

Self-Organization in Rome: a map

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Abstract

Durante gli ultimi anni, diverse ricerche sono state realizzate a Roma sul tema dello spazio e dell'autorganizzazione e molte di queste contengono importanti mappature. Tuttavia, questi processi sono molto dinamici e la situazione a Roma cambia ogni anno. Per questa ragione a novembre 2017 abbiamo deciso di realizzare, per della conferenza "City and Self-organization", tenutasi a Roma a dicembre 2017, un aggiornamento della situazione dell'autorganizzazione romana, legata all'utilizzo dello spazio, attraverso una mappa, al fine di comprendere meglio la portata e i significati del fenomeno. Le principali domande alla base del contributo sono: perché, anche se questi spazi sono così numerosi, non riescono ad influenzare le politiche urbane? Perché sono concentrate prevalentemente in alcuni quartieri della città e cosa rappresenta questa concentrazione? Quali sono le loro caratteristiche rispetto ad altri contesi europei? In che misura riescono a cambiare le istituzioni pubbliche?

During the last years many different researches regarding social spaces have been realized in Rome, sometimes containing different maps representing these experiences. Nevertheless, these processes are very dynamic and the situation of Rome changes every year. For this reason in November, 2017 we decided to realize, during the International Conference "Cities and Self-organization" held in Rome on December 2017, an updated map of all the self-organization experiences within the city of Rome in order to better understand the reach and the meanings of this phenomenon. The main questions at the base of the present research are: why, even though these spaces are so copious, are not they able in influencing urban policies? Why are they concentrated mainly in some specific quarters of the city? What are their features compared to others European cities? To what extent are they able to change the public institutions?

Parole chiave: Autorganizzazione, Mappatura, Politiche Urbane

Keywords: Self-organization, Mapping, Urban policies

Introduction

During the last years many different researches regarding social spaces have been realized in Rome, sometimes containing different maps representing these experiences. Nevertheless, these processes are very dynamic and the situation of Rome changes every year. For this reason in November, 2017 we decided to realize, during the International Conference "Cities and Self-organization" held in Rome on December 2017¹, an updated map of all the self-organization experiences within the city of Rome in order to better understand the reach and the meanings of this phenomenon.

¹ The Conference was organized by DICEA department (Dipartimento di Ingegneria Civile Edile e Ambientale) of Sapienza, University of Rome, on 11th-12th-13th December 2017.

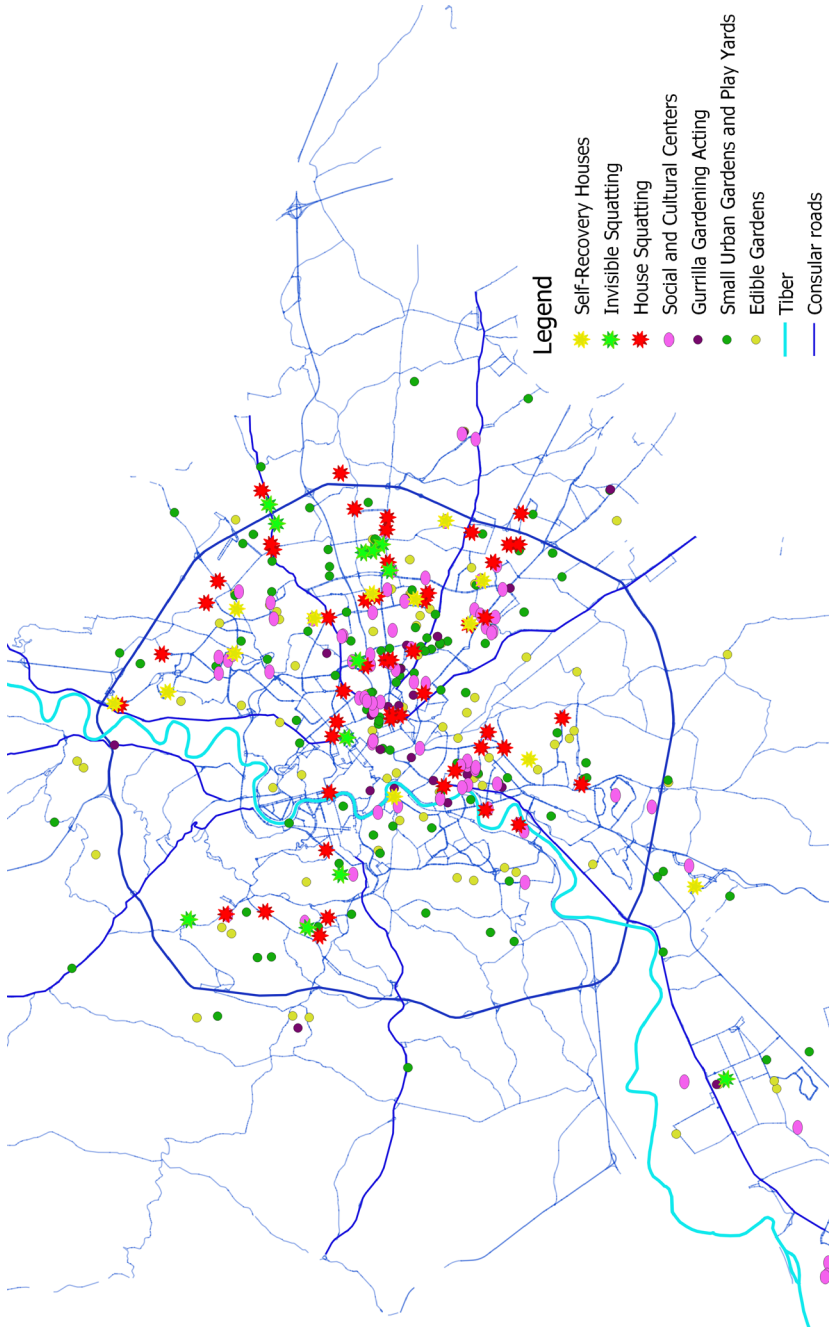


Fig.1- Rome and the Self-Organization

The map has been made with a GIS software, georeferencing and intertwining different kinds of data: for the green urban areas, we decided to start from the map realized by the association *ZappataRomana*²; for the social and cultural centers, we used the data of the associations *ReTer - Reti e Territorio*³ and the ones from *romattiva*⁴, which is a network of Roman social centers which has on its website even a list with all of his members. The same has been made for the house squatting, starting from a map realized in 2013 within a PhD thesis (Pisano, 2013) and from an act of the City's Administration dated 2016, the so-called *Delibera Tronca*. In both cases we tried to update and cross-check these data with the local news online newspapers of the last few years, in order to verify the presence of each space or the occurrence of evictions.

Considering all the possible self-organization processes, we decided to analyze only the ones related to physical spaces. This choice has been made in order to keep the focus on the space, inasmuch the object of socio-spatial urban conflicts and point of contention between re-appropriation of urban commons and commodification through neo-liberal processes.

The red, yellow and green stars represent three different kinds of house squatting. The red stars represent the house squatting experiences organized by three different housing struggles organizations of the city with different modes of action and political values. They are the Blocchi Precari Metropolitan (Precarious Metropolitan Blocks, born in 2007); the Coordinamento cittadino lotta per la casa (Citizens' Committee for the Fight for Housing), born in 1988; Action, created in 2002 but born in 1999 under the name Diritto alla Casa (Right to Housing).

The yellow stars represent all the public buildings converted into residential dwellings through a shared process between the public administration and the citizen's committees: in these cases, the City Administration realizes the first stage of the conversion, while for the second stage (the conversion of the internal flats) the City Government issues a Call addressed to committees, whom realize the conversion. The funds come from the City Government, the Region and the State.

2 <http://www.zappataromana.net/mappa/>

3 <http://www.reter.org/#zoom=11&lat=5144517.75099&lon=1388172.87049&layers=B00FFT>

4 <https://romattiva.wordpress.com/centrisocialiroma/>

The green stars represent some of the spontaneous squatting experiences in the city: in other words, that kind of squatting not organized by any committee or coordination. It is very complicated to identify these places, especially in a city like Rome. In this case, we decided to consider a municipal act known as Decreto Tronca (2016), in which these spaces are reported for evicting purposes but probably they are more than the ones visible within the map.

The pink ellipses represent the social and cultural centers and they often coincide with some house squatting experiences; the violet, green and yellow points represent respectively the Guerrilla Gardening Action, Small Urban Gardens and Play Yards, and the Urban Vegetable Gardens.

Social Centers and Housing Struggles, a long (Roman) history

At first glance, it would seem that the Social and Cultural Centers and the House Squatting in this map are the natural result of the 2008 economic crisis.

In fact, the financial downturn of the last ten years seems to have become a sort of universalistic explanation of almost all the various forms of urban exclusion, including phenomena like migration flows and housing emergency (Pozzi, Rimoldi, 2017) which today are closely interrelated especially in a city like Rome. This interrelation and - at the same time - this spread throughout the Roman territory of these experiences are, in fact, the results of a process much more historically relevant than it seems to be. Many researchers have tried to point out this relevance (Mugnani, 2017) and someone has tried to highlight the specificity in this sense of the recent Roman history both of the struggles over housing and the development of social centers (Mudu, 2014b). Others, from an anthropological perspective, have underlined the impact of these projects on domestic spaces and how the idea of *vicinato* (an intermediate social and physical place between a private home and his neighborhood) has changed throughout the years also thanks to some house squatting movements (Vereni, 2013) and how, at the same time, they often represent a surrogate of welfare state (Ibid, 2015b). For this reason, in order to better understand the map, it could be useful to try to outline the historical phases of this two phenomena together with how and why they often overlap.

At national level, in the last sixty years we have witnessed a

significant increase of the number of dwellings for housing together with a decreasing trend of the whole population (Aureli and Mudu, 2017:501). This apparently contradictory process went hand in hand with a progressive rise of policies encouraging home ownership and dismissal of public assets, culminated in the late 1990s in the so-called *cartolarizzazione* (securitization), a financial arrangement aimed at selling public assets, especially buildings owned by public bodies like State Social Security Systems (*enti previdenziali pubblici*) converted into marketable goods. Nevertheless, the result of this process is that Social Housing today is largely absent from the political agenda of the Italian Capital city: its history, since the very beginning⁵, was characterized by a will to strengthen class differences along the demarcation of “productivity” (Vereni, 2015a) with the result that a large amount of citizens (almost always those groups which are most in need) have been excluded to these policies.

After the Luttazzi’s Law and the creation of IACP (Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari) and also during the Fascist Regime, the subjects of housing policies were primarily the middle class families while shanty town dwellers, unemployed and immigrants from Southern Italy were ghettoized in the so called “*baraccamenti ufficiali*” after being evicted from the city center (Vereni, 2015b).

From the post war period, the Christian Democrat Party held the roman political power uninterruptedly for almost thirty years “allied with the same landlords and real-estate speculators active during the dictatorship [...] and additionally supported a new generation of *palazzinari*”⁶ (Mudu, 2014a:65): an alliance that helped to continue along the same political path regarding housing and that will be formalized in 1962 into the approvation of the new Urban Master Plan of Rome, whose goal was also “to stimulate further real-estate speculation with the intention of developing the city to accomodate up to five million inhabitants (the population at the time was 2.278,882)” (Ivi :66).

In this way, a large amount of housing blocks was built between the historic city and the *borgate*, sometimes pretty close to the

⁵ The Luttazzi’s Law (1903) is considered the first step in Italy towards the birth of public housing. It assigned the task to the municipalities in providing for the housing needs of the poorest inhabitants.

⁶ *Palazzinaro* is a roman slang term used to indicate the most famous roman families of builders and owners of several buildings in the Capital.

already existent illegal housing constructions (*abusivismo*) and not designed as integrated parts of the city. This process marked the birth of planned suburbs (*periferie*), areas that from their genesis and during the 1970s and 1980s became not only places of residence but also sites of production of alternative cultures: it is within these contests that experiences like social centers and housing struggles were born.

Following the analysis made by Pierpaolo Mudu (2014a; 2014b), it is possible to identify three phases both in the development of social centers and in the one of housing struggles in Rome. The first generation of social centers (during the second half of the 1970s) was strictly linked to a series of national pro-housing initiatives; after that period, in Rome, Mudu identifies a first phase between the 1985 and 1989 within which almost all the projects were related to *Autonomia Operaia* and located in suburban areas as the result of a precise choice against the real-estate speculation and the concentration in the historic center of all the cultural services and activities.

The second phase was after the 1990 mobilization of university student against the reform of the Italian University system, and according to Mudu the most interesting innovation about this period is that people started to visit and participate to the social centers activities even if they didn't live in that neighborhood. New sympathizers were actually attracted thanks to an increased visibility also in terms of communication strategies (like posters and big musical events). This increased number of visitors marked, in fact, a change in the internal demography of social centers that continued afterwards also during the third phase (after the anti-G8 demonstrations in 2001) although a significant rise of the internal disagreements.

Interestingly enough, the Roman history of the struggles over housing has a similar threefold partition together with some elements in common with the social centers one. First of all, it was born after the Second World War (1950s-1960s) and this first stage was actually directed by the PCI (the Italian Communist Party). Their main aim was to integrate all the peripheral neighborhoods to the city, together with the request of a legal planning of the house building and the legalization of the illegal houses built until then by poor people (Tozzetti, 1989). After that battle and the revoking of the Fascist Law N.1092/1939 (better known as *Provvedimenti contro l'urbanesimo*), the second

phase of this struggle started from the latter part of the 1960s and it was headed mostly by extra parliamentary organizations like *Autonomia Operaia* or national association like *Unione Nazionale Inquilini Assegnatari*: while the second promoted squatting as a means to negotiate with Institutions, the first attacked also private housing and was strongly settled in the social and political climate of those years (Mudu, 2014a:71). The third and last phase can be identified from the late 80s onwards, when squatting became in fact a permanent feature of the city and new associations⁷ - that are still active today - were created. There are at least three new features about this new wave of squatting: the first is a spacial change occurred in the choice of the squatting locus, which are mostly abandoned public buildings like schools or former public offices sometimes very close to the center of the city (unlike the first phases); the second is the internal demography of these contexts, within which there are a significant number of foreign immigrants and in general middle class people or families, both Italians and foreigners, whom can't afford to pay a rent anymore (Pisano, 2013); the third is the formalization, even if in many different ways, of a self-organization process aimed at managing the internal cohabitations and at the same time at organizing the external political claims (for example, all the squatters share to participate in political demonstrations on Human Rights and urban issues).

Map's interpretations

The first aspect to consider and that from our point of view deserves a reflection is the location of these spaces, above all the houses squatting and the social and cultural centers: they are located mainly within the south and the east area of the city, the post-Fordist ones of the Capital. Even though Rome has never been an industrial city as Milan or Turin, during the second half of the nineteenth century it had some important factories in the neighborhood of Ostiense, within the south quarter, while after the Urban Master Plan of the 1962-65, the east quarter was supposed to be the industrial axis of the city. The industry didn't

⁷ As previously stated, at the moment the three most active and relevant associations in this sense are *Coordinamento cittadino lotta per la casa* (Citizen's Committee for the Fight for Housing), born in 1988, *Action* (2002) and *Blocchi Precari Metropolitan* (Precarious Metropolitan Blocks, 2007).

last enough to make the economy of the city dependent on this sector like the public and the services ones (D'Albergo, Moini, Pizzo, 2016), but in these quarters there are still some former factories and the surrounding neighborhoods arose as working class ones.

We cannot say if it was the availability of such vacant spaces inherited by the former industries, or rather the popular origin of these neighborhoods to trigger the relation with these squatting realities (probably both); anyway, we think that it is possible to read these self-organization experiences in the light of some global processes tied to the de-industrialization, the restructuring of the contemporary economy and the recession of welfare state in favor of a neo-liberal agenda by the public institutions. In this sense, Rome is not strictly readable as a city of the Global North (Sassen, 2010), inasmuch it had not a strong industrial economy and the transition between the Fordist economy through a Post-Fordist one was not so marked. On the other hand, if we compare the informality characterizing a consistent part of Rome's management with the literature dedicated to the Global South (e.g. Fernandez-Kelly and Garcia 1989; Portes et al. 1989; Rao, 2013) we can track some relations, because of the tolerance of these practices as they are seen as alternative forms of survival strategies.

According to Pizzo and Altavilla, the division between Global North/South is not helpful and «what counts are the conditions under which they [illegal practices] emerge» (Pizzo, Altavilla, 2018:177). According to this perspective, it would be interesting to analyze these “conditions”, and in particular the role of the public institutions in managing self-organization's practices. The two authors (Pizzo, Altavilla, 2018), for example, argue that informal practices⁸ sometimes are useful for maintaining the status quo in socio-economic relationships. Some reflections in this sense could start from analyzing the public policies adopted in the two areas containing the highest number of social and cultural centers of Rome: Ostiense, in the south quarter, and Scalo San Lorenzo and Pigneto, in the east quarter. In both these areas the City Government invested in requalification programs during the 90s triggering processes ascribable to gentrification

⁸ It is important to distinguish the concept of informal, illegal and illicit, but for summary reasons we refer to the text of Pizzo and Altavilla. Anyway, self-organization can belong to all these three categories.

(Marinero, Daniele, 2014; Scandurra, 2012). Were these social and cultural centers functional (involuntarily) to a rent increasing in that areas?

Following this kind of analysis, we can stress the second thing that is possible to notice looking at the map: the amount of the mapped spaces. They are so copious that they should have a strong impact on the city's policies, but the relation between the public institutions and the instituting society that these self-organization experiences are producing is very ambiguous, dynamic and contradictory. We can try to put light, in a very concise way, on this constant dialectical tension between the institute society and instituting society through three aspects related to the three different kind of spaces analyzed:

1) City's regulation for the self-management of green urban areas

The city of Rome has around 45 million square meters of green areas scattered around its territory and articulated in different typologies, like parks and gardens, and it has a historical difficulty in managing them. Since many years, different associations and committees are asking for a city's regulation for the self-management of these areas, following the model of other European and Italian cities. In 2012, it was established a coordination between the City Government and a coordination of associations in order to elaborate a regulation, with the support of technicians and universities. Today, after different guidelines approved by the city government (throughout three administrations), it still misses an official regulation.

2) Self-recovery for House Squatting

Rome has a long history of housing struggles, but it has never been able to face the issue and nowadays it has only the 4.3% of social housing against the European average of 13.7% (Global City Report, 2011) and around 30.000 families suffer from housing problems, while 5.000 live in a squatting (Caritas, 2017). What is interesting, looking at the map, is the number of self-recovery houses compared with the other illegal and informal house squatting: they are only 11. Furthermore, these spaces are converted with the same processes of the recovery of the former self-made (illegal) housing, a kind of process that probably is useful also for maintaining the status quo in socio-economic relationships (Pizzo and Altavilla, 2018).

3) City government resolutions for the recognition of Social and Cultural Centers

The history of the last three decades of the relation between the public institutions and the social centers in Rome is paradigmatic of the paradox and the ambiguities of this issue. The first act regarding the use of the public property was promulgated in 1983, but it wasn't until the 1995, after the first two years of administration of the left-center wing, that the City Government approved a resolution named *Delibera 26*⁹ which was related to the social use of the public properties: with this act some social centers could use those properties paying only the 20% of the market value of the spaces.

After the financial crisis of 2008 and the following austerity policies, the public discourse about valorization and privatization in order to reach the budget balance begun to put under pressure the public institutions: in 2014 an act named *Delibera 219*¹⁰, a guideline for the new regulation, introduced the principle of the public call for the use of the public properties (860 of them are considered unavailable properties¹¹) with the criteria of the social and economic assessment. Hence, the first important struggles between the movements and the new left-center wing administration started. But the biggest paradox appeared the following year: the Court of Audit, a public and independent agency, by the hand of a general regional vice-prosecutor, proclaimed a revenue damage for the act of 1995, reporting the public officials responsible for that act for millions of euro and, consequently, the social centers for 20 years for being in arrears: the social centers received penalties of tens of thousands euros. One of them arrived to 6 million euros of penalty¹². In that year, the 2015, the *Delibera 140*¹³ was proclaimed by the City government and it led to the eviction of different centers and to the resignation of the vice-mayor of Rome.

Today there is an open struggle between the movements and the public institutions and the issue is still open: recently another

9 https://www.comune.roma.it/PCR/resources/cms/documents/CC26_1995.pdf

10 <https://www.comune.roma.it/PCR/resources/cms/documents/DGCDelib.N219del23.07.2014.pdf>

11 The public properties are divided in unavailable and available (according to the article n.828 of the Italian Civil Code): the firsts ones can be used only for public purposes.

12 <https://ilmanifesto.it/sfratti-e-sgomberi-un-anno-dopo-roma-non-si-vende/>

13 https://www.comune.roma.it/web-resources/cms/documents/DGCDelib_140_20151.pdf

act of the Court of Audit of the judges deleted the first one of the prosecutor ¹⁴ and interestingly this happened in the same period in which the movements and the associations were organized in a network named “*Decide Roma*” (Rome decides) and they decided to organize a big common protests under the slogan “*Roma non si vende*” (Rome is not for sale). Anyway this act is not executive, because the intervention of the new city’s administration is mandatory in order to make it effective.

Conclusions

In all these cases, self-organization experiences in Rome are very different in internal organization arrangements and political mindsets. Sometimes they just have an oppositional role towards the misrule of the city, but the risk could be to justify the absence of public institutions in providing the citizens with a welfare state system or even to become functional to the maintenance of the neo-liberal current socio-economic system. At the same time, they offer autonomous responses to social needs and they are able to provide services to the neighborhood inhabitants or to the roman citizens themselves.

Overall, there is an undoubtable fragmentation and inability to create a unique political network on these political and urban issues, but this fragmentation is the result - as we have seen - of a very complex historical and political process and it has to do with the many ways in which people live and see a city like Rome. This complexity is both the cause and the effect of an ongoing negotiation among associations, citizens and Institutions.

To summarize, in Rome it seems that self-organization doesn’t correspond to a unique and unambiguous political project on the city; nevertheless, these realities try to carry out some interesting everyday reflections and practices upon what it means to make politics in the city, with or without the institutional counterpart. In doing so, they actually contribute to the de-naturalization of a hegemonic and neoliberal way to inhabit the city.

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14 Because the properties were considered unavailable, so it was impossible to get a rent from them.

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