Searching for affective spaces:
an interdisciplinary approach to wounded cities through the case of Caivano's Rione Parco Verde (Naples, Italy)

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Abstract

Discussing urban peacebuilding processes today also means reasoning about the everyday life of cities that are the site of conflicts and power asymmetries that generate injustices at different scales. Urban studies, in which theories, approaches, and tools of urban planning and social sciences intersect, can contribute interpretatively and transformatively to processes of everyday peacebuilding. Often confronted with traumatized places, researchers propose situated approaches and practices that foster the coexistence and protect the most vulnerable groups. Drawing on the project "Futuri (Im)Possibili" (Caivano, Naples, Italy), this paper discusses an interdisciplinary research that aims at urban peace through mutual learning with communities and territorial actors: a process that is not driven by hierarchical decision-making and territorial control but by affective praxis based on active listening, participation and the development of interaction spaces oriented at mending local civil society.

Discutere oggi di processi di costruzione della pace urbana significa anche ragionare sulla quotidianità di città che sono teatro di conflittualità e asimmetrie di potere che generano fenomeni di ingiustizia a diverse scale. Gli urban studies, nei quali si incrociano teorie, approcci e strumenti tipici delle discipline urbanistiche e sociologiche, possono contribuire in chiave interpretativa e trasformativa ai processi di costruzione della everyday peace. Spesso a confronto con luoghi traumatizzati, i ricercatori propongono approcci e pratiche situate che favoriscano la coesistenza e tutelino le soggettività più vulnerabili. A partire dal progetto "Futuri (Im)Possibili" (Caivano, Napoli, Italia), questo articolo discute una ricerca interdisciplinare che mira alla pace urbana attraverso l'apprendimento reciproco con le comunità e gli attori territoriali: un processo che non è guidato da un processo decisionale gerarchico e dal controllo del territorio, ma da una prassi affettiva basata sull'ascolto attivo, sulla partecipazione e sullo sviluppo di spazi di interazione orientati alla ricucitura della società civile locale.

Keywords: urban trauma; everyday peace; affective spaces.
Parole chiave: trauma urbano; pace nella quotidianità; spazi affettivi.

Introduction

Numerous places have suffered the effects of sudden devastation or social and cultural tensions, such as natural hazard phenomena, armed conflicts, riots, or forms of segregation, militarization, and marginalization. These settings are referred to as *traumatized places* and *places to be reconstructed* in a rational logic that conceives them only as objects to be acted upon. Indeed, in most cases, such places are subjected to sectoral policies and approaches, top-down imposed urban transformation processes, and public safety policies based on the 'command and control' *logic*, or the logic of pressure policies recognized in so-called 'peacekeeping' and 'peacemaking' processes (Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Jett, 2000; Elfversson *et al.*, 2023). In urban practice, these approaches privilege interventions aimed at redeveloping public spaces or spaces of public use in terms of urban decorum and globalized building standards, which are considered *neutral* (in case of cultural and social conflicts), scarcely criminogenic, and easily defensible. Such interventions are grounded in the idea that *new stones can erase unsettling memories.* A well-known example is the post-conflict urban redevelopment of the city center and the waterfront in Belfast, to distance the narrative of Northern Ireland from the Troubles (Esposito De Vita, 2013). These interventions neither build on the demands of the population nor engage them in collaborative processes with decision-makers at various scales. Conversely, both theory and practice suggest that spatial interventions based on place-making can play a substantial, meaningful role in peacebuilding (Bădescu, 2022; Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel, 2022).

Traumatized places do not only experience forms of 'advanced marginality' (Wacquant, 2008) – where spatial alienation, social fragmentation and territorial stigmatization enables extraordinary measures to be imposed top-down – but are also subject to 'abyssal exclusion' (de Sousa Santos, 2017) where the invisibility, dehumanization, and inferiorization of social groups lead to a denial of their rights and agency, and thus to their non-involvement in transformation processes. In this paper, 'urban peace' is not understood as an event crystallized in time, but as a process geared towards establishing new relationships beyond the polarized lines of conflict and criminal behaviors. This entails the construction of visions away from the forced and

destructive confrontation and injustices of the 'command and control' approach; visions capable of inspiring integrated actions on physical and social space, aimed at *peaceful coexistence* and *constructive dialogue*. This conceptualization is captured by the term 'everyday peace' and is grounded in the experiences and practices of people or groups inhabiting specific territories, who are best positioned to understand how peace and coexistence can be generated and nurtured over time and in place (Elfversson *et al.*, 2023). It reflects a 'spatial turn' (Soja, 2008; Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic, 2016; Macaspac and Moore, 2022) as it aims at a more situated understanding of peace processes through ethnographic, participatory, and collaborative methods.

This paper takes the complex horizon of *trauma* as a key to understanding and supporting human behavior and the organization of places in contexts in which people experience the effects of a stressful event – or repeated events – of anthropogenic or non-anthropogenic nature. The category of post-traumatic syndrome is extended to all those conditions in which people live daily with the effects of an event – or repeated events – that may undermine the individual or collective capacity to act and react.

In relation to anthropogenic issues, the built environment, geopolitical dynamics, and social conditions play an important role in amplifying and perpetuating *urban trauma*. These dimensions are tied to processes of socio-spatial marginalization whose stigma-producing narratives foster a persistent sense of alienation. These, in turn, undermine the sense of belonging typical to inhabiting places and, often, encourage identification with subcultures that fuel conflicts (Cellamare, 2020). In such sites, the concept of community itself can be misleading, being a driver of division and conflicts instead of developing a *cum munus* (Esposito, 2006). In fact, when discussing social marginalization and spatial peripheralization, there is a tendency to simplify, generalize, and represent communities in opposition, proposing solutions framed by control that accentuate boundaries and expropriate inhabitants of their capacity to aspire and act. In her disambiguation of the concept of 'vita activa', Arendt (2012) emphasizes the need to confront the pressure on the public realm that seeks to diminish human agency and political freedom. In socio-spatial contexts, where publicness is eroded by continuous exercises of power, violence, and showdowns, inhabitants are

deprived of the human capacity for action that is the very essence of humankind.

The concept of trauma in these contexts, intersecting with themes of public space (Madanipour, 2004), of school as a community garrison (Lecardane *et al.*, 2025), of future studies literacy (Cook, 2017), and of the practices of everyday life (de Certau, 2011), can offer interpretative keys of urban phenomena that go beyond the traditional cause-effect logics of dirigiste approaches. It introduces the logics of *relationality, affection, subjectification,* and *everyday life* (Elfversson *et al.*, 2023). Towards this aim, a 'praxeological approach' (Reckwitz, 2012) may help transferring the theoretical horizon of trauma into an embedded case study in a context in which the following criteria coexist: triggering stressor event, conditions of segregation (also self-enforced), continuous erosion of the public realm, loss of capacity for action and activation, criminal subcultures and narratives that reiterate stigma and alienation. Caivano, a municipality located in the northern part of Naples (Italy) and a site of turbulent histories, is one of those spaces that calls for alternatives to the 'command and control' approach.

Drawing on an ongoing case study (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009), this paper describes a context in which the everyday life of communities living in social housing (Brignone *et al.*, 2022; Cellamare, 2020) is affected by a trickle of lawlessness and abuse that reiterates trauma on a daily basis. In this context, the deteriorating conditions of the built environment and social fragmentation are intertwined with atavistic distrust of institutions. Organized crime and its subcultures make it difficult to shape trust within and across communities. Through the theoretical filter of trauma, we discuss an action research activity integrating methodologies typical of sociology and urban studies for co-designing shared futures. In the following sections, we will first examine the literature on urban trauma and successively focus on the concept of 'affectiveness' in the urban field. Further, the case of Caivano is presented in its many critical aspects, and the methodology of the ongoing project "Futuri (Im)possibili - Diagnosticare il presente e immaginare il futuro con i giovani di Caivano"[1] will be illustrated.

We will conclude with theoretical and methodological reflections.

Embracing (urban) trauma through affective practices

Trauma is understood as a physiological response to a painful or threatening situation from which there is no way out, and in which the body reacts helplessly by retaining that unprocessed traumatic memory. Levine (2014) explored the biology of trauma, showing how the body reacts to traumatic events and how these very mechanisms can be used to overcome the trauma itself through bodily sensations. In *Somatic Experiencing*, he argues that trauma is what the nervous system retains in the absence of an empathic witness. This is why the need to establish a sense of safety (shelter, stability) in the here and now can be configured as a point of departure for trauma resolution – enabling individuals to feel comfortable in exploring and expressing the feelings underlying the trauma. When trauma is chronic, it is associated with entrenched forms of violence (gender, race, class, political abuse), that usually appear under a veneer of normality. This concealment makes the afflicted even less visible and more prone to conditions of distress/discomfort, including dehumanization, identity alteration, anxiety, and depression.

In urban studies, urban trauma is considered a condition in which conflict or catastrophe damages not only the physical environment but also social and cultural networks (Lahoud *et al.*, 2010). Here we can think of extreme natural hazard phenomena, terrorist attacks, or numerous conflicts and displacements that populate the daily news. Pain (2019; 2021) illustrates some limitations, framing trauma as a common, sudden, rapid event that originates from outside – one that has a long-lasting impact and must be managed by the technical discipline according to the canons of adaptation and resilience. Drawing on post-colonial theories, social psychiatry, social ecology, feminist political theories, and art theory, Till (2012), on the other hand, conceptualizes 'wounded cities' as densely inhabited places damaged by histories of physical destruction, displacement, and individual and social trauma resulting from violence perpetrated by the state. For Till, these are not punctual external events but forms of violence that act over the long term and continue to structure current social and spatial relations, and as such also structure expectations of

in September 2024 with a foreseen duration of 36 months.

what is considered *normal*. Commenting on Till's (2012) writing, Shields (2012) focuses on *ethics*, *affects*, and *care* by conceiving trauma as stress – a wound that highlights materiality and embodiment as well as less intangible qualities, recovering aspects of place, people, and communities, and the relationships between them. In this vein, more recent feminist, queer, and post-colonial perspectives on trauma have conceived of this condition as follows: *collective*, since it can pervasively afflict particular communities and/or disadvantaged places; *ordinary and material* because it affects the reality and materiality of everyday life; *embedded* because it enters into the webs of social and cultural processes (among many: Cvetkovich, 2003). These positions shift the notion of trauma from a consequence of catastrophe to a *structural condition of everyday life*.

Rittel and Webber's conception of 'wicked problems' (1973) offers an analytical perspective to approach wounded contexts. Unlike tame problems that have clearly defined parameters and single, correct solutions, wicked problems entail shifting definitions, multiple interpretations, and the co-evolution of problems and solutions. Such conceptualizations resist linear, top-down technical approaches and instead call for participatory, iterative, and context-sensitive methods. *Affective urbanism*, which has introduced theories of affect into urban design and planning, is such an approach. Emphasizing the places of everyday life as sites where social inequalities related to categories of difference (gender, class, race, religion, ethnicity, disability, etc.) take material form (Viderman and Knierbein, 2020), it proposes an inclusive perspective that focuses on spatial practices of belonging, re-appropriation, and contestation; on the relationality and materiality involved in the making of place, understood as bodies acting within spaces; on the subject-object and subject-collectivity relationships; and on the power of encounters that connects bodies. Building on Lefebvre's studies on lived space, Viderman and Knierbein (2020) highlight *affective encounters* between individuals and groups as a way to challenge routines and processes of alienation. These encounters can generate new logics of urban resistance and change by giving voice to those who have none, putting different capitals back into circulation, and enacting power in an alternative way, to undermine the silences and absences of not adequately represented subjects. This approach seeks to go beyond the

traditional and detached urban planning tools by prioritizing a «bodily action in embodied space» (Viderman and Knierbein, 2020: 61) capable of mobilizing resources and people, thereby laying the foundations for meaningful everyday places. It embraces design and planning positions that are not neutral but grounded in the social and democratic dimension, guided by protocols of *collaboration*, *cooperation*, and *co-creation*, as well as principles of emotional involvement, everyday life, and the materiality of the urban body. Affective urbanism is operationalized through the practices of *bodies in space* (affective space), such as insurgent planning practices, care-inspired practices, urban commoning practices, and feminist and trans-feminist practices. In line with the theory of practice (Reckwitz, 2012; Schatzki *et al.*, 2001) – which considers the intersecting activities of bodies, minds, objects and their possible uses, cognitive and experiential baggage, emotional states, and their interconnections, activated and repeated over time – the collective making of places avoids abstract and binary approaches cast down from above.

Everyday emergency: social and urban trauma in Caivano (Naples, Italy)

From emergency to trauma

Caivano[2] is a municipality of the metropolitan area of Naples, lying halfway between the cities of Naples and Caserta, approximately 15 km from both urban centres (Fig. 1). For centuries, this area had been mostly dedicated to agriculture. Following WWII, national urban planning laws had been suspended to promote post-war recovery, reshaping the landscape of the metropolitan area of Naples through unregulated construction of residential buildings, industrial hubs, and transport infrastructure, and incorporating Caivano into the urban sprawl. In the 1970s, Caivano's mainly agricultural character and low-income economy have slightly changed as companies such as Unilever and Cirio bought nearby agricultural land in Pascarola (see the upper left perimeter of the municipality in the Fig. 1) to develop an industrial district. A further transformative event was the 6.9-magnitude earthquake that struck on 23/11/1980, affecting 687 municipalities across the regions of Campania, Basilicata, and Puglia. It killed nearly 3,000

2 The municipality of Caivano covers an area of approximately 27 km² and has a population of 35,966 (ISTAT, 2024).

people, injured around 9,000, and left about 400,000 homeless (Ventura, 2006). Beyond the immediate emergency, it exposed and worsened the already precarious conditions –especially overcrowded and decaying housing – in Naples, where over 10,000 buildings were damaged[3]. In the aftermath, Law 219/1981 established a framework for the reconstruction and development of affected areas. This law granted full commissarial powers to the Mayor and suspended urban planning regulations to enable rapid reconstruction on the metropolitan fringes. The plan proposed a top-down redesign, with around 20,000 new housing units to accommodate about 100,000 people in peripheral and peri-urban areas. While it faced criticism for financial and political speculation (e.g., Mastroberti *et al.*, 2021), from a socio-urbanistic standpoint, it led to the displacement and mass relocation of mostly lower-class families from Naples' center to peripheral blocks, where they lacked material and social ties. Although Caivano was not directly hit by the earthquake, the *Rione Parco Verde* (Green Park District, hereafter RPV) was built on its northwestern edge as part of the reconstruction plan (see Fig. 1 and Fig.2), housing 4,000 earthquake-displaced people, though many units were also illegally occupied. Today, approximately 6,000 residents live in large apartment blocks and temporary dwellings that became permanent and public spaces that were never built or maintained (e.g., parks, playgrounds, streets). Notably, the "Green Park" is not actually a park – the term 'green' refers only to the color of the housing blocks. Public spaces such as parks, playgrounds, and streets were either never built or have since fallen into neglect. Today, the area includes two schools, a church, and a few associations offering social, cultural, and sports activities aimed mainly at children. Some residents also spontaneously take initiative in waste management and maintenance of neglected public spaces, as institutions largely ignore the area due to high rates of illegal occupancy.

The rising of wicked problems
The emergency-driven reconstruction approach introduced a core flaw: the provision of housing without the structural and functional

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3 In fact, already before the seismic event there was a very high demand for social housing, and a municipal plan to depopulate the city centre through a metropolitan "Periphery housing plan".

conditions for proper dwelling. Social displacement, institutional neglect, and resulting marginalization worsened the degradation triggered by the initial trauma. Similarly to other well-known fringes of the Metropolitan area of Naples, such as Scampia, the socio-spatial conditions in Caivano provide ideal preconditions for the Camorra to settle in the area (Esposito De Vita, 2013, 2018). Over time, metropolitan and local organized crime established a stronghold in RPV, turning it into what some media described as one of *Europe's largest drug markets*. Exploiting poverty, lack of institutional involvement, and the area's isolated, easily controlled layout (e.g., *cul-de-sacs* streets and surrounding highways), criminal groups relocated from more policed neighborhoods like Scampia (notably after the 2002 feud). Beyond drug trafficking, organized crime sought to control housing assignments and infiltrated local politics, thus criminously reshaping both private and public spaces in RPV. To give an extent of this phenomenon, Caivano's municipal administration has been placed under external commissarial control ten times since 1988[4], resulting in a prolonged 'state of exception' (Agamben, 2003).
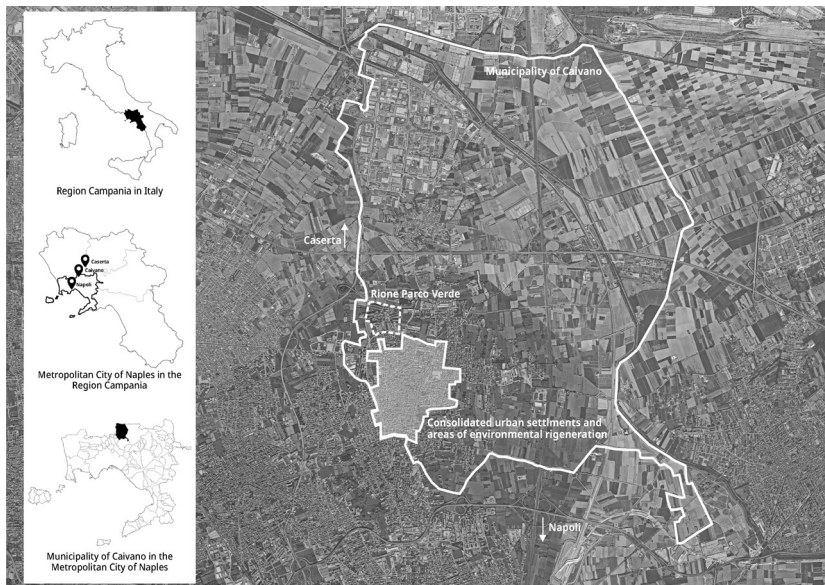

Fig. 1 A map of Caivano, with Parco Verde located on the northwestern edge. Source: Federica Morra's elaboration from OpenStreetMap.

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4 https://amministratori.interno.gov.it/index.php?page=StoriaEnteC.

Organized crime in the area is also linked to environmental crimes, particularly illegal waste disposal. Caivano is part of the *'terra dei fuochi'* (land of fires), an area notorious since the early 2000s for the burning and burying of toxic industrial waste, causing severe pollution and elevated cancer rates and deaths (Flora, 2015). Yet it represents another collective trauma the population has to deal with. Apart from the presence of mafia-like subculture in everyday life, RPV has seen Camorra-related violence[5] and tragic incidents, including sexual abuse cases[6]. These examples reflect only the surface of the deep-rooted complex issues that pose an obstacle to everyday peace in RPV. Beyond its physical isolation, RPV carries a strong negative stigma – some residents report being denied 'honest' jobs because of their address[7]. To give a glance at how social divisions persist: RPV inhabitants refer to old-Caivano residents as *villagers,* while the latter often distance themselves by highlighting *they're not from RPV* and still (ca. forty years after its construction) call RPV residents *Neapolitans*. In summer 2023, Caivano drew significant media and political attention following a series of criminal events including repeated cases of collective sexual abuse – both victims and perpetrators were minors – within the abandoned Delphina sports centre in RPV (see Fig. 1). While the area had long been neglected, these severe incidents prompted national outrage and state intervention. Yet, the institutional response once again reflects a top-down, 'command and control' approach rooted in a 'state of exception' (Agamben, 2003), replacing local administration with central authority and focusing on militarization (increased police presence, CCTV surveillance) and top-down regeneration.

Is the 'command and control' approach suitable for solving wicked problems?
Since September 2023, the municipality has been under extraordinary commissioner status, mandated by the Presidency

5 See, e.g., Ciccarelli-Sautto clan, or the case of Antonio Natale.
6 https://fondazionepolis.regione.campania.it/fortuna_loffredo.
7 Apart from the problems listed until now, Caivano also suffers from the historical structural differences between Northern and Southern Italy (Barbagallo, 2013). For instance, Caivano has a 16,6% unemployment rate (compared to 12,9% for the Campania region and 9,2% for Italy), low incomes, a higher presence of children, and a very high school dropout rate (reaching peaks of 40% in some years)

of the Council of Ministers, «in order to deal with situations of degradation, social vulnerability and youth discomfort in the territory of the municipality»[8]. The appointed Commissioner is tasked with implementing an extraordinary infrastructure and redevelopment plan[9], under Decree Law No. 123/2023 called "Caivano Decree", part of a broader national policy against youth hardship, educational poverty, and juvenile crime[10] operating at the legislative level, implementing public safety policies and a punitive revision of juvenile law[11] (Tessitore, 2023). Apart from evicting some of the residents illegally occupying flats in RPV, one key intervention is the recovery of the abandoned Delphina Sports Centre (now "Centro sportivo Pino Daniele", see Fig. 2), built by the military and entrusted to Police sports groups. Additional plans include converting an abandoned concrete plant into a university facility and repurposing the decaying building of the former "Caivano Arte" theatre into a smaller auditorium and cultural hub near the new sports centre (Fig. 2).

These actions, though also aimed at addressing social vulnerability and improving municipal capacity (e.g., hiring 16 social service workers, expanding police and administrative staff), have sparked controversy. Critics argue the approach is securitarian and symbolic (Cavaliere, 2024), narrowly focused on Caivano without really addressing the local community and broader regional issues.

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8 Authors' translation from: https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/DPCM_18_settembre_2023.pdf.

9 https://presidenza.governo.it/AmministrazioneTrasparente/Organizzazione/CommissariStraordinari/CS_Caivano/DECRETO_N7_20231120_organizzazione_struttura_supporto.pdf

10 https://www.programmagoverno.gov.it/media/r4fjygbf/focus-dl-123_2023.pdf.

11 The "Caivano Decree" established the direct responsibility of the family in cases of school dropout by their children (sanctioned with up to two years of imprisonment). It also revises parental authority, which may be revoked by the Public Prosecutor in cases of mafia association or drug trafficking committed by the minor. In addition, the Decree extends the oral warning by the Questore to minors under the age of 14, who will also be banned, upon proposal to the Judicial Authority, from using or possessing electronic devices and mobile phones. In addition, the Decree also extends the Urban Daspo, a provision prohibiting access to specific areas of cities, to minors of 14 years old involved in violent episodes. As of today, the Decree has led to an increase of the number of imprisoned minors (Carli, 2024)
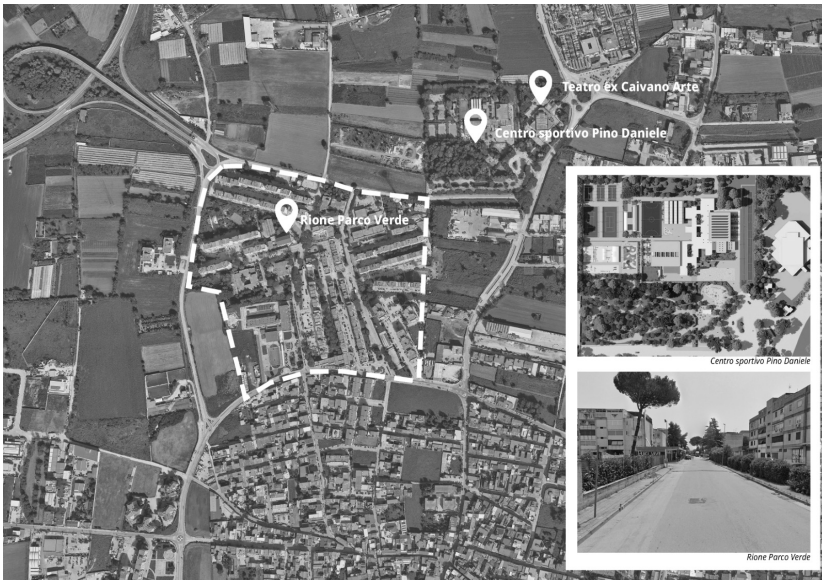
Fig. 2 A zoom on the Rione Parco Verde and its surroundings.
Source: Federica Morra's elaboration from OpenStreetMap.

For instance, the use of the new Centro Sportivo Pino Daniele[12] is restricted upon payment of high monthly fees (comparable with other private sports centres), and the local sports teams and associations have been excluded, even though they struggle to find adequate training spaces. The new, smaller auditorium replacing the old "Caivano Arte" theatre will also have restricted access to those able to pay a higher ticket price. Similarly, the new University building, unveiled in December 2024, remains unused, although some Neapolitan universities had granted the relocation of some of their courses to Caivano. These examples[13] illustrate how the €55 million "Caivano Plan" appears detached from local specificities and civil society, which have not been meaningfully involved in its development but rather acted upon. By bypassing the principle of vertical subsidiarity, the plan reinforces the marginalization of an already stigmatized and socially excluded population. Some authors argue it

12 The centre, unveiled with big mediatic resonance by the Prime Minister in May 2024 and constructed by the military using €13 mln of public funds, is now managed by the statal 'Sport e Salute Society' and the State Police 'Fiamme Oro Group'
13 https://www.ilpost.it/2025/01/27/modello-caivano-parco-verde/.

prioritizes quick, visible, and measurable outcomes over structural, long-term interventions grounded in contextual knowledge and inclusive, multi-level participation (Ferraro and D'Ascenzio, 2025). Despite the criticism, the national right-wing government promotes it as a model to be replicated, with €180 million earmarked for its expansion to other deprived areas in the national context (e.g., Rome, Foggia, Palermo) over the next three years (Colombini, 2025; Taby, 2025).

From 'command and control' to 'affective practices': a sociology of (im)possible futures

The current outcomes of the "Caivano Plan" expose the limitations of the *'command and control' approach*. While not discounting the goodwill, resources, and efforts invested, such a strategy may not be the most effective in addressing the layered material and social challenges that characterize *wounded urban areas*.

In an effort to explore alternative forms of engagement, the "Futuri (Im)possibili" team developed a research design that prioritizes everyday peace, relational repair, and social listening campaigns as fundamental pillars, also focusing on youth in order to transversally involve the very different social realities of Caivano. Here, subjectivation and critical reflection about present and possible future conditions may help to redefine narratives about Caivano, but also to increase local youth's capacity to aspire, possibly enabling them to affect local transformation processes (Appadurai, 2007; Sen, 2005).

The aim is to mend fragmented situated knowledge about the context, foster imagination, encourage subjectivation, and create spaces where residents are no longer passive recipients of external interventions but become active agents in shaping their environment. The research approach shifts the focus from external control to local empowerment by emphasizing explorative and transformative practices. First, *subjectivation* becomes central to our methodology; we emphasize residents' agency, enabling them to actively narrate, imagine, and shape the community around them and envision 'alternative futures' (Cook, 2017). The ability to reflexively consider the anticipatory hypotheses that shape ideas about the future and to examine how these can be questioned, rethought or disrupted altogether, enables us to discover new possibilities in the present or new

pathways to create desired futures (Delanty, 2024), shaping the 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai, 2007). Here, traditional sociological techniques such as surveying and qualitative in-depth interviews with local stakeholders aimed at diagnosing local criticalities are accompanied by so-called 'creative/inventive methods' (Giorgi *et al.*, 2021), where local residents are asked to produce video narratives about current criticalities and possible solutions. Through brainstorming sessions and focus groups, social workers helped identify key challenges faced by local youth and map out the institutional actors – whether currently present or lacking – best suited to address them. This participatory approach aligns institutional responsibilities with the lived experiences of young people and highlights relevant local stakeholders. Complementing this effort, Street Units operate as a proximity service, engaging youth directly in their everyday environments – such as public squares, schools, neighborhoods, and informal gathering spots. They offer listening and support for personal and family issues, facilitate connections with educational, cultural, and social services, and promote spaces for socialization, dialogue, and reflection.

Furthermore, spaces of affect and practices of *mending* are fostered to build bridges between formal institutions (such as local administrations) and bottom-up initiatives (such as civil society organizations). These connections aim to restore social trust, facilitating more meaningful interactions and coordination among the existing – both grassroots and institutional – initiatives. Finally, we use *affirmative critique* (Braidotti, 2019) as a tool not only to diagnose current problems but to open up possibilities for imagining and building alternative futures. By engaging participants in critical reflection and imagination, we try to move beyond the trauma, stigma, and alienation that have defined life in Caivano, generating *hope* and new pathways forward. The methodology operates through a framework of recirculating and networking existing resources, addressing situated knowledge, and fostering reciprocal awareness among stakeholders. This approach aims to establish *spaces and practices of affection*, where social bonds are strengthened and institutional relationships mended to achieve long-term cooperation and coordination among local organizations through Community Boards.

The idea is to escape the *compressed temporality* imposed by the 'command and control' approach that proposes preconfigured solutions and to embrace a path of long-term reconciliation and the definition of solutions.

An alternative approach to 'wounded cities' and 'wicked problems'

As anticipated, this research stems from an integrated social-spatial approach in which injustice, challenges, and forms of conflict shape places and relationships and are, in turn, shaped by them. By combining a complex methodology for interpreting the local needs – developed through an embedded action-research process rooted in the dialogue with local associations, civil society and public institutional actors – with a collaborative approach to urban design, the proposed approach aims at opening a discussion on how to move beyond the top-down emergency strategies often adopted by public institutions to address the critical issues of peripheral social housing complexes. The study focused on three dualities in order to provide an alternative perspective to support social activation and to contribute to raising awareness instead of alienation and distancing bodies from action in wounded cities.

Urban trauma vs everyday peace

The social and spatial conditions of contested, fragile, and wicked territories were addressed through the analytical prism of *urban trauma* as a starting point for building processes of everyday peace. Constructive positions frame such traumatised, unsettled, wicked territories not only as fraught with violence and instability, but also as spaces in which radical transformation can take place by going beyond fixed perimeters (Viderman *et al.*, 2023). These spaces can accommodate creativity, innovation, and new forms of connection between people and ideas by enacting constructive potential and transformative conflict dynamics capable of healing wounds, trauma, and power imbalances between urban actors (Elfversson *et al.*, 2023).

Research design for Caivano expands on the logic of the 'spatial turn' (Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 2008) to nurture a mutual exchange between social sciences and urban planning. The main aim is to trigger the coveted mechanism of transformation of spaces,

of relationships, of everyday life quality, and of institutions of all degrees and types, to initiate a process of deconstruction of the stigma that pervades places and people in contested contexts. Overcoming the stigma that constrains the creative and innovative potential of the communities requires a focus on the production and reproduction of space through collaboration among local associations, civil society, and public institutions.

In such contexts, creative, participatory, collaborative, and situated methods are vital for engaging with the intimate, traumatized, frightened, and disillusioned realities of places, making visible the effects of urban violence and disillusionment (Pain, 2019; Levine, 2014). While discussing creative perspectives may appear secondary where basic needs – such as adequate housing and public services – are unmet, and where organized crime affects everyday life, approaching this unsettling condition through the lens of trauma allows for the emergence of alternative narratives of everyday life, beyond stigma and mistrust in the public sphere.

Emergency regime vs collaborative and creative communities

The connection to everyday life and the creation, consolidation, or expansion of creative and collaborative communities animated by the possibility of imagining feasible, alternative urban futures is not only valuable in itself, but also provides a foundation for planners, policy makers and urban theorists to engage in transformation and governance rooted in situated and unbiased territorial knowledge (Till, 2012). In many Italian public housing estates, the sense of urbanity is frequently eroded by deteriorating built environment, inadequate infrastructure and primary services, as well as the absence of meaningful public spaces to build community. Emergency approaches, administrative receivership, and zero tolerance policies often emerge as a reaction to traumatic events. Yet, these measures follow their own logic, intervening on specific topics and places, without dealing with the social unease of wronged communities or the dilapidated conditions of the built environment. These are, however, shortsighted solutions, which frequently generate a further post-traumatic reaction, reinforcing stigma, mimicking a securitarian narrative, while offering only superficial redevelopment. A systemic approach to

planning in these challenged areas could be more effective in fostering a renewed sense of belonging, positive narratives, and the production of inclusive public spaces for local communities. Raising awareness of the extent of the suffered trauma, fostering affective engagement in decision-making, and combining relational, collective, embodied, and material perspectives in planning can enable the initiation of effective regeneration processes. These approaches, also based on the methods of listening and consensus (Sclavi and Susskind, 2011), strengthen the possibilities of managing conflicts and extending decision-making processes to the inhabitants. They also increase the possibilities of promoting collaborative projects on the basis of a real willingness to work collectively, seeking shared urban and social solutions that are not necessarily based only on economic capital and private investment (Goñi Mazzitelli, 2024).

'Command and control' vs affective space

The theoretical approach and the ongoing empirical experience in Caivano have highlighted the limitations of a 'command and control' approach and securitised territorial management, which have failed to integrate spatial and social initiatives. In the case of Caivano, institutional choices have always generated new and overlapping social, economic, and cultural fractures, creating requalified but inaccessible places, militarised zones, and symbolic but insubstantial interventions that did not consider the inhabitants' demands. In other words, the plan tends to produce visible effects that are not based on spaces or practices of affect, such as listening, participation, and reciprocal knowledge. As such, the plan risks reproducing 'advanced marginality' (Wacquant, 2008) and 'abyssal exclusion' (de Sousa Santos 2017) by suspending the normal institutional order and denying the local community's agency. This approach, which generates an apparent redevelopment without triggering regeneration, risks producing a rebound effect, accentuating alienation and distancing bodies from public space and, therefore, from the *vita activa* that fosters, in Arendt's stance, social and democratic activation (Arendt, 2012).

Drawing on the theoretical framework and ongoing empirical work in Caivano within the "Futuri (Im)possibili" project, we propose the subjectivation of actors and users as co-protagonists

in urban transformation. Their embodied experience, marked by materialities, imaginaries, emotions, discomforts, and aspirations, contribute essential forms of situated knowledge. In contexts shaped by long-standing fragility, where self-respect and institutional trust are eroded, even the possibility of dialogue among different parts of society must be seen as a fragile, yet crucial starting point.

Rather than immediately focusing on capacity-building (Sen, 2005), the Caivano case suggests to begin with incremental steps towards re-activation (Arendt, 2012) to revive human agency and political freedom. *Vita activa* becomes possible only when the neglected corners of the city are addressed not merely as emergencies, but as traumas in need of healing through listening, dialogue, and the co-design of embodied space.

In this light, the convergent perspectives of urban studies and social sciences, and the idea of dealing with (im)possible futures, seem to offer theoretical and praxeological tools to actively intervene in these contexts, in order to mend fragmented situated knowledge, re-orient institutional actions and open up spaces of affect, subjectivation, interaction and listening – possibly offering an horizon of peace to traumatized cities.

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