that persist today, despite the urbanisation of nearby areas, which no longer make the neighbourhood geographically peripheral. Today Quarticciolo, primarily a public housing district, faces significant social problems that remain unaddressed by institutions. The historical overview of Quarticciolo was also crucial in illustrating the unique context and the relevance of certain historical developments in shaping the area's future trajectory. This historical perspective is vital for formulating place-based policies that are functional to the territory and its expressed needs and potential. The origins of Quarticciolo as a borgata and the events surrounding Tor Sapienza, which attracted attention from the "sparks of change" (Nardis, 2022)—the social actors of Red Lab—highlight the importance of historical evolution in influencing development trajectories, the outcomes of which might otherwise remain unclear.

Chapter 4, devoted to the case study, described the actors involved in the Quarticciolo context, including the role of institutions and the limitations of the initiatives they promoted. The Neighbourhood Contract, for instance, revealed the shortcomings of top-down approaches to participatory processes, consisting mainly of a consultative mechanism (confirming what was observed in the literature section). The Theatre-Library, one of the few public facilities in the neighbourhood, has consolidated as a somewhat isolated core, failing to serve as a reference point for residents. However, it has been able to interact with the self-organised community in the neighbourhood, facilitating the realization of several initiatives and demonstrating the potential of public services to create synergies and local networks. In response to the inadequacies of institutional initiatives, significant contributions from self-organised actors were noted. These actors have reclaimed abandoned spaces and repurposed them for community activities that address the neighbourhood's multiple needs, demonstrating the critical role self-

organisation can play in local development. The design capacities of local actors were further evidenced by the bottom-up Master Plan they developed, which marked the first moment of informal collaboration between LabSU of La Sapienza University and the neighbourhood. This collaboration was formalised through the establishment of the Neighbourhood Laboratory by the Municipality of Rome, in partnership with the university. The initiative has fostered a more structured relationship, characterised by continuous dialogue and collaboration between the university and local actors, where the former offers technical expertise to support the planning efforts of the latter. The chapter concludes with an outline of the projects carried out by the Neighbourhood Laboratory.

Chapter 5, which discusses the findings, presents the key outcomes of the research, including the predominance of a *bottom-up approach to participation* in Quarticciolo. Social actors in the neighbourhood assert their role in decision-making processes, encapsulated in the slogan of the Quarticciolo Ribelle network: "*from the borgata to the borgata*". The persistence of local actors in claiming their right to participate in decision-making processes can be interpreted through Arnstein's (1969) framework, which suggests that only an angry demand from citizens can truly challenge the distribution of power in decision-making. The relationship between self-organised actors and institutions revealed a dual dynamic of *conflict* and *concertation*. What makes Quarticciolo's experience of self-organisation unique is its ability to maintain this balance, demonstrating that mobilisation is necessary to attract institutional attention, while concertation fosters dialogues that allow both self-organisation and institutions to evolve. In the consultative aspect, the work of the neighbourhood laboratory appears to play a key role, with the research aiming to highlight its function as a *'bridge'* between local actors / bottom-up initiatives and institutions. This role not only involved securing institutional funding for neighbourhood projects, but also facilitating communication between local actors and the authorities, thereby reducing the distance between the neighbourhood and institutions. However, it was observed that one year after the lab's activation, no project had been completed, highlighting the slow pace of implementation. When evaluating whether the workshop experience qualifies as co-creation, the findings indicate that while universities and local residents collaborate equally in project design, the final authority remains with the institutions, who ultimately determine whether or not the projects are realised. An emblematic example of this power dynamic is the project linked to Modesto Di Veglia Park, whose renovation was only achieved through a

competitive tender, underscoring the still-vertical relationship between institutions and the neighbourhood.

Beyond the limitations defining co-creation, which in Quarticciolo sees the university and social actors as key protagonists, the research aimed to demonstrate that the participatory experience in Quarticciolo offers an alternative model of 'govern the city' that can serve as an inspiration. The involvement of new social actors, such as the RedLab activists, who have fostered a gradual process of building relationships with local residents, has been instrumental in generating trust within the community. This process has provided a point of reference—a stable presence on the ground—from which residents can seek support and assistance. This, together with the intricate organization of the Quarticciolo Ribelle network, structured through assemblies at various levels, exemplifies a form of *territorial democracy* and underscores the potential success of such an approach in fostering proximity between governance structures and the local population. This model could offer a solution to the shortcomings of representative democracy in addressing the specific needs expressed by local communities. The Quarticciolo experience highlights the importance of maintaining continuous engagement with the territory and its inhabitants when developing policies that are truly responsive to their needs. Furthermore, with respect to both self-organised efforts and the Neighbourhood Workshop, the research suggests that Quarticciolo represents a model of *integrated local development*. This is evident not only in the Laboratory's declared mission but also in the Bottom-Up Master Plan. Local actors emphasise that effective local development cannot be achieved through fragmented interventions but must adopt an integrated approach, addressing the various problems faced by a complex neighbourhood like Quarticciolo— such as education, housing conditions, poverty, and environmental degradation— simultaneously. This vision of integrated development is aptly captured in statements by Rome's Municipality V Councillor, Edoardo Annucci[46]: "The park in Via Trani (Modesto Di Veglia Park), which will soon be redeveloped, will be both beautiful and useless if the region's housing—where people live—continues to deteriorate and the shops remain closed. Quarticciolo needs an overall masterplan to restore a perspective to the neighbourhood."

Regarding the Neighbourhood Workshop, the research highlighted the university's *learning posture* in engaging with local actors and experiences. This approach emphasises

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[46] Source: https://www.romatoday.it/politica/assessore-annucci-contro-fiaccolata-don-coluccia-quarticciolo.html

"starting from what already exists to imagine what will be," aiming to harness the skills and visions expressed by the neighbourhood. This approach is exemplified in the "activating local economies" project, where the workshop conducted interviews with residents to uncover the latent capacities of the neighbourhood, laying the groundwork for a development plan based on these insights.

In conclusion, the research shows that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions for each area. Instead, effective solutions must be rooted in the specific history and needs of the area and its inhabitants. By working with the territory and respecting its traditions, it is possible to foster sustainable development that leads to innovative processes, with marginalized areas also entitled to a brighter future. Working with the territory means acknowledging its diverse histories and needs—an inherently complex and long-term process—but one that is place-based and capable of generating sustainable, locally relevant actions.

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