UTOPIA OF NORMALITY

TACKLING HOUSING EMERGENCY THROUGH URBAN REGENERATION.

THE CASE OF PORTA DI ROMA.

Martina Gentili
This graduation project stems from my personal interest in the city of Rome, where I was born and raised. It all started because of my desire to understand the mechanisms that are transforming such a beautiful city into an unsustainable model of development, in which the social distress is increasing and the lack of identity and social cohesion of the peripheral areas is growing.

A matter of particular concern to me was the so-called “housing emergency”. Rome is facing an ever growing shortage of affordable housing for the weakest segments of its population, due to a lack of social housing policies and of public housing projects. At the same time real estate speculation, and especially the real estate bubble of 1997-2007, caused an overproduction of residential stock at market prices, too high for the majority of the population.

The failure of the state in regulating market dynamics caused a great mismatch between demand and supply. As a result there are many vacant houses and great number of people struggling to have a decent roof over their head. In this situation right to housing movements and the phenomenon of squatting are becoming central again. However, illegal occupation of unused buildings does not only fulfil a residential purpose, but it also fills a void in Rome’s urban and social tissue. By providing socially engaging activities, aggregation spaces and missing services and functions for the community, squatted spaces respond to a widespread social need that has an important spatial impact. Right to housing in Rome has ceased to mean simply “a roof on your head”, but it mingles that basic right with a wider idea of more “social” and “sustainable” forms of living and dwelling.

The overall objective of my graduation project is to find a smart way of making the empty houses meet the homeless people and to recognize the urban potential of social movements and appropriation processes.

The project seeks to provide a different approach to the provision of social housing, and does so through a housing policy proposal. The policy implies various measures to tackle the housing shortage, including taxation on vacant property and the acquisition of vacant dwellings through expropriation and other means, in order to transform it into social housing.

In this proposal a better integration between housing and other functions in envisioned, promoting socio-functional mix as a tool to make social housing a strength and not a weakness in urban development projects. Moreover, the proposal suggests to empower the many right to housing movements and community associations that already operate in providing affordable housing solutions and social services and

Abstract
activities. All these people are operating for social good but are kept in a condition of illegality. What these associations do is outside the schemes of “conventional” use and production of space in Rome and if canalized correctly it could bring a positive change in how urban management is handled. Therefore I propose to make this type of associations partially responsible for the management of the social housing stock acquired through the new policy measures.

I argue that “scaling-up” the local associational networks to wider power structures and relations is an important step to promote social integration between different income groups. This will be central in achieving a more active use of space (private, public and “transitional”) and in supporting a more culturally and socially active urban life.

As a case study I chose Porta di Roma, a large newly developed neighbourhood in the north eastern outskirts of the city of Rome. It represents very well the rise and fall of real estate speculation: envisioned as a new centrality with commercial and tertiary functions, it turned out to be an unfinished and vacant residential neighbourhood, a satellite to the large shopping mall that dominates the area.

Porta di Roma is a place with a lot of housing, but very little people and activities: the perfect spot to try out trigger points and consequences of my housing policy proposal. The project for the case study represents the example of how the implementation of the new policy could lead to urban regeneration of neglected “market-city developments” through the social potential hidden in social housing. The implementation of the policy is the trigger for a series of spatial interventions that should breathe new life into the ghost neighbourhood of Porta di Roma. These include a general long term strategy at a district level, as well as neighbourhood scale strategies for public space, plinths and facades.

The distorted model of urban development and the mismanagement of the public thing make it impossible to achieve a “normal” urban environment, especially in the peripheries, which is why the standard, plain and functioning neighbourhood becomes a Utopia that is almost impossible to reach. My argument is that it would take only so much effort to make things better, but that it will probably never happen, making it relevant to talk about a “Utopia of Normality”.

With this project I seek to draw attention to what is wrong in Rome’s housing market by proposing a utopian solution to it in Porta di Roma. This case study should serve as a showcase and reference of how tackling housing shortage and revitalizing peripheral areas can go hand in hand, achieving the desired “Utopia of Normality”.
introduction
the problem
  The context
  Housing emergency
  Problem statement
the research
  Research questions and aims
  Housing policy analysis
  Porta di Roma
  Altra Economia
  Theoretical framework
the design
  Design task
  Ideology and Utopia
  Housing policy proposal
  Objectives and strategy
  Abitare Sociale
  Altra Economia and Public space
  The Wall
  Stakeholders and participation
  Scenarios
conclusions
  Reflection
  Conclusions
  Acknowledgments
bibliography
Introduction

This graduation project stems from my personal interest in the city of Rome, where I was born and raised. It all started because of my desire to understand the mechanisms that are transforming such a beautiful city into an unsustainable model of development, in which the social distress is increasing and the lack of identity and social cohesion of the peripheral areas is growing.

The project was carried out within the Design as Politics Graduation Studio. The topic of the studio for this year is “New Utopias on the Ruins of the Welfare State”.

We are living in an age where nation states seem to become weaker and weaker, under the influence of privatisation, localism but also of globalisation and supra-national politics like that of the European Union. Countries seem to be both falling apart in small fragments as well as being dissolved into huge global networks.

Architecture and Urbanism have for a long time been dependent on the nation state. We cannot imagine doing without a strong government and huge public investments for developing housing projects and public buildings, or for designing huge and even utopian visions for new cities and regions. Architecture and planning are starting to lose their traditional role and authority to represent the nation.

In Italy a functioning Welfare State is a Utopia itself. We know how it feels not to have a strong government and huge public investments: no public housing projects, money wasted on public works that are never completed, no chance to afford utopian visions for cities and regions. As a matter of fact we are facing a great housing emergency, a failure of the state in regulating market dynamics and a widespread corruption.

With these premises, the new Utopia would be to live in a functioning nation state. That is why with my project I propose a “Utopia of Normality”.

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the problem
The history of contemporary Rome is one of urban development predominantly led by private interests, which have caused the city to be a patchwork of disconnected settlements still revolving around the same historic centre (Insolera 2011; Erbani 2013).

Landowners and private developers have always had a very strong power in the life of the city of Rome: the historical development of the city has been strongly influenced by the interests of land ownership from the moment Rome became the capital of the newly formed Kingdom of Italy (Insolera, 2011). This power has been growing over the years, aided by the weakness of the local public authorities, which, most of the time, had very strong (economical, familiar, patronage) connections with landowners themselves. Comparing Rome’s master plans with the history of what actually happened - where and how the city has grown compared to where it should have – shows how easy it has been - and still is - for real estate developers, constructors and landowners to ignore or change the planning rules, considered as mere complications on the way to real estate profit (Insolera, 2011).

The twisted ratio between private profit and public costs generated a great poverty of services and infrastructures. The political weakness and the absence of an administrative culture in the face of powerful forces in Rome’s planning and economy caused inequality in the distribution of services and in the availability of affordable housing (Erbani, 2013c).

Political weakness has been particularly evident in the past 20/30 years, when Rome has been “sold” to developers in order to face the financial crisis of the Municipality. Former Mayor Gianni Alemanno literally talked about “urban money”, meaning the economical advantage that the city could gain from allowing private developers to build increasing volumes of constructions (Berdini, 2013; Erbani, 2013c). In the urban management of Rome, one can very frequently witness collusion between economic interest and political administration, where private interests too often overcome those of the citizens. This led to a distorted model that influenced the shape of the city and the life of its citizens, especially in terms of availability and location of housing.

It is very interesting to compare the statistics on population growth and the quantity of new constructions that have been scattered in the municipal territory. In 1981 Rome had 2,839,000 inhabitants, and this number has been decreasing ever since, to reach 2,612,000 inhabitants in 2011 (Istat, 2011 census). This decrease is also due to an internal migration of citizens. The city’s chronic shortage of affordable housing plays a large role in the decision of many families to leave Rome and move to smaller towns of the Lazio province that
have more reasonable real estate prices (Caudo, 2012). Immigrants (especially extra-European) are the only segment of population that has been steadily growing.

On the other hand, in the decade before the economic crisis the construction market and the number of real estate transactions were boosting: 52,000 new dwellings have been built between 2003 and 2007, around 10,000 only in 2007 (Bagnoli, 2013). Even the new city’s master plan, approved in 2008, envisages an enormous amount of new developments. Millions of cubic meters of new constructions are planned; both to fill the gaps in the existing urban fabric and to further expand in the countryside.

The contradiction is blatant: while thousands of families are forced to leave the city due to the level of real estate prices, the master plan calls for the construction of a massive quantity of apartments which will be put on the market at the same unreachable prices as those that have been abandoned (Boccacci, 2007). Such an amount of new construction does not find any justification in the real needs of the city but it represents a great possibility for profit to real estate developers.

In 1992, “negotiated urban planning” was introduced as the new way of managing urban development: master plans become mere indications and every single development project becomes the ground for negotiation between public administration and private operators (Insolera, 2011).

The new developments envisioned by the 2008 master plan follow this model of public-private negotiation. They happen in the outskirts of the city, around and beyond the ring road, and they were supposed to regenerate the outer suburbs. However, they have completely failed to meet this objective and have essentially turned out to be financial operations (Erbani, 2013c). Of course the land use that is most profitable for developers is residential, which leads to disastrous developments exclusively made of dwellings. These new areas not only lack public services, as schools and health care facilities, but also public space, green, shops and all the amenities that constitute the life of a city (Erbani, 2013c).
“Much above the scale of what is needed they proceed with the negotiation of land prices, while the population still lacks housing.”

Luigi Pianciani - Mayor of Rome - 1973
distorted urban development
- profit driven - unsustainable
- historically radicated

housing emergency
- new poor - squatting
- community building
- criminalization

economic dynamics of housing market
- ownership - rent
- marketization
- failed social housing policies

Aerial view of the city of Rome - source: wikipedia.org
This kind of private urban interventions create a standardized “market city”, made of new residential, business, and mall complexes mainly aimed at middle classes, while failing to meet the demand for affordable housing, which is very high in Rome. As a matter of fact the new developments tend to remain vacant, because the large majority of roman population is not in the condition to afford market prices (Caudo, 2007 and 2012; Berdini, 2013b). From estimates made by the Municipality and by the Tenant’s Union, Rome has something like 240,000 vacant houses, including unsold apartments in new developments and apartments that are not occupied by the owners or by a tenant (Legambiente, 2013).

The new peripheral developments are so scattered in the municipal territory that it is impossible for the administration to actually provide them with a coherent and efficient public transport. They are also lacking identity and are not really part of the city anymore: their distant location, their lack of connection and their total incoherence with the urban fabric of the rest of the city is such that scholars are talking about “pulverization” of the city (Erbani, 2013).

A good example of this type of development is Porta di Roma, a large newly developed neighbourhood in the north eastern outskirts of the city of Rome. I chose it as a case study for my project because it represents very well the rise and fall of real estate speculation: envisioned as a new centrality with commercial and tertiary functions, it turned out to be an unfinished and vacant residential neighbourhood, a satellite to the large shopping mall that dominates the area.
The Municipality of Rome does not have enough money to build public infrastructures or services and asks private developers for their realization, in exchange for variations on the planning rules for other areas more convenient for the developer. Local governments act as if territory were a commodity to trade in negotiation with private actors – using deregulation to obtain alleged advantages. In the long run, this unequal exchange is too high a cost for the citizens (Berdini, 2013). Especially in Rome, given the enormous political power of developers, local authorities find themselves in a position of inferiority, in terms of money and power, and have to give up more and more to the advantage of the developer in order to achieve the basic services for the community. The appetites of real estate speculation are eating out the quality of life of the citizens.

It is evident how this distorted model had an impact on the availability, quality and location of affordable housing, intended in its broadest meaning as any form of housing that was accessible to the low income population in different historic periods. Low income population has always been pushed to the edge of the city, either through forced relocation or by building social housing in the very outskirts. In this sense, socio-spatial segregation proved itself intrinsic to real estate speculation.

In Rome, private real estate has always been considered the only possible engine for urban change, wiping out any other form of urban development, including that guided by public principles of collective welfare. It is virtually impossible for low and middle income population to find decent affordable housing without giving up on other benefits such as public transport, public services, green or social interaction (Erbani, 2013). Rome’s distorted model has robbed its citizens of the possibility to live in an urban environment that is at the same time good and affordable.
The urban history of Rome is totally and only the history of land property, of the excessive speculation it generates, of its collusion and of its culpable patronage system.

Giulio Carlo Argan - Mayor of Rome - 1978
Housing emergency

Due to the inaccessibility of the housing market for the vast majority of the population, and to a lack of social housing policies and of public housing projects, Rome faces an ever growing shortage of affordable housing for the weakest segments of its population.

Real estate speculation, and especially the real estate bubble of 1997-2007, caused an overproduction of residential stock, with devastating effects on the real estate market. Real estate prices and rents went sky high, not only in the central or semi central areas. As housing prices are rising, the available income of households cannot keep up. Renting an apartment in many peripheral districts is now impossible even for the middleclass population (Mudu, 2014a). Families with an annual income of less than 30,000 euros cannot rent an apartment in Rome, where rent now absorbs around 45-50% of a family's income, according to estimates of 2012 by Nomisma¹. A dwelling is generally considered affordable if the rent - or the mortgage repayment - does not account for more than 30% of the family income. In this context rent affordability has significantly worsened, at least for the poorest tenant segment. As a consequence, in 2013 there has been an increase of 8% in the number of evictions, 80% of which are due to impossibility to pay mortgage instalments or rent (Collevecchio, 2013).

The failure of the State in regulating market dynamics caused a great mismatch between demand and supply. Real estate developers are building for a non existing demand, because people are asking for affordable housing in accessible locations, with services and amenities, while the market is providing high priced apartments in isolated locations, in dormitory neighbourhoods with very little services. As a result there are many vacant houses and a great number of people struggling to have a decent roof over their head.

The issue is about supply. But supply of what and for whom? The emergency is for those who need, want, and have a right to, a secure and affordable home in a safe and sustainable community. We can see that the last two decades of housing policy which was based on promoting homeownership and the private property market as its priority failed to deliver this.

After the good “public housing era” of the ‘50s and ‘60s, at the end of the ‘70s the government trusted that the market would take care of the housing needs of the population. Therefore policies for affordable and social housing

¹ - Nomisma is an independent company that engages in economic research and consulting activities for companies, associations, and public administrations at national and international level. www.nomisma.it
Political timeline of national housing policies - own work

1903 Luzzatti law for public "popular" housing
- Allows banks to finance cooperatives
- Allows municipalities to build and rent public housing
- Creates IACP, institutions that design and manage public housing on a local level

1914 Law on rent
- Destra storica
- Restrictive legislation on rent prices
- Freezes evictions
- Facilitations for rents for deprived households

1934/38

1949 Law on rent
- Fascism
- Freezes rent prices
- Facilitations for rents and mortgages for deprived households

INA CASA Program
Democrazia Cristiana
- 7+7 years program
- National program to build houses for workers, financed through taxation on salaries of workers and employers + state money
- Aimed at providing housing and jobs for lower classes and internal migrants

Law 167 PEEP
Democrazia Cristiana
- Implementation plans for public housing projects on local level
- Right of eminent domain
- Contract speculation
- New powers to Regions
- Contrast real estate speculation
- Abolish salaries taxation, State money only

Law 60 GESCAL
Democrazia Cristiana
- 10 year plan for maintenance and building of public housing
- Financed through leftovers from INA CASA + new taxation on salaries
- Regional law
- DC

Law 457
Democrazia Cristiana + PCs
- 10 year plan for maintenance and building of public housing
- State money only
- Facilitations to acquire land

Law 392 on rent
Democrazia Cristiana + PCs
- Fair rent regime

Law 431 on rent
Democrazia Cristiana + Ulivo
- Liberalization of rent market + abolish fair rent
- National Housing Allowance Scheme
- Tax benefits for landlords and tenants

Emergency national program
Ulivo
- 20,000 new dwellings for social rent
- "Neighbourhood contracts"
- Mixed public-private financing

Law 9 Evictions emergency
Parliamentary left
- Freeze evictions
- Tax benefits to landlords
- Promotes "Unified Conference", a negotiation tool between State and Regions to build a coherent set of guidelines

Financial law PIANO CASA I
Berlusconi + Polverini
- National framework, each Region has to approve its own Piano Casa
- Uses public-private agreements
- Increase housing stock by private initiative
- Sale of public housing asset

PIANO CASA II
Renzi + Zingaretti
- National framework, each Region has to approve its own Piano Casa
- Housing Allowance Scheme
- Tax benefits for landlords that rent at social prices
- Uses public-private agreements
- Increase housing stock through private initiative
- Auction sale of public housing asset
- Deregulation on building permits and land use
- No obligation to respect urban laws if you claim to build (also) social housing
Baldini & Poggio, 2013


Baldini & Poggio, 2013
disappeared from the political agenda. The last twenty years of local government have seen a massive withdrawal of the public sector from the housing market. Very little public housing has been built since the 1980s (Botta, 2013), money for subsidies has been drastically cut by both left and right wing governments and social housing is not very popular in Rome, given the power and freedom held by private developers. Moreover the management of the existing public housing stock is struggling, due to lack of funds, black market of dwellings and cases of corruption (Berdini, 2014b).

With these premises it is easy to understand why the numbers of the housing emergency are astonishing: 50,000 families applied for public housing in 2013 (Comune di Roma, 2013), there have been over 7,000 eviction requests per year since 2009 (Collevecchio, 2013), and there are between 2000 and 3000 families squatting (Collevecchio, 2013).

At the same time the number of vacant dwellings is embarassing. The lack of housing policies and the deregulation of market forces have created a paradox in which thousands of vacant dwellings in anonymous middle class housing developments are the only response to the great numbers of people demanding an affordable dwelling.

The housing emergency no longer involves only the poorest social strata, but it affects a growing segment of population, previously untouched by the problem and now impoverished by the global economic crisis and by the mechanisms of real estate speculation that distort the Italian housing market. These people are too rich to apply for public housing but too poor to afford market prices. They live in a “limbo”: marginalized by the housing market, which has no interest to satisfy their demands, and neglected by the public authorities, which failed to implement successful housing policies.

Numbers of the housing emergency - own work

50,000 families in waiting list for public housing
Comune di Roma, 2013

300,000 people struggling for housing
Sunia, 2012

90,000 non resident students
Adisu, 2011

2000 families are squatting
Unione Inquilini, 2013

7000 new eviction requests per year since 2009
Provincia di Roma, 2014

2500 families actually evicted in 2013
Provincia di Roma, 2014

100,000 empty apartments
Istat census, 2011

240,000 empty dwellings
Legambiente, 2013

600 public student dwellings
Adisu, 2011
Over the last decade the phenomenon of illegal squatting has started to become more and more visible, with squatted buildings both in the central areas of the city and in the outskirts. The type of people that resort to illegal occupation of buildings is changing. Squatters are now the “limbo people” that have to resort to illegal occupation of dwellings because they have no other option (Mudu, 2014a). Their socio demographic profile is various, but they all have something in common: they are marginalized both from the job and from the housing market. “Limbo people” are young couples, single parents, families in which one of the parents lost their job, retired elderly with minimum pension, large families, students, immigrants. Many of them belong to the former lower middle class, which has been kicked back into a state of poverty by the crisis and by short sighted policies.

In this situation right to housing movements and the phenomenon of squatting are becoming central again. However, illegal occupation of unused buildings does not only fulfil a residential purpose, but it also fills a void in Rome's urban and social tissue. By providing socially engaging activities, aggregation spaces and missing services and functions for the community, squatted spaces respond to a widespread social need that has an important spatial impact. Right to housing in Rome has ceased to mean simply “a roof on your head”, but it mingles that basic right with a wider idea of more “social” and “sustainable” forms of living and dwelling.

**Economic profiles of people in housing need - own work**

- **low income people**
  - < 20,344.92 €/year
  - income threshold for public housing in Rome

- **limbo people**
  - 20,345 €/year < > 30,000 €/year
  - between public housing threshold and minimum income to afford rent in Rome
Social profile and risk factors for Limbo people - own work
Roma, EUR, demonstration of right to housing movements - source: coordinamento.info

Roma, Porta di Roma, illegal occupation of Caltagirone housing blocks - source: coordinamento.info
Problem statement

Neither the State nor the market are able to provide enough affordable housing. The lack of housing policies and the deregulation of market forces have created a paradox in which thousands of vacant dwellings in anonymous middle class housing developments – such as Porta di Roma - are the only response to the great numbers of people demanding an affordable dwelling. There is an urgent need for new solutions for the housing emergency.
the research
Research questions and aims

The main research question that arises from the problem definition and the chosen case study is: how to tackle the housing shortage in Rome by regenerating the vacant housing development of Porta di Roma through the social capital of the right to housing movements?

The aim of the research is to investigate how urban development and the housing issue in Rome are related and if there is a possibility to combine the alleviation of the housing emergency with a more coherent and balanced urban development.

Further knowledge in the studio’s theme and the first theoretical research led to picking Porta di Roma as the location of my case study. By doing this I could define the goal of the project as achieving a more equitable provision of affordable housing and an overall social sustainability of the chosen location. Social sustainability in this case is intended as “Development (and/or growth) that is compatible with harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population” (Polese and Stren, 2000).

In order to achieve the aim that I had set out at the beginning of the process, my research sub-questions were:

- What are the possible policy strategies to face the housing shortage?
- What is the role of public space in Porta di Roma, which is born around a shopping mall?
- What is the role of ground floors, plinths and common spaces in the perception and use of public and private space?
- How can the right to housing movements be empowered and how can they cooperate with other actors to improve the spatial quality of the housing development?
- How can urban regeneration help in promoting social integration of different income groups?

The overall goal of my project is to find a smart way of making the empty houses meet the homeless people and to recognize the urban potential of social movements and appropriation processes.

The project seeks to provide a different approach to the provision of social housing, and does so from two different perspectives. On one hand I propose a new housing policy and on the other hand I develop a design proposal for the urban regeneration of Porta di Roma triggered by the policy itself.

The design for the case study represents the example of how the implementation of the new policy could lead to a spatial regeneration of neglected “market-city developments” through the social potential hidden in social housing.
Housing policy analysis

1. Italian housing shortage: Historical development of the “housing question” in Italy

The Italian housing situation can be best understood through its historical development, from the end of WWII to present day.

From the end of the Second World War to the 1970s the key to the housing question was the housing shortage that resulted from war damage and urban migration to cities from the countryside. Most of the Italian Public Housing has been built during this period, when housing was at the top of the political agenda. A crucial step in the provision of housing for the less well off was Law no. 43/1949, the so-called “INA-Casa” housing program, promoted by Christian Democrat Amintore Fanfani. Through this program a huge number of new dwellings was built through public institutions, in order to be rented or sold to low and medium income households. The program lasted for 14 years and was replaced in 1963 by Law no. 60/1963, which founded “Gescal” (Gestione case lavoratori), a ten years program that financed the building of new dwellings by withdrawing employees’ contributions. In the same years as the Gescal program was in place, the Fair Rent Act came into force, in order to regulate the private rental sector.

The second important phase for the housing issue runs from the 1980s to the 2000s. During this time housing disappeared from the national political agenda and the State slowly stopped financing housing programs. Centralized public financing was provided for the last time in 2001 with Law no. 21/2001. In this same period the private rental market was completely liberalized by Law no. 431/1998.

An additional issue is that of the progressive reduction of the Public Housing stock. Since the 1960s part of the stock has been gradually sold for very low prices to the grantees in order to support homeownership. Since the 1990s this phenomenon expanded to most of the Public Housing stock and also to other public and institutional buildings. The reason was not supporting homeownership anymore, as much as making money for public deficit reasons. Since the (very little) money gained from the sale of the stock was not used to build more public dwellings, this process led to the progressive

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR:
All data in this chapter, unless differently specified, comes from the TENLAW Italy report.
impoverishment of the Public Housing sector. As a matter of fact, between 1990 and 2010 only around 1000 new public dwellings were built every year. Consequently, the number of dwellings that the State can use for social housing purposes, which has always been very low compared to other European countries, further decreases: at present only 5% of Italian households live in roughly 800,000 public dwellings. At the beginning of the 1990s it was understood that the market would provide for the housing needs of the population, but in actual fact the housing issue was still far from being solved. In this period, the demand for housing from low-income groups increased due to population growth and migration. Moreover, in the decade from 1997 to 2008 a speculative bubble in the housing market provided incentives for building new dwellings but at the same time led to a great increase in prices and rents, thus pushing many households out of the market.

From 2008 to present day, the global economic crisis impacted on the income of a large percentage of population, thus leading to a collapse in the housing market. Supply and demand do not meet anymore: while rental costs have increased, the capacity of medium and low-income households to afford suitable dwellings on the market has reduced dramatically. If we consider that in 2007 about 77% of rental households earned 20,000 Euros or less we can safely affirm that families looking for a house to rent belong in most cases to the poorest segment of the population.

Due to this unbalance in the housing market, the number of households in housing need is estimated at 2.5 million. A great deal of the people in need for housing is represented by the 650,000 families who applied for Public Housing but are still in the waiting lists, mainly because there are not enough dwellings available.

A dwelling is generally considered affordable if the rent - or the mortgage repayment - does not account for more than 30% of the family income. In this context rent affordability has significantly worsened, at least for the poorest tenant segment. This is shown by the 1.2 million families for whom rent accounts for more than 30% of their income. Their percentage has significantly increased: it was 22% in 2002, 26% in 2008, 31% in 2010 and 37% in 2012. In the event that the head of the household is a foreigner, this percentage reaches 42%, according to 2012 data. Further evidence of a widespread situation of distress is provided by the ever increasing number of evictions due to rent arrears. Between 2008 and 2011 the number of evictions carried out went from 24,959 to 28,641 and about 150,000 additional eviction notices have been announced but not yet executed.

In addition to this, households who cannot afford housing loan payments anymore are a matter of particular concern. There are around 900,000

1- Baldini, La casa degli italiani, 137.
2- Baldini, La casa degli italiani, 137.
6- Censis, ‘Quasi un milione di famiglie vuole comprare una casa’.
2.5 million people in housing need

650,000 people asking for public housing

Percentage of households whose rent accounts for more than 30% of their income
source: Censis

Number of evictions carried out
source: Censis
households who own a house and spend over 30% of household income on mortgage repayments. Their percentage was 2% in 2002 and 5% in 2012. House seizures are also on the rise, even though their number is still quite low if compared to other European countries as Spain or Ireland, mainly because Italian banks were much stricter and careful in giving out mortgages even during the real estate bubble. Repossessions by banks increased by about 75% between 2008 and 2011, with an expected further rise of about 22.8% in 2012.

Italian youth is the population segment that raises the most concerns. Research shows that at least part of the 2.6 million Italians between 18 and 34 years old who are still living with their parents are forced to do so because of their inability to afford to live on their own. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the approximately 800,000 students who attend university away from their hometown can rely only on 46,800 beds in public dwellings. This mismatch feeds the black market and puts many households in a condition of difficulty.

The immigrant population plays a large role in this type of analysis. Italy has seen a great increase in the percentage of immigrants in the past decades, almost 90% between 2003 and 2007, characterized by long term stays and relative stability. The number of immigrants is of course higher in the large metropolitan areas as Rome, Milan and Naples, and also in the northern regions, due to a larger job market. Nonetheless, Italy lacks structural integration policies. This can represent a risk for social cohesion, especially because the lack of specific policies keeps immigrants in conditions of distress, precariousness and diffuse illegality. This often means a great difficulty in accessing basic rights, of which housing represents probably the hardest to obtain.

The average housing condition of immigrants in Italy is far worse than that of Italians and is highly precarious, much more than their working condition for example. This depends of course on factors as discrimination and lack of immigration policies, but also on the general weakness of housing policies for low income population, characterized by a very small offer of public housing and of affordable rents on the private market. The problems in social cohesion are especially evident since immigrants eligible for public housing score very high in the rankings, generating a conflict with Italian families.

This data refers to the national situation, but local differences are extremely evident in the Italian housing market. The most problematic areas are of course the biggest cities and their surroundings, especially Rome, Milan and Palermo.

As a consequence of this dramatic situation, further State intervention in public and social housing has become urgent and it is not surprising that new housing policies have been set in motion by the central government since 2008.

2. Italian housing market: housing tenures, vacancy and actors.

The most widespread tenure structure in Italy is ownership, which concerns about 67.2% households. This is due to a number of concurrent reasons. Political choices since the post war period have encouraged homeownership above every other form of tenure, through specific programs and fiscal measures. Moreover house buying has always been the main way of investing savings in Italy and property is traditionally handed down to heirs. Finally the percentage of homeownership increased in the 1997-2008 decade as a consequence of the speculative bubble in the housing market.

The rental sector represents the second most widespread form of tenure with a percentage of about 21.8%. This sector is divided in private tenancies (16.3%) and public tenancies (5.5%). As a whole, about 5 millions households live on rent. About 7.4% of the remaining percentage of households lives in a dwelling with a commodatum, a free rent that often hides black market, and about 3.3% have a usufructuary tenancy or a right of housing. Finally, about 0.3% households have a rent to buy contract and about 0.17% households live in dwellings provided by housing cooperatives.

8- QN. Quotidiano Nazionale, 2 December 2012.
11- Censis, ‘Quasi un milione di famiglie vuole comprare una casa’.
The rental sector is the most interesting to analyze, due to the important role it could potentially play in solving the housing shortage. Moreover, the issue of home ownership versus rent is particularly significant when it comes to vacancy. Since corporate investors and developers are not interested in the rental market, they only provide home ownership. This type of tenure at the moment is not accessible for a large segment of the population, therefore generating a high number of vacant dwellings that are almost never transformed into property for rent, a situation that can be found for example in Porta di Roma. This means that the high rates of vacancy are also a consequence of a weak rental sector, with poor policies and very low appeal for large investors. A number of issues affect the Italian rental sector, both in private and public tenancies, causing it to be weak and unbalanced.

2.1. Private rental tenancies

At present day two different laws, Law n. 392/1978 (Fair Rent Act) and Law n. 431/1998, are the main framework of regulation for private tenancies. The 1998 bill substituted most of the Fair Rent Act (the whole part about rent control) with the aim of providing an improved balance between property rights and tenant protection. It has therefore introduced a system of rules, which vary according to the type of contract. Tenancy contracts in which the rent is fixed in accordance to legal parameters are called “assisted tenancies” (locazione a canone concordato), while tenancy contracts in which the rent is determined by the landlord are called “free market tenancies”.

The law determines the duration of the contract in a period of four years in case of ‘free market tenancies’ and of three years in case of ‘assisted
tenancies’. After that, the contract is automatically renewed, respectively for four and two years. Both landlord and tenant can terminate the contract with a six months notice. Reasons for termination on the landlord’s part are expressly indicated by the law and include the necessity to sell the dwelling.

In case of rent arrears Italian law is very protective of the tenant, making it particularly difficult and costly for the landlord to get his property back. Evictions are usually only the epilogue of a long process that consists of at least three different phases: the administrative procedure, the legal procedure and the executive procedure. These difficulties are one of the factors that holds back landlords from renting their property.

Different types of contract imply different sets of rules with regard to rent increase. In “free market tenancies”, the contract can include clauses which gradually increase the rent over time. In case of “assisted tenancies”, increases must be agreed upon by associations of representatives of landlords and tenants. However, this increase can never go beyond 75% of the inflation rate per year as calculated by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). Finally, rent increase is not allowed for temporary contracts, such as tenancies for students or for holiday houses.

It is evident from these measures that Italian tenancy law still considers tenants as the weaker party and therefore maintains a rather protective approach towards them even after the liberalization of the market occurred in 1998.

In Italy, the residential rental market has never been particularly attractive for professional investors and real estate companies, mainly because of unfavourable fiscal rules. These investors have always had a tendency to prefer building projects assigned for sale, or rents for commercial purposes, as they represent the quickest and often the safest way to cover expenses and make profit.

The black market is a serious issue in the Italian rental market. It mainly consists of rent agreements not regulated by any contract, that put the tenant in a difficult position, both in terms of protection against increasing rents and against eviction and that are used by landlords to evade taxes and to have more control over the property. According to recent statistics, about 950,000 dwellings are considered to belong to the black market.

However, this number does not include the many students who attend university away from their hometown and that are, in most cases, living in accommodations rented on the black market.


**ASSISTED TENANCIES**

+ tenant protection
- fixed rent below market prices
- rent and rent increases agreed with Municipality and Unions

**FREE MARKET TENANCIES**

+ landlord control
- rent and rent increases determined by the landlord according to market prices
Indeed, the situation of students and immigrants is one of the most critical since they are in a condition of need and can be easily convinced to agree to less rights in exchange for accommodation.

Within the context of the black market, a specific circumstance is represented by the illegal detention or occupation of public dwellings. This phenomenon is especially relevant in Rome and Milan, where illegal occupations are in the range of, respectively, 5000 and 3500 dwellings. Reasons for illegality can vary. Among the most common are rent arrears of grantees and detention of the dwelling also when the necessary requirements are no longer fulfilled. Sub tenancy to third parties by the grantee and occupation by people who are not entitled to it are also a relevant part of the phenomenon. This type of behaviour is found more often in those areas where large numbers of vacant public dwellings overlap with serious housing problems, with thousands of households on public housing waiting lists. The illegal occupations of public dwellings often hide more or less organized criminal groups that, far from having altruistic social purposes, aim at making profit by taking advantage of households in need. These circumstances are clearly damaging the finances of Public Housing Agencies (the loss is estimated in about 50 million Euro per year) while preventing deprived households from benefitting from a necessary public service.

At the same time there has been a general increase in squatting of private residential buildings and abandoned public buildings (such as former schools and factories) that is not related to forms of organized crime, but stems from a true housing need. The right to housing and the social function of property (Art. 42 of the Italian Constitution) are often claimed as the legal basis for occupation. However, the squatting of a residential building is considered as an offence by both the Italian property law and tort law. Nevertheless, the Italian Appeals Court recently affirmed that, if the occupants are in immediate housing need, the offence of squatting is excluded, as occupation is prompted by necessity. These occupations - both for residential and non residential purposes - represent a necessity of the urban population that is not fulfilled by the housing market or by the current land uses and urban plans.

Vacancy would be an interesting figure in the analysis of the housing situation; however, only approximate estimates have been made of the number of vacant dwellings in Italy. This depends on the fact that it is difficult to distinguish truly vacant dwellings from holiday homes or dilapidated houses. In addition to this, almost 1 million houses are estimated to fall within the black market of rents. This means that, while they might appear vacant, they are actually rented out illegally. The estimates for vacancies are therefore pretty rough. In Italy, about 4.9 million houses are not used as principal residence by owners or tenants. If we detract from this the black market houses and the holiday homes, the result would range between 400.000 and 700.000 vacant dwellings. Even given the roughness of the estimates, this would nevertheless be a number of dwellings that, if available on the market, would probably solve the problems of part of the estimated 2.5 million people in housing distress.

Data at local level can be more accurate, but it is not official. Due to the lack in the Italian regulation of a proper definition of what a vacant dwelling is, only private agencies have attempted to calculate vacancy based on different notions. Therefore, even if local data on vacancy is available, it consistently differs among various sources.

Vacancy rates are also rather high within the public housing stock. Dwellings might be vacant because they do not fulfill the necessary requirements to be rented out or because they are under restoration or waiting to be assigned, sold or demolished. Since there is a structural lack of funding for public housing, municipalities and agencies need to find alternative solutions to restore or build new dwellings. For example, the municipality of Milan has been involving grantees in restoration work in return for rent reductions.

### 2.2. Public tenancies

As we saw, public tenancies suffer from much of the same problems of the private sector when it comes to vacancies and black market, though they follow consistently different regulations.

Following the Constitutional Reform of 2001, the jurisdiction for housing policies in Italy significantly changed. In this new system, defined as “multi-level protection of social rights”, a central role is played by the regional authorities. The new administrative layout substantially limits the legislative power of the State, which should only concern the matters expressly indicated by

14- Ilaria Sacchettoni, ‘Alloggi occupati abusivamente, 780 indagati’, Corriere della Sera, 16 September 2013
16- Guerrieri & Villani, ‘Sulla città, oggì’, 37 et seq.
17- Luca De Vito, ‘A Milano è emergenza casa’
the Constitution, while all the other matters are left to Regional legislation. Housing policies are considered an essential service provided by the State as part of the Welfare system. Therefore the State is exclusively entitled to the determination of the minimum standards of quantity and quality for dwellings aimed at the weakest part of the population. Moreover the State distributes the national funds assigned for housing policies among the different regions. However, the State shares with the Regions the responsibility to draft national guidelines concerning the offer of public housing.

Regions, on their part, set the goals for housing policies, carry out the administrative tasks and decide the allocation of funds to different purposes. Eligibility criteria and amount of rents for Public Housing are also decided at the regional level, causing an evident inequality across the national territory with regards to accessibility to Public Housing. In accordance to regional legislation, Municipalities provide regulations for access to public dwellings by drawing up rankings and waiting lists. Through urban plans, they identify the best location for social housing projects and they are also entitled to provide different solutions for local housing problems, such as temporary housing and residences.

A very relevant place in the governance chain of housing is held by local Public Agencies for Housing. They are specific public bodies that own and manage the Public Housing stock, generally on a provincial area. They were established in 1903 in the form of Istituti Autonomi Case Popolari (IACP – Autonomous Institutes for Public Housing) and their role evolved through the years. They gradually became the main owner and only manager of Public Housing, though their financing entirely depends on regional and municipal transfers. In the 90s, in the context of a general empowerment of the Regions, the IACP were reformed and fell under Regional jurisdiction, thus changing their name into specific regional variations. For brevity and clarity, in this paper I will always refer to them as ex-IACP.

The main problems ex-IACP are facing at the moment are a substantial lack of funds and the systematic reduction of the stock due to discounted sales of dwellings. The State has not been transferring enough money in the past decades and the economic efforts of Regions and Municipalities are not sufficient to provide adequate funding. The income from rents is too low, often almost symbolic, to cover the expenses, and even the sale of the asset does not allow for a renovation or increase of the stock, making it especially difficult for the Agencies to provide enough affordable dwellings. Moreover, even if Agencies for Housing are public bodies that offer a public service, they do not enjoy a favourable fiscal treatment. As already mentioned, rent arrears and black market of dwellings are also major issues to be tackled. With regard to tenant protection, the rules for eviction due to rent arrears in public housing are very similar to those of private rental. In addition to that, grantees are required to present their income statement every year. If they fail to do so they might be expelled from the dwelling. Grantees lose the right to a public dwelling when their income exceeds the threshold and have to leave the property or stipulate a different contract. Grantees can be expelled if they sublet or make improper use of the premises, and also if they do not permanently reside in the dwelling.

Socio spatial segregation is probably one of the most significant urban phenomena connected with housing. For many years, especially during the 50s, 60s and 70s, neighborhoods made up entirely of Public Housing were concentrated in peripheral areas of the city, where cheap land was available. The location itself implied not only a physical but also a social separation from the rest of the urban fabric. These places came to be identified with low-income groups and problematic situations, like dilapidation and criminality, leading to high risk of social exclusion. In order to improve this negative reputation, the construction of Public Housing neighbourhoods has been gradually reduced in favour of more policy measures aimed at providing financial support to households in need. In an attempt to reduce socio-spatial segregation, recent changes in Italian housing policy have introduced Social Housing solutions next to the more traditional Public Housing, with the explicit objective of increasing social mix.

However, a social stigma associated with the criminalization of poverty remains against social and public housing.

It is relevant for the purpose of this analysis to specify the understanding of “Public Housing” and “Social Housing” in the Italian legislation and culture.

Laws n. 865/1971 and 457/1978 define the notion of “Edilizia Residenziale Pubblica - ERP”, which can be translated as “Public Housing”. ERP represents a public service with specific characteristics: it pursues a public interest; it meets the housing needs that the market cannot fulfill; it refers to a public regime when it comes to financing, locating and building housing projects.
ERP features three different typologies of Public Housing: “Edilizia Sovvenzionata”, “Edilizia Agevolata” and “Edilizia Convenzionata”.

“Edilizia Sovvenzionata” could be translated as “Public Housing” in its purest form and it is the most traditional type of provision. It is directly built by the State and the Regions through the Municipalities or Public Housing Agencies, and it relies integrally or largely on public funds. Dwellings are managed by ex-IACP in accordance with criteria established by Regions and Municipalities, and are rented at very low rates (so called “social rents”).

“Edilizia Agevolata” could be translated as “Assisted Housing” and it can be developed by private investors, cooperatives or public agencies (ex-IACP). However, public support (in the form of direct financial aid, fiscal discounts or privileged access to credit) is limited to 50% of the whole investment. Dwellings can be for rent or on sale and rates are set below market level in accordance with Regional or Municipal regulations, which also determine eligibility criteria.

“Edilizia Convenzionata” could be translated as “Contracted-out Housing” and it is developed by private investors. Public support (usually by Municipalities) is limited to discounted (or free) land provision and discounts on building permits. Dwellings can be for rent or on sale and the price needs to be agreed upon with the Municipality.

While Edilizia Sovvenzionata is traditionally intended for low and very low income households, Edilizia Agevolata and Convenzionata aim at providing affordable housing solutions for families whose income is too low for market prices but too high to qualify for Public Housing. Both programmes do so by seeking different forms of partnership between public and private actors.

Since the number of these “limbo” households has been increasing, affecting also a significant percentage of the middle class and threatening social stability, there has been a growing attention to the issue that resulted in a substantial effort in producing new policies. In the D.L. 112/2008 (the first version of the so called “Piano Casa”) the essential features of a national housing plan are presented. The decree defines as “social dwelling” the “residential unit, permanently on rent, aimed at reducing the housing problems of deprived households that cannot access the free housing market, thus improving social cohesion”. This definition includes all the typologies of Public Housing seen above, but also opens the way to different methods of providing housing that is affordable for low and middle income people. The same decree, in fact, indicates “Social Housing” (Edilizia Residenziale Sociale) as a new category of affordable housing for those who struggle with the free market. This new typology stands next to the existing ones and it is built with a mix of private funds and public contributions, which can include direct financing, free or discounted land, and additional building permits as benefits.

It has to be noted that it is very difficult to distinguish this new Social Housing from the existing forms of Edilizia agevolata and convenzionata. The overlapping of so many similar modalities generates confusion and it is unclear why the Piano Casa has introduced a new form of affordable housing without integrating it with the existing ones. In principle, Social Housing differs from Public Housing because it is primarily carried out by private developers, with only a very limited contribution from the public sector and because it targets “limbo” households. However, in this respect, it is really hard to distinguish it from Assisted and Contracted-out Housing.

From the point of view of policy objectives, the only remarkable difference between Social Housing and Assisted or Contracted-out Housing is that the former not only aims at providing affordable housing solutions, but also at successfully achieving a social and functional mix. From a financial point of view, the main divergence is that the implementation of Social Housing is demanded to a new specific financial instrument: a Real Estate Investment Fund participated by the State through the Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (or CDP: a stock corporation 80% owned by the Ministry of the Economy which manages the Italian postal savings bank).

This financial instrument is too recent to allow a proper assessment of its effectiveness, as its effects are held to be visible in the long run. Indeed, unlike in other countries, Social Housing in Italy is still at an experimental level, though it has registered a significant increase in the last few years, and therefore it is rather difficult to evaluate.

A more in depth analysis of Social Housing will be carried out in the next paragraph; for now it is important to draw attention to the ways in which the different typologies will be indicated in this paper. The expression “Public Housing” or ERP will indicate housing solutions provided mostly by public authorities for low and very low income population, including all the different forms (Assisted and Contracted-out Housing) even if they involve some form of private funding. The expression “Social Housing” or ERS instead will stand for all the new interventions (after 2008) that use the new legislation (Piano Casa) to build affordable housing for low and middle income population with a prevalence of private funds and a very limited help from public authorities. Instead the expression “social housing” with no capital letters will be used to indicate all forms of housing that have the social purpose of providing affordable dwellings for households in distress.

3. Current national policy

In the light of the information presented above, it is crucial to analyze the policies related to housing that are currently operating, in order to investigate the critical issues that need intervention. The paragraph will be organized in thematic units in order to cover clearly all the relevant topics.

3.1. Subsidies

In Italy there are two categories of subsidies, those aimed at helping households to pay the rent and those aimed at facilitating the purchase and maintenance of houses on the part of owners.

In the “ownership” category, we can mention a number of different policies: funds and guarantees in order for families to obtain a mortgage; contributions to developers in order to build social housing and tax deductions regarding refurbishment works (reduction of energy consumption, aseismic measures, elimination of asbestos or structural barriers, etc.).
Institutions
Municipality, Province, Region, State

ex-IACP
Territorial Agencies for Public Housing

Real Estate developers, Investment Funds, Asset management companies

limbo people
low-middle income population

low income people
low and very low income population

right to housing movements

Associations
Confedilizia (main association of real estate owners)
Federcasa (association of public housing agencies)
Sunia, Sicet, Uniat, Unione Inquilini (tenants unions)
Two national funds have been created in order to favour homeownership: the Fund for Access to Credit is used to guarantee to the bank part of the home loan required to buy a house; and the Fund for Home Loan is used to finance the suspensions of mortgage payments for struggling households. Regions or Municipalities often provide similar measures as well. In addition to this, the principal residence is subject to a lighter fiscal regime when it come to the Municipal Tax (IMU).

In respect to homeownership, a provision introduced in 2013 to discipline repossessions in the event of fiscal debts (Law no. 98/2013) establishes that a property cannot be repossessed if it is classified as a residential dwelling, if it is the only dwelling owned by the debtor and if he resides there. Indeed, the number of repossessions in Italy is significantly lower than in other countries hit by the crisis, such as Spain or Ireland.

In terms of support to home ownership, the sale of public housing stock holds a particular importance. This process regards Public Housing dwellings as well as residential property owned by public institutions and not used for social purposes. According to Federcasa - the association which represents ex-IACP - these properties are sold at highly discounted prices, thus favouring the buyer and damaging the already weak financial situation of housing agencies and of Municipalities (besides dramatically reducing the Public Housing stock). Since 1993 about 200,000 public dwellings have been sold in this way, making it reasonable to say that the discounted sale of public dwellings is probably the most important form of indirect housing subsidization in Italy.

In the “rent” category, the different forms of subsidization can be classified according to the subjects who receive them. With regard to tenants, the majority of the measures is aimed at providing rental housing at reduced rates. The most traditional way to do so is by subsidizing the construction of Public Housing. Funding for these subsidies depends on both national and local institutions, while regional and municipal authorities are responsible for their management. Thus, eligibility criteria for Public Housing vary from region to region: in some cases the only relevant factor is the household’s income, while in other cases financial or real estate assets are also considered. Municipalities draw up rankings based on Regional criteria and the available dwellings are allocated according to the waiting list. This form of subsidization regards about 900,000 households, but unfortunately, in the past few years the number of applicants considerably exceeded the number of available public dwellings. However, the construction of Public Housing is not very popular anymore as centralized national funding has been withdrawn decades ago.

19- Baldini, La casa degli italiani, 154.

**OWNERSHIP subsidies**
- Fund for Access to Credit
- Fund for Home Loan
- lighter fiscal regime on principal residence
- sale of public housing stock (indirect subsidization)

**RENT subsidies**
- Social Fund for Rent
- Regional and Municipal Funds
  - tax deductions for tenants
  - tax deductions for landlords
  - subsidies for developers to provide assisted and contracted-out housing
- subsidies to build Public Housing
In the “rent” category, the different forms of subsidization can be classified according to the subjects who receive them. With regard to tenants, the majority of the measures is aimed at providing rental housing at reduced rates. The most traditional way to do so is by subsidizing the construction of Public Housing. Funding for these subsidies depends on both national and local institutions, while regional and municipal authorities are responsible for their management. Thus, eligibility criteria for Public Housing vary from region to region: in some cases the only relevant factor is the household’s income, while in other cases financial or real estate assets are also considered. Municipalities draw up rankings based on Regional criteria and the available dwellings are allocated according to the waiting list. This form of subsidization regards about 900,000 households, but unfortunately, in the past few years the number of applicants considerably exceeded the number of available public dwellings. However, the construction of Public Housing is not very popular anymore as centralized national funding has been withdrawn decades ago.

Other forms of affordable housing, like Assisted and Contracted-out Housing, are more popular, since they are co-financed (to different degrees) by both public and private investors. Subsidies in these cases are assigned to private developers in order to build dwellings that will be put on the market at discounted rates. In the case of Assisted Housing, public contributions are quite significant, though always below 50% of the whole investment. As a result, the contributing public institutions (Regions and Municipalities) establish strict eligibility criteria and rent rates. These regulations are consistent with those for Public Housing, though the group of potential receivers is wider and rates are not as low. In Contracted-out Housing, subsidies are limited to land concessions and tax reductions, therefore eligibility and rates are to be defined for each project through specific agreements between private and public stakeholders.

For tenants, a second category of subsidies is represented by financial aid to support the payment of a rent on the free market. The largest of these subsidies is represented by the Social Fund for Rents (Fondo Sociale per l’Affitto), financed both at national and local level (Regions and Municipalities). However, right after the economic crisis struck, the State adopted strict measures to limit deficit, mostly cutting on social expenditure. National contributions for the Social Fund were thus drastically reduced: they went from 440 million Euros in 2000 to just 33.5 million Euros in 2011. Despite efforts by Municipalities, a cut of this magnitude cannot be compensated with local funding and, as a consequence, differences among Regions have become more pronounced. At the same time, due to the crisis, the number of requests for this subsidy has been increasing, especially in the larger cities, exposing the inadequacy of such a crippled instrument.

Recently the trend has been changing: the new Renzi Government approved a new Housing Plan in March 2014, raising the national contribution to the Social Fund for Rents to 100 million Euros for 2014 and 2015. Requirements for the access to this subsidy are a low family income and a high incidence of the rent on it. Each Municipality divides the yearly funds among all the applicants who meet the requirements. According to 2009 data, 4.36% of households living on rent could make use of this subsidy. Similar forms of subsidization and support are provided by each Region or Municipality, according to their financial ability. These instruments can include funds for tenants under eviction, funds for young couples, funds for students and so on. Due to their variety and local application, the national relevance of these local measures is hard to quantify.

Tax deductions in consideration of the rent paid represent a further form of subsidy for tenants. It is possible to deduct a percentage from the taxable income when the household lives in rental accommodation and its global income is under a certain amount. This percentage is higher in case of “assisted tenancies” and can rise further if the tenant is in his twenties living without parents. A similar deduction is provided also for employees or students who move away from their original residence for job or study reasons. Despite a very complex system of calculation and limitations, tax deductions are the most common form of housing aid and regard 56.41% of the households on rent.

With regard to landlords, tax deductions on the income from rents are probably the most significant.

23- Ibidem
form of subsidy. “Assisted tenancies” (locazione a canone concordato) are particularly favoured by the law, with reductions regarding both income tax and the annual registration tax. In case of “free market tenancies” the deduction for income tax is at 5%. Moreover, some Municipalities offer further aids to owners in order to incentive the offer of dwellings on rent.

3.2. Taxation

Just as subsidies, also taxation can be classified according to the subject that pays or receives benefits. Landlords and home owners are those most affected by measures on taxation.

Generally, landlords who are also owners are subject to two main taxes: a national income tax (IRPEF) and a municipal value tax (IMU). Income tax is calculated on the income gained from rents. Since 2012 it is possible for landlords to choose from two different IRPEF taxation schemes for income from rents. In the traditional one the income from rents is added to the general personal income and it is subject to the normal IRPEF rates, which range between 23% and 43%. In the new available system (called “cedolare secca”) rent incomes are taxed separately, at a fixed rate of 21% in case of “free market tenancies”, or of 10% in case of “assisted tenancies”. With the “cedolare secca” solution also registration tax and stamp duty are not due. This system was introduced to support “assisted tenancies” and at the same time to give battle to the black market by counteracting tax evasion and reducing the number of unregistered contracts.

In 2012 the fiscal system regarding property was importantly changed by the Monti Government through the introduction of the municipal value tax (IMU). This tax is due in case of ownership of a house in Italy and it is calculated on the cadastral value of the property, which in many cases does not match with the current market value. IMU rates can vary according to the use and the classification of the property, and Municipalities may choose to increase or decrease them within an established range.
On some rare occasions, the introduction in the national housing plans of structural measures against vacancy has been suggested, like for example fines or forced assignments. However, even with the ongoing housing crisis, such measures have never been adopted. An exception is represented by the 2007 expropriation and forced assignment in Rome of a rather large number of dwellings owned by large private corporations and institutions (among them the Catholic Church) for the whole period of time necessary for the competent authorities to find a suitable accommodation for the households in need. However, though it sets a very interesting precedent, this was an initiative taken by the presidents of a few Districts in the Municipality of Rome and certainly not a structured approach against high vacancy rates.

Indeed, the main role regarding vacant dwellings is played by the ordinary taxation system. Italian legislation does not provide a definition of “vacant dwelling”. Instead, fiscal rules use the expression “available dwelling”, a term that misleadingly includes in the same category houses that could be rented but are left vacant, houses that could not be inhabited (for example, because they are in ruins) and second or holiday houses (not rented but occasionally used by the owner).

The 2012 reform of the fiscal system formally considers vacant dwellings and dwellings on rent at market prices in the same way with regard to IMU taxation, but it abolishes the payment of the income tax (IRPEF) for all vacant dwellings. Before this reform, IRPEF taxation on vacant dwellings was calculated on the cadastral rent increased of one third, providing a deterrent effect on vacant houses. Its abrogation can be criticised, since in this way vacant houses have a more favourable fiscal treatment.

As seen in the paragraph on subsidies, tax deductions for landlords mainly regard the income from rents. Most deductions tend to favour “assisted tenancies”, in an attempt to convince owners to act as “social landlords”. However, these deductions are often not enough to compensate for the loss of income of controlled rents in comparison to free market rents (which are often double or triple). Hence, free market tenancies still account for about 80% of private tenancies.

**3.3. Piano Casa 2008-2009**

With the economic crisis, growing issues in the housing sector sparked a renewed interest in housing policies at national level, after decades of negligence. As a consequence, a variety of measures were worked out to grant a decent house to families in need. In 2008 the Berlusconi Government proposed a National Housing Plan (Piano Casa), which was ultimately confirmed in 2009. The main aim of this Housing Plan was to enhance the offer of social dwellings for rent, with ownership losing its traditional first place in housing policy. These goals seems to acknowledge that Italy needs a significantly higher number of dwellings on rent for social purposes and that levels of homeownership should not be increased any further. However, the plan also establishes that “social dwellings” built with this programme should be given on rent for ‘at least eight years’, hinting at a possible sale for a later time. This represents a concrete risk of further increasing homeownership.

The main measure included in the Housing Plan 2008/09 is the creation of Real Estate investment funds for the construction of Social Housing, alongside benefits for housing cooperatives and other incentives to develop Social Housing projects.

The greatest efforts have been placed in the formulation of a system of Real Estate investment funds, partially financed by public institutions. These funds are meant to attract private long term investors interested in developing real estate plans for Social Housing. The only fund of this kind so far is the Investment Fund for Living (Fondo Investimenti per l’Abitare – FIA), a real estate fund reserved to qualified investors operating to increase the offer of rent-controlled lease and sale at discounted prices, to support and complement public policies for housing. Its goal is to build affordable homes for families unable to meet their housing needs, but not entitled to Public Housing.

FIA has a signed amount of around 3 billion Euros, of which 1 billion underwritten by Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP - a stock corporation 80% owned by the Ministry of the Economy which manages the Italian postal savings bank), 140 million from the Ministry of Infrastructure and the remaining amount by banking and insurance groups and private pension funds. FIA invests its assets through shareholdings, for a maximum of 80%, in local Real Estate investment funds managed by asset management companies. These local funds and companies build Social Housing projects that aim at integrating various functions, developing living environments rather than simply housing. Often the additional services and functions are
thought through with the future inhabitants, in order to ensure a successful project.

The Social Housing projects have to comply with Regional and Municipal regulations, but have no additional obligations other than that. Households are chosen through private announcements of selection, with specific eligibility criteria and discretionality in the choice. Implementation of Social Housing projects is carried out via “integrated programs” that are directly managed by the Ministry of Infrastructure in collaboration with specific Regions and Municipalities and by means of project financing.

The ultimate goal of involving private funds in social housing programmes is indeed to reduce pressure on public finances, and of course forms of public-private partnerships in housing projects already existed before the Piano Casa. What is different with this programme is that private investors are given a leading role as the main contributors of Social Housing projects to an unprecedented extent. The general idea was that of adjusting the Italian system to other European countries, making the social housing provision instruments more similar to those of the Netherlands or France.

Although the National Housing Plan 2008/09 was the most extensive and in many parts the most innovative programme regarding social housing in decades, it has to be acknowledged that it has not really gained momentum yet. Most of the recent social housing projects have been carried out thanks to this new programme; however, their number is still rather limited. This might be due to major difficulties in the coordination of private and public institutions at national, regional and municipal level. Indeed, the overlapping of jurisdictions led to the Piano Casa being contested before the Constitutional Court, since the inerence of the State in topics traditionally demanded to Regional legislation has been seen as excessive. In this respect, questions might be raised about the efficiency of the multi-level protection of social rights as envisioned in the 2001 Constitutional reform.

The Piano Casa of 2009 also introduced a completely different set of measures, regarding a substantial deregulation in the field of enlargement and refurbishment of buildings. Clearly such a programme has little to do with social purposes and everything to do with stimulating investment in existing private property. Indeed, in Italy investment in and support to the building industry has often been regarded as the only effective way to sustain economic growth. These measures raised countless criticism, as initially they were meant to overrule regional and municipal urban and building legislation, leading to an uncontrolled building activity. Luckily this project, too, had a rather limited application. This is in part due to the fact that the national statute was modified and in the end had to comply with regional and local rules, which often prevented further home enlargement. Therefore, twenty-one different housing policies have stemmed from the National Housing Plan, leading to further fragmentation in terms of right to housing.

3.4. Piano Casa 2014

In March 2014 the Renzi Government approved a new Housing Plan, in order to refine the provisions from 2009 and to face the growing emergency of households struggling with rents.

The new programme is based on the Piano Casa from 2009, of which it keeps the structure of financial instruments (FIA) and the approach to social housing.

In terms of subsidies, the new Housing Plan raised the Social Fund for Rents to 100 millions per year for 2014 and 2015 and introduced the “Fondo Morosità Incolpevole”, a subsidy for people who are not able to pay their rent anymore due to extraordinary causes (mostly unemployment or illness). It was 40 millions in 2013, to be distributed over two years (2014-2015), and the Piano Casa 2014 raised it to 225 millions, to be distributed over 5 years (from 2015 to 2020).

It is also worth mentioning the so called “statute for the suspension of evictions”, a measure with a long tradition in Italian housing policy. It establishes that eviction orders for specific categories of tenants in critical situations can be suspended, provided that they live in areas with serious housing problems. In these cases, landlords are given a number of fiscal reductions as partial compensation for the loss of income. Initially introduced to deal with emergency situations, this measure has been extended over the years until it became chronic. Such an inappropriate use of this statute is an improper way of dealing with housing emergencies, since it takes responsibility off the shoulders of the State and places a social burden on private citizens, both the evicted households and the private owners. Indeed, the endless extension of the measure exposes the inability of public policies to counteract the housing crisis.

In contrast with this trend, when the latest statute for suspension expired at the end of 2014, the Renzi government decided not to extend it to the new
Housing Plan. Though this may seem a positive development, in actual fact it is an irresponsible move, as no other substantial measures have been issued in the Housing Plan 2014 to contrast the emergency of evicted households.

The Piano Casa 2014 also made a few changes on taxation, with the objective of helping the rental sector and of promoting Social Housing. The “cedolare secca” taxation has been lowered to 10% for landlords who rent with assisted tenancies. Regarding Social Housing, tax benefits have been introduced for developers that erect new buildings in which at least 50% is intended as social housing for at least 10 years. Moreover, for developers and private landlords, 40% of rent incomes from social housing can be deducted from the taxable income (IRPEF for private landlords, IRAP e IRES for companies) in case the rented social dwelling is newly built or renovated. The deduction lasts 10 years. Benefits are not only limited to landlords and developers: households that live in social housing can deduct rent expenses from their taxable income for a maximum of 900 Euros.

Regarding Public Housing the Renzi government has approved contrasting measures. On one hand it allocated 468 million Euros to be invested in refurbishment of Public Housing stock, to be divided among regions on the base of requests. On the other hand it decided, with a top down bill, a further sale of Public Housing stock, which depletes the offer of affordable dwellings.

The new policy shows an iron hand towards squatting. Illegal occupation of both public and private buildings is criminalized: no gas, water and electricity for squatted buildings; no legal residence for households that live in squatted dwellings; and 5 years of exclusion from waiting lists for Public Housing in case of squatting of a public dwelling.

Regarding Social Housing the Piano Casa 2014 follows its predecessor. The financial system represented by FIA stays the same, with the addition of 100 million Euros for Regions and Municipalities to finance Social Housing projects. The money should be invested in interventions of refurbishment, demolition and reconstruction, change of land use and implementation of extra services in existing property. Originally these interventions could be implemented regardless of the urban policies and regulations in place. However, after considerable criticism, this provision has been changed, and the interventions that fall under the Piano Casa have to comply with the existing urban plans.

A very debated provision of the 2014 Piano Casa is the one that allows real estate companies and developers to turn their building projects (whatever their intended use, even commercial) into Social Housing in exchange for fiscal benefits. This can be done for already built developments that went unsold but also for developments that are under construction or even still only on paper, regardless of the type of development it should be, where it is or why it was allowed in the first place.

4. Conclusions on current situation and policies

The analysis that has been carried out outlines a situation of general lack of coordination and scope, with many of the problems that are overlooked in favour of easier and consensus related issues. Measures are unclear and overlapping, and at present there is still no implementation decree (therefore no money allocation) for the Piano Casa 2014, which as a consequence remains only on paper.

The main issues come from the conflict of jurisdiction between State and Regions on the topic of housing policies. As a consequence, State financial aid for housing was cut and the financing of affordable housing fell entirely on Regions. However, the taxation system and insufficient transfers from State to Regions made it impossible for them to provide an adequate offer and management of social housing. In this context the rift between North and South becomes evident. Poorer Regions, in the South, do not have any resources to invest in housing, while some of the Centre-North Regions have enough money to start interesting initiatives in Social Housing, with co-housing and self-building experiments. This evident inequality across the national territory calls for a renewed commitment on the State’s part to finance affordable housing with long lasting and regular investments.

Essentially, Public Agencies for Housing still represent the main actor in the provision of affordable housing. However, even though they manage a substantial stock (around 800.000 dwellings), they have gradually lost their leading role and have been subject to increasing political control that reduced their efficiency. As a consequence, there is now a diffused belief that the public housing stock is ill-managed, has lost its social function and represents more of a burden than an asset for the State. However, this is not the case in many Regions, and Public
Agencies still represent a great asset and have a lot of potential to improve the overall provision of affordable housing. Federcasa itself, the national association of Public Agencies for Housing, has been asking for a reform of the whole system, in order to allow ex-IACP to perform their social function better. Nonetheless, politics has been deciding otherwise and has been depleting the public housing stock through an ever-growing discounted sale of the dwellings. Any form of social housing in Italy still has to deal with a heavy social stigma, and it is necessary to free public housing from passive welfare dependency in order to promote a better integration of different incomes and social backgrounds.

Instead of the much needed reform of Public Agencies for Housing, governments have been increasing the number of typologies of social tenancies, without actually increasing the stock, generating a great confusion about the actual offer. Typologies of affordable housing are too many and too similar: Social Housing option is hardly distinguishable from Edilizia agevolata or convenzionata. This contributes to a poor organization of the sector and makes it very difficult to measure results.

The two successive Piano Casa mainly aim at that segment of population that, mostly due to the crisis, is not able to access home ownership or private rental, but is still too rich to apply for Public Housing. While this is very good in principle, the implementation fails to integrate the offer for this new category with the existing options. Moreover it fails to address the housing emergency of the lowest income population by focusing only on financial aid and neglecting the Public Housing stock, thus causing even more discrimination.

A Piano Casa measure that could potentially be very good to tackle the affordable housing shortage is that which allows real estate companies and developers to turn their building projects into Social Housing in exchange for fiscal benefits. Unfortunately the way in which it was implemented – the change is allowed regardless of quality, location or previous land use, even for unbuilt projects – poses many questions. In this way it looks more like a favour to developers and real estate companies to get rid of their ill placed stock that has ben vacant for too long with very little regard for the existing urban plans or for the suitability of the locations. Moreover, the fact that this rule applies even to unbuilt projects shows little regard for the over consumption of land in Rome and its surroundings. The Piano Casa offers this possibility to developers without at the same time tackling vacancy (there is still less taxation on empty dwellings than on occupied property), greatly diminishing the effectiveness of the bill. However, with more public control, stricter rules and a smart taxation on vacancy this measure could have a very positive effect.

The current policy tries to address the issues of illegal squatting and black market of public dwellings, but to hit at criminality it results unnecessarily harsh on people in housing need. Before applying such penalties on people that most of the time are in severe need, it is necessary to provide a suitable solution for the housing emergency. This criminalization extends to all sorts of activities that take place in an illegally occupied space. By only punishing and suffocating the needs and energies represented by these phenomena, without recognizing the social potential hidden in these initiatives, the government fails to put to use substantial resources.

Finally, a few other observations need to be made about the private rental sector. Italian policies underestimate private rent as a tool to provide housing for the middle income population, as they do not allow a healthy rental sector. Excessive tenant protection, incoherent taxation and poor controls are among the causes of a large black market, that has devastating effects on the ability of people to find an affordable home. At the same time, the management of evictions is inadequate: it is irresponsible to cancel the suspension of evictions without providing an alternative solution for households in financial distress. The measures to provide financial aid for rents are very good in theory, but are not backed up by a sufficient amount of money and they lack serious planning in the long term.
Bufalotta - Porta di Roma is a large newly developed neighbourhood in the north eastern outskirts of the city of Rome. It is one of the new residential districts of the market city aimed at middle-class housing, and I chose it as a case study because it represents very well the rise and fall of real estate speculation: envisioned as a new “centrality” with commercial and tertiary functions, it turned out to be an unfinished and vacant residential neighbourhood, a satellite to the large shopping mall that dominates the area. A “centrality” for the masterplan of the city is a “peripheral centre”, a place in the city where the concentration of services and activities is so high to be considered an alternative urban centre. Unfortunately, this is not the case: Porta di Roma is a place with a lot of housing, but very little people and activities; the perfect spot to try out trigger points and consequences of my housing policy proposal.

The project started in the early 1990s, when Lamaro Appalti SpA, the construction company of the Toti family, powerful roman developers, acquired the area in a consortium with other construction companies (Parsitalia Real Estate, of the Parnasi family, and later also Caltagirone) and requested a change of land use. The area was changed from logistics and industrial sector functions to a mixed-use residential area with services and offices (and a huge shopping mall), keeping the same cubic capacity. The exponential growth in the value of the area and the projected value of the housing to be constructed, guaranteed a huge profit to the developers, much more than the originally intended use could ever do (Cellamare, 2014).

The request was welcomed by Rome city government and the plan for the Bufalotta district, drawn up by the private sector, was adopted into the new urban master plan as the new centrality of Bufalotta-Porta di Roma, with the objective of regenerating the northeastern suburbs of Rome.

The Bufalotta area used to be a very large green zone where archaeological park and farmland coexisted. This area was the continuation within the limits of the ring road of the natural reserve of the Marcigliana, that extends at the edge of Rome’s Municipality. This system of green areas, both inside and outside of the ring road, provided a very large green lung for the northern sector of the city. Due to its past as ancient Roman’s farmland, with villas and sacred buildings, the whole area has been subject to thorough archaeological investigation, revealing a great deal of artifacts and building remains. It has been decided, together with the Municipality and the citizens, that the Parco delle Sabine would remain a public park, to preserve both the natural and the historical value of the place. No archaeological remains are visible in the park, as they have been buried again, but some of the more precious
Location of Porta di Roma, III Municipio, Roma
own work

Porta di Roma aerial picture - Google Maps
Artifacts have been collected and are now displayed in the main hall of the shopping mall.

The construction works began at the end of the 1990s, starting with the new branch of IKEA and the large shopping mall, which opened in July 2007. The completion of the shopping centre was a priority, since it is a huge economic and financial machine. The main infrastructure, especially the link with the ring road (which was built with public money), was also given priority in order to support the mall. The capital gained during this first stage was then invested in the gradual construction of the residential areas, which allowed investments to be capitalized. Schools were quickly provided, while the rest of the areas that were supposed to host public services still remain empty.

Even in the built parts of the neighbourhood, residential vacancy is higher than average and vacancy of commercial spaces at ground floors in close to 90%. The green spaces are not yet finished and the large archaeological park (Parco delle Sabine) is still under construction, though open to the public. It hosts quite a few activities, ranging from public sport fields and playgrounds, to private horse riding facilities.

Since the real estate sector was hit very hard by the global economic crisis in 2009 many plots are empty. The residential blocks are only half built, while none of the offices or other tertiary functions have been built: Porta di Roma remains mostly residential and is indeed a “dormitory neighbourhood” (Erbani, 2008; Cellamare, 2014).

The Porta di Roma complex is organized in housing blocks with common features. Flats are very small (sizes range from 20, 40, to 60 m²), clearly aimed at single people, young and old couples, and small families. The apartments have balconies that compensate for the limited space. Small blocks of flats are often grouped in complexes with their own swimming pool and garden, and even security systems to control access. Very few of them can be described as high end residential complexes, while the majority tend to replicate on a lower level the models of higher classes, according to the lifestyle that is promoted by the marketing campaigns of the real estate developers. A large number of the apartments remain vacant even after years, with developers still trying to sell dwellings from 2008 and private owners desperately trying to rent or sell their apartment without success.

The shopping mall is a large monolithic structure that creates a physical and social distance between itself and the world outside and absorbs all the functions of living. Massive car parks stretch out around it as a barrier, reinforcing this distance. The local shops envisaged in the Porta
Playground in Parco delle Sabine - photo by the author

Horse riding facility - source: panoramio.com
Elements of (good) urban life

- mid to high density of people of buildings
  
  condensed - human scale - compact structure - dense street pattern

- building typology: apartment blocks, palazzine, high rise

- activities at ground level and living at higher floors

  active street profile

  'public life' - 'life between buildings', people in public spaces, eyes on the street

  small but frequent public space - occasional larger spaces (parks)

  distribution of services and activities

- functional mix

  proximity to services to other dwellings

  travel choice - efficient public transport - walkability

  central location

  little open green space
Elements of suburban life

- low to mid density of people of buildings
- wide - car scale - dispersed structure - loose street pattern

building typology: single family houses with garden, one/two storey apartment buildings
living and no activities at ground level
- passive street profile - wide roads

'private life' - no diffuse commercial activities, no eyes on the street, little street life

frequent private open space
concentration of services and activities
distance from services from other dwellings

monofunctionality (residential)
no travel choice - car based commuting
peripheral location

much open green space
Vacancy, November 2014 - own work

Neighbourhood activities map, April 2015 - own work
Porta di Roma residents

> 35,000 €/year
income to afford
a 40m² flat in Porta di Roma

middle class couples, families and retired people
di Roma project remain empty, creating - after just a few years - an atmosphere of desolation. The few shops that are able to survive are those that cannot find a place in the mall: bars, pizza places, some restaurants and services such as medical facilities and plumbers. At the same time also neighbouring districts experience a disappearance of local shops, and their reorientation toward the lowest segments of the market. The shopping centre has a magnetic attraction: in the absence of an alternative, it becomes the only place for social interaction, especially for young people, who tend to spend all their spare time in the mall. Therefore there is a major reduction in people visiting these streets, leading to an overall impoverishment of life in the district. People seldom make use of the public space of the neighbourhood and the few available squares are serving as car parks (Erbani, 2008; Cellamare, 2014).

The only possible public space therefore, sits on private property: the “square” or “courtyard” enclosed by Ikea, Leroy Merlin and the mall was designed by Gino Valle as the central place for the neighbourhood. It was supposed to be the place where cafés and restaurants would open their doors and use the outside area, but unfortunately plans did not go as expected and the commercial activities give their backs to the “square”, leaving it empty: only an exchange place to move from one block to the other. The shopping mall’s management thought of adopting this underused space as a venue for concerts or special events linked to the commercial activities in the mall. This generated big revenues and attracted people to the mall even during night hours, but it did not represent an improvement in terms of public space availability for the neighbourhood.

Porta di Roma’s shopping mall has little regard for the locality and the neighbouring areas: it is an urban structure that functions on a metropolitan level. It is a very complex economic, housing, and financial operation that has little to do with the regeneration of the outer suburbs. It represents the rise and fall of real estate speculation, heavily fostered by public authorities, guilty of supporting an initiative that is of most benefit to private operators (Cellamare, 2014).
Aerial view of shopping mall - source: europaconcorsi.com

The mall seen from the neighbourhood - photo by author
Structure and public space map - own work

Where is public space in Porta di Roma, picture of Via Adolfo Celi - own work
As things are right now, the best we can hope for Porta di Roma is to become a pleasant middle-class residential area.

Mauro Baioni 2014

I don’t mind the lack of public transport. It is like that everywhere in Rome anyway, but here at least we have the ring road very close and that is very convenient.

Porta di Roma resident 2014

There is no bench, no fountain...not even garbage bins in the streets! There is no square... in Porta di Roma you cannot even sit in the sun unless you go to the shopping mall.

Porta di Roma resident 2015

Square of the shopping mall - source: panoramio.com

Square of the shopping mall - photo by the author
The only square is in the shopping mall.
Public space on private property!
Views of Porta di Roma - photos by the author
It is empty here, there is nothing to do and it is difficult even to find a beer and a snack at the aperitivo time... unless of course you go to the shopping mall. There is not even a supermarket or a grocery store, you are forced to take your car and go somewhere else, or to the huge supermarket in the mall, but that is always so crowded!

Parco delle Sabine is a great place, it is the real quality of this neighbourhood... if only there would be more maintenance... it is really neglected and that is a pity because it is so beautiful!

It takes me about one hour to commute to work by car, but I like living in this place. It is quiet, not messy and there is a lot of space between buildings, a lot of green space and also parking space! Not in the weekend though... the mall attracts so many cars that all our parking space disappears!
People do not interact very much here, I don't even know my neighbours and we live on the same floor! People here like it because it's quiet...I like it too, but maybe a little less quiet would be better, no?

Safety is a big issue. There is no public lighting, no garbage collection in many places, no maintenance of the streets and of the park. When it is dark anybody can do what they like, and they steal cars and vandalize bus stops! We have had enough!

I like Porta di Roma because it is spacious and there is a lot of parking. I especially like the huge park, I go there with my dogs and kids in the weekend. But it is unsafe because it is unfinished. There is no control and there are a lot of accidents and car thefts. Also apartment thefts are more and more common... safety is definitely a problem here.
Many organizations operate in Rome to defend the right to housing. They are diverse and often are aimed at specific segments of population, but in recent years they have networked to advance joint requests and protests.1

These associations and movements actively defend the right to housing by providing support (also legal), resistance to evictions, a social safety net for people in need and by organizing protests and demonstrations. Some of these organizations have a strong political background and have become able to sit at the negotiation table with the municipality, but their contractual power compared to that of the private developer is very low. For example, the left wing administration in 2006 recognized the importance of the efforts of “Action”, a social movement for housing rights, and requested their collaboration to face the housing struggle. On the other hand, centre-right parties and developers - whose political action always took place within the right wing sphere of influence – treat the housing right movements with hostility, denying responsibility over the housing emergency by criminalizing the actions of the associations (Mudu, 2014a).

In the current situation of housing emergency, right to housing movements and the phenomenon of squatting are becoming central again. However, illegal occupation of unused buildings does not only fulfil a residential purpose, but it also fills a void in Rome’s urban and social tissue. By providing socially engaging activities, aggregation spaces and missing services and functions for the community, squatted spaces respond to a widespread social need that has an important spatial impact. Right to housing in Rome has ceased to mean simply “a roof on your head”, but it mingles that basic right with a wider idea of more “social” and “sustainable” forms of living and dwelling.

1 - Pierpaolo Mudu provides a list of the most important associations that operate in Rome at present (Mudu, 2014a): Coordinamento cittadino lotta per la casa (Citizens’ Committee for the Fight for Housing) was created in 1988. In 1999, the association Diritto alla casa (Right to Housing) was created (and became Action in 2002), denouncing real-estate speculation and the complicity of the city administration in not providing housing for a large share of the population. Blocco Precario Metropolitanano (Precarious Metropolitan Block) started their squatting experiences in 2009, becoming the first intercultural social movement for housing. To complete the picture, it is worth bearing in mind that other associations also operate in Rome: Comitato inquilini del centro storico (Historic Center Tenants’ Committee), Comitato popolare di lotta per la casa (Popular Committee for the Housing Struggle), Comitato obiettivo casa (Committee for Housing Objective), Unione inquilini (Tenants’ Union).
These associations not only fight for housing rights, but are also the expression of a different socio-cultural environment. They seek to escape from the real estate speculation model, which builds anonymous pieces of city and frustrates social and cultural needs. Many associations organize cultural activities, mainly aimed at low income population, which could not afford them otherwise. For example they set up “social gyms”, language classes, music and dance schools, theatre and cooking classes, local food production and many kinds of building workshops, to provide practical training for young people. All these projects aim at strengthening social cooperation in order to achieve a more balanced urban life, also by reusing abandoned buildings, thus giving new life to neglected parts of the city (Mudu, 2014b).

These movements and associations promote the appropriation of urban space and a different type of life, to fight the market city model that deprives them of services and opportunities for social interaction. Their model is based on the idea of “sharing economy”, which has a beautiful name in Italian: “Altra Economia”, which literally
means “the other economy”, implying that it is different from the mainstream neoliberal and consumerist economic model. Sharing economy is based on the simple idea that there is no need to over-consume, like society is pushing us to do continuously. There is a more sustainable way: sharing goods and services within our community, in cooperation with our peers. This lifestyle is based on sustainability, on sharing and cooperating and it is socially, environmentally and culturally engaged. Examples of Altra Economia can be found anywhere, and they include all sorts of activities. Most of these activities are informal or illegal in Rome, definitely bottom up at least, but they provide an alternative to consumerism for a growing number of people that seek to be more aware and less isolated.

In this gallery of images I included all sorts of Altra Economia examples, from time banking to reuse, but also many community based initiatives that are not exactly sharing economy, but promote a more engaged, responsible and ethical lifestyle and a caring citizenship.

*Time bank is a platform where groups and individuals can pool and trade time and skills, bypassing money as a measure of value. Time bank is based on the premise that everyone has something to contribute and that it is possible to develop and sustain an alternative economy by connecting existing needs with unacknowledged resources.*

*Forte Prenestino - Km 0 Weekly market of organic groceries and biologic products from local producers*
Casa delle Culture
Cooking together to promote cultural integration

ARCI
Italian classes for immigrants

Ferraironi primary school
Self organized afternoon daycare for immigrant kids
Parco della Cellulosa
Bottom up building of community playground

Blocchi Precari Metropolitani
Museo dell’Altro e dell’Altrove
MAAM - Metropoliz
Kindergarden

Parco della Cellulosa
Bottom up building of community playground

Parco della Cellulosa
Bottom up building of community playground
Colle Salario
Social Gym

SCUP
Capoeira class

Forte Pranestino
Ciclofficina in squatted abandoned military fort
SCUP - EcoSolPop
Weekly market of organic groceries and biologic products from local producers

Forte Prenestino
Kids Pasta Lab
Making fresh pasta with children

Forte Prenestino - Km 0
Weekly market of organic groceries and biologic products from local producers
Bottom up appropriation of unused urban space
Temporary use of Viadotto dei Presidenti
- cleaning the space
- community gathering
Bottom up appropriation of unused urban space
Temporary use of Viadotto dei Presidenti
- kids corner

Sotto il Viadotto
Bottom up appropriation of unused urban space
Temporary use of Viadotto dei Presidenti
- music afternoon

Sotto il Viadotto
Bottom up appropriation of unused urban space
Temporary use of Viadotto dei Presidenti
- free bike repair
In order to answer the main research question and all the other subsequent questions I carried out an extensive literature review, including newspapers, journals and bureaucratic papers. This input mainly related to the general social and economic aspects (urban development, housing market, urban regeneration) and to the context of the city of Rome, therefore I needed to use different methods to gain knowledge on different topics and scales. I used in-depth interviews with scholars, municipal officers, the developers’ architects and sales people, people from neighbourhood associations and people from the right to housing movements to deepen my knowledge on the aspects of stakeholder analysis and interaction, trying to grasp the needs and perspectives of the different actors. In order to understand the spatial issues related to my project location I used desk analysis of the site combined with fieldwork and short questionnaires to the inhabitants.

Once the problem was clearly defined and the location was chosen, I started building the theoretical framework for my project, which helped me to identify the focus points in my urban regeneration strategy.

First of all it is necessary to explore the definition of urban regeneration, in order to be able to intervene in the project location. According to Roberts and Sykes (2000) urban regeneration is “(...) an outcome of the interplay between many sources of influence and, more importantly, it is also a response to the opportunities and challenges which are presented by urban degeneration in a particular place at a specific moment in time” (p. 9).

Another interpretation is that of Couch (2003): “Regeneration is concerned with the regrowth of economic activity where it has been lost; the restoration of social function where there has been dysfunction, or social inclusion where there has been exclusion; and the restoration of environmental quality or ecological balance where it has been lost”.

Both these definitions are useful to understand the various interpretations that regeneration interventions can have. Urban regeneration is usually carried out in inner city or economically deprived areas (Colantonio and Dixon, 2010), while I seek to apply these definitions to a newly developed peripheral housing district, which was born based on distorted premises, and therefore is already desolate and vacant after just a few years. Porta di Roma responds to the first definition because it poses a challenge due to the degeneration of the real estate speculation model of urban development. At the same time it fits Couch’s definition because local economic activity has been lost (or never even appeared) and social dysfunction is present in the form of
Urban leisure venues such as cafes, bars, restaurants and cinemas can be regarded as modern public spaces, as they offer a place for forms of informal contact, news-gathering, social exchange, and business transactions: they are "places where anonymous individuals interact".

Diversity in regard to spatial, social and economic characteristics is increasingly identified as the key to vitality in new urban environments.

Mixed use programs on the ground floors, and shorter blocks to encourage pedestrian flows and circulation.

A good environment image gives an important sense of emotional security, satisfaction and pleasure, because space is always experienced in association with past memories.

Richard Sennett 1977

Jane Jacobs 1961

Kevin Lynch 1960
non-existing public life and isolated population. Based on this, I argue it needs urban regeneration even if it is a new peripheral development, in order to prevent it from becoming a completely dysfunctional part of the city.

Residents of Porta di Roma feel cheated because they bought their apartments with the promise of living in a high end mixed use district with a high quality of life. Now they live in an anonymous housing development, with little population, no job opportunities and scarce public services and they are not even able to sell their house for a good price. In order for them to feel somehow connected to their neighbourhood and to allow a smooth coexistence of different social classes once the vacant dwellings will be used as social housing, it is important that the residents participate in the urban regeneration process. For a community, participation can indeed result in an engaged and informed society that feels better connected to its own environment (Francis, 2003) and it can also reduce the feeling of anonymity in culture and society (Davidoff, 1965).

One of the clearest definitions I found of participation is given by Francis (2003, p. 59): “Participation is the process of working collaboratively with individuals and groups to achieve specific goals”. In this case the specific goal is to tackle housing shortage by allocating vacant dwellings in a middle class housing development to low income population. In order to make it a successful project, all the aspects of the issue need to be shared and purposefully discussed both with the locals and with the newcomers. The community associations and right to housing movements, together with the urban designers, need to be social mediators between the different interests and will be in charge of managing the housing stock.

In this situation the purpose of participation is clear and can be described as the involvement of people in the process of design and decision-making, with the result that their voice is heard and that they gain confidence and trust in the organizations working on the project. In this way it is more likely that people will accept new plans and policies (Sanoff, 1992).

The intervention on street profiles and ground floors finds its theoretical background in the ideas of Jacobs and Sennett. Small-scale economic activity by civil society initiatives is very important for vitality and city life. The failure of the urban plan of Porta di Roma led to a monofunctional residential area that desperately needs the mix of small shops, bars, social and cultural activities defined as a vital element for a healthy urban environment by Jane Jacobs already in 1961.

Sociologist Richard Sennett defines modern public space as “places where anonymous individuals interact” (Sennett, 1977). Here, the act of encountering strangers determines the nature of a public space. According to Sennett, urban leisure venues such as cafes, bars, restaurants and cinemas can be regarded as modern public spaces, as they offer a place for forms of informal contact, news-gathering, social exchange, and business transactions. In this sense also the “active ground floors” that I am proposing can be considered modern public spaces, though they are not simply bars or cafes, but host more complex functions, such as workshops, learning centres, artistic and cultural activities and so on. They are not just places to hang out and encounter strangers, but they act as urban catalysts because they engage people from different social background in socially productive activities, with the aim of promoting integration through cooperation.

The debate on public space also revolves around the urban meaning of open space: open spaces are the places that residents use, where they move through and spend part of their leisure time; places where experiences and uses of different inhabitants meet. Therefore, these places should be conceived as a space owned by everyone, and as a place for spatial expression of a community (Janches and Sepúlveda, 2009). Open public space should be the place for interaction, but its quality and spatial composition affects the perception by individuals, thus influencing the opportunities for interaction. The built environment provides the physical background for the interaction, thus if it is unpleasant, the degree of interaction will be low. On the other hand, spaces like courtyards, green spaces, playgrounds, but also small-scale shared spaces within buildings have a high potential for contact and interaction.

The interaction between different social groups with different interests and lifestyles depends very much on the use, quality, perception and typology of the public and semi public space.

The purpose of this literature review is to help me in the identification of public spaces in Porta di Roma that can be transformed into relevant places for interaction because they have good potential for different types of activities. The scope of informed interventions on public space is that of contrasting the anonymity and impersonality of the “private” public space of the shopping mall.
New York - a passive street front and unused public space - source: nycissues.org

Barcelona - an active street front and "semi public" space - source: flickr.com
the design
The design task represents the coming together of my multiple lines of research, from housing shortage and market driven developments to public initiative and bottom up organization. The final objective of the project is to design tools and processes to increase the power of the local government, in order to provide more affordable housing and a policy that prioritizes the welfare of the citizens instead of the interests of the developers.

The project seeks to provide a different approach to the provision of social housing, and does so through a housing policy proposal. The policy implies various measures to tackle the housing shortage, including taxation on vacant property and the acquisition of vacant dwellings through expropriation and other means, in order to transform it into social housing.

In this proposal a better integration between housing and other functions in envisioned, promoting socio-functional mix as a tool to make social housing a strength and not a weakness in urban development projects. Moreover, the proposal suggests to empower the many right to housing movements and community associations that already operate in providing affordable housing solutions and social services and activities. All these people are operating for social good but are kept in a condition of illegality. What these associations do is outside the schemes of “conventional” use and production of space in Rome and if canalized correctly it could bring a positive change in how urban management is handled. Therefore I propose to make this type of associations partially responsible for the management of the social housing stock acquired through the new policy measures.

I argue that “scaling-up” the local associational networks to wider power structures and relations is an important step to promote social integration between different income groups. This will be central in achieving a more active use of space (private, public and “transitional”) and in supporting a more culturally and socially active urban life.

Porta di Roma is a place with a lot of housing, but very little people and activities: the perfect spot to try out trigger points and consequences of my housing policy proposal. The project for the case study represents the example of how the implementation of the new policy could lead to urban regeneration of neglected “market-city developments” through the social potential hidden in social housing. The implementation of the policy is the trigger for a series of spatial interventions that should breathe new life into the ghost neighbourhood of Porta di Roma. These include a general long term strategy at a district level, as well as neighbourhood scale strategies for public space, plinths and facades.
The objective of the project is to convince Municipality to tackle housing emergency differently. Municipality to invest and let go, empowering civil society. Residents that social housing is an asset, not a threat. Developers that investing in social housing is smart. Everyone that a more equitable model of development is good for the city and for those in housing distress.

by suggesting policy implementation showing what it could be like involving civil society
Ideology and Utopia

My ideological manifesto starts from the idea that Porta di Roma represents the failure of the neoliberal model of production of space. There should be no neighbourhood attached to the shopping mall in the first place: it responds to no housing needs and it only serves as a justification to build the shopping mall itself.

In fact Porta di Roma is suffocated by the shadow of the mall, that works on a much larger scale and oversees and overrides the needs of the neighbourhood. The mall is this black hole that sucks life away from any other economic activity in the area. Porta di Roma cannot grow in this shadow and it needs to detach itself from the mall.

Given the failure of this model of production and use of space, I propose a different economic and social approach, attached to a different ideology. I propose an alternative urban life based on the idea of “sharing economy” or “Altra Economia”.

The shopping mall and Porta di Roma cannot feed on the same thing: Porta di Roma needs to find its own identity in a different model, one that cannot find place in the mall. In order to achieve normality for itself, Porta di Roma needs an alternative to get away from the neoliberal, consumerist ideology that caused its failure. This alternative can be represented by all the examples of Altra Economia that already happen in Rome, in Italy and in Europe (see page 000).

The ultimate goal is to reach normality for people in housing need and for Porta di Roma, but the current system prevents urban life from happening in the neighbourhood and keeps people out of the housing market.

This is meant to be a polemic project: normality seems to be impossible in this situation, hence the idea of “Utopia of Normality”. In Rome there is a distorted model of urban development and a mismanagement of the public thing, including social housing. All this makes it exceptionally hard to achieve a ‘normal’ urban environment, especially in the peripheries, which is why the standard, plain and functioning neighbourhood becomes a Utopia that is almost impossible to reach. My argument is that it would take only so much effort to make things better, but that it will probably never happen, making it relevant to talk about a “Utopia of Normality”.

The Utopia of Normality needs two things to be realized: it needs people and it needs independence from the shopping mall. The first can be achieved through the new housing policy, while the second needs an extraordinary element to allow normality to happen outside of the shadow of the mall. The extraordinary element is called “The Wall” and its role is that of changing the relationship between the neighbourhood and the shopping mall.
Porta di Roma is in the shadow of the shopping mall
Sharing economy
Space to be produced
Collective use of common spaces
Reuse
Anthropological place (Augè)

Real estate speculation
Space to be consumed
Individual use of common spaces
Consumerism
Nonplace (Augè)

“Counter culture” use of space

Neoliberal production and use of space
THE UTOPIA OF NORMALITY
With this project I seek to draw attention to what is wrong in Rome’s housing market by proposing a utopian solution to it in the chosen location of Porta di Roma. This case study should serve as a showcase and reference of how tackling housing shortage and revitalizing peripheral areas can go hand in hand, achieving the desired “Utopia of Normality”.

The objective of the strategy is to promote a model of urban life that is different than that of the shopping mall, by encouraging its spatial expressions, where housing is strongly connected with sociability, communal life, the direct appropriation and shared dimension of common spaces. These are some of the aspects that went lost in the “market city” and that I seek to recover. Moreover the strategy aims at promoting economical activities and employment opportunities; and mixing different income groups through socially inclusive networks of activities. The overall goal is to make Porta di Roma attractive for investors again, in order to finish the building of public and private areas that are still missing, but without expelling the lower income population that has been introduced through the housing policy.

Through a carrot and stick policy private developers could be seduced into re-investing some of their unused housing stock for social housing purposes. The goal is to convince real estate actors that social sustainability and the public interest are more profitable for them than mere speculation, which already proved itself unfit to face the crisis.
Housing policy proposal

This proposal does not aim at being a comprehensive policy covering all the possible options, but it consists of a series of suggestions as to how to intervene in the system to make it more efficient and equitable. After analysing the current housing situation and the critical issues of the existing policies, I decided to focus on a limited number of issues that are relevant for the housing problem, trying to tackle specifically the ones that are present in Rome. I chose not to include the regulation of private rental market in my proposal because it would be too wide for the limited scope of this graduation project and because the link to the specific case study would be less immediate. For the same reason, the topic of subsidies and allowances is only superficially discussed.

The proposal implies various measures to tackle the housing shortage, including taxation on vacant property and the acquisition of vacant dwellings through expropriation and other means, in order to transform it into social housing.

A better integration between housing and other functions in envisioned, promoting socio-functional mix as a tool to make social housing a strength and not a weakness in urban development projects. Moreover, the proposal suggests to empower the many right to housing movements and community associations that already operate in providing affordable housing solutions, social services and cultural activities by making them partially responsible for the management of the social housing stock acquired through the new policy measures.

The objectives of my policy proposal are multiple, but they all combine to bring about an increased and more integrated offer of affordable dwellings, in order to provide all segments of population with adequate housing solutions. In particular I seek to:

- Simplify and rationalize the offer of affordable housing;
- Improve the management of public housing;
- Contrast vacancy (both public and private);
- Seduce real estate developers and asset management companies into social housing;
- Decrease socio-spatial segregation and improve social mix and integration of different income and background groups;
- Recognize and empower the social role of right-to-housing movements.

All the selected issues are particularly relevant for my case study and, where necessary, explicit reference will be made to Porta di Roma to show how the policy could be implemented.

The suggestions I formulate will be organized in a thematic structure, in order to provide a clear overview.
1. Simplified system

The current offer of affordable housing solutions is not very clear, as many similar options overlap, generating confusion. Especially the role of Edilizia Residenziale Sociale (Social Housing) is unclear when compared to Edilizia Agevolata and Convenzionata. Moreover, the problem of evicted households is not properly addressed.

Therefore I propose a rationalization of the offer, with only two typologies of affordable housing solutions: Public and Social Housing, with specific interventions to tackle the issue of evicted households. The two typologies differ as to financing, providers and target, as explained below.

The idea is to have a system that, through a differentiated offer involving both private and public financing, is able to cater for multiple income groups and households types, in a way similar to what already happens in other E.U. countries as France, the Netherlands and partly also Germany (Oxley & Un-Habitat, 2009; Czischke & Pittini, 2007).

One of the main issues with not for profit social housing providers in Europe is that of efficiency. It is argued that a better efficiency could be promoted through competition between a variety of both profit and non-profit making housing providers (Oxley & Un-Habitat, 2009). Kemeny’s distinction between unitary and dualist social housing systems implies that in the former, non-profit landlords compete with profit making providers, while in the latter there is a separation that prevents such competition (Kemeny 1995; Kemeny, 2005).

Given this distinction, my proposal moves toward a unitary system, in which there is a combination and therefore a competition between public and private, profit and non-profit making social housing providers, in order to promote efficiency and ensure an improved provision of affordable housing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL HOUSING</th>
<th>PUBLIC HOUSING</th>
<th>TEMPORARY HOUSING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+ private - State</td>
<td>- private + State</td>
<td>- private + State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- low and middle income population</td>
<td>- low and very low income population</td>
<td>- subcategory of Public Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- rent, with possibility to redeem the dwelling</td>
<td>- rent only</td>
<td>- evicted households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- rent based on cost-provision, weighted regionally and agreed for every project, anyway never higher than 70% of “assisted tenancies” for that Region, adjusted every 10 years.</td>
<td>- income based rent</td>
<td>- income based rent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- indicative income threshold of 35,000€ (has to be weighted regionally based on average regional income)</td>
<td>- built and managed by ex-IACP</td>
<td>- built and managed by ex-IACP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- built and managed by multiple housing providers, including ex-IACP</td>
<td>- indicative income threshold of 18,000€ (has to be weighted regionally based on average regional income)</td>
<td>- temporary solution for evicted households waiting for another accommodation, for households whose public dwelling is being refurbished or for specific categories in temporary situation of emergency (divorcees, newly unemployed etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- financed through Real Estate Funds (FIA) and local private investors.</td>
<td>- financed through State and Regional transfers</td>
<td>- allocation is discretional according to specific situations and availability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- frequent change, short stays</td>
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- A national eligibility criteria is necessary: income will be calculated with the same criteria in all Regions in order to avoid discrimination and income thresholds will then be weighted according to average Regional income. Yearly adjustments will be made to the criteria, and also the Municipal rankings and waiting lists for both Public and Social Housing (separated of course) will be updated yearly.

- It is necessary to pursue functional, social and cultural mix in Public and Social Housing projects. I propose the idea of “Abitare Sociale”, which can be translated as “Social Living”, that is not providing just housing, but also a healthy living environment that promotes integration among different income groups and ethnicities. Abitare Sociale is an active and socially engaged way of understanding social housing. Public and Social Housing projects will include more functions than just residential: commercial spaces can be envisioned, as well as workshops and spaces for production and crafting, in order to promote job opportunities for the deprived households in the small manufacturing sector. Also spaces for social interaction and engaging activities for young and elderly should be implemented. These areas are supposed to be the place where integration between different income groups happens and also where the interaction between the housing complex and the rest of the neighbourhood takes place. All sorts of activities that encourage integration and positive feedback from grantees and neighbourhood are welcome and they can be designed according to each specific case.

- A mix of Public and Social dwellings will be mandatory, and the mix with private tenancies is highly encouraged and recommended: no “segregated” neighbourhoods should be built. A quota of at least 10% of immigrants needs to be included in every project, and dwellings will be assigned according to waiting lists. Productive activities, education and job opportunities can also be integrated in the project, according to Regional and Municipal agreements. Specific financial and building programmes for young couples, students and elderly, should be introduced, paying particular attention to their specific needs, though always aimed at integration. Co-housing is encouraged as a successful mode for integration. Measures for specific categories can be found almost in all E.U. countries (Oxley & Un-Habitat, 2009), as well as measures to avoid segregation and improve social mix (van Ham & Manley, 2012). These are just guidelines, specific regulations and implementation methods should be elaborated at the Regional and Municipal level.

- It is mandatory to include at least 20% of Public or Social Housing in any new urban development (in compliance with local urban plans). Developers can
choose to entrust ex-IACP with the management of the dwellings or they can opt for private management (Cooperatives, Asset management companies, etc.).

- Re-use and refurbishment of existing property (private or public) is the priority and can benefit from tax benefits. New construction is of course possible, but subject to higher taxation. Both Social and Public Housing stock needs to be energy efficient and sustainable: tax reductions and incentives are available for renovations aimed at energy efficiency and for new construction built with sustainability criteria.

- “Self-renovation” (autorecupero) is an encouraged modality of refurbishment, as it is socially engaging and financially sustainable (both for housing providers and inhabitants). Inhabitants can organize in cooperatives and engage in self-renovation works in order to make dilapidated dwellings available for occupation, in exchange for rent reductions. Calls for households willing to participate in such projects will be held regularly and dwellings will then be assigned according to Municipal waiting lists. It should be promoted through specific Regional Funds. As an example of this practice, the region of Toscana in Italy has successfully been implementing this type of refurbishment strategies for social purposes since 2003 (Dexia Crediop, 2008).

- Self-building experiments are also encouraged as a socially engaging and financially sustainable (both for housing providers and inhabitants) way of building new stock. Inhabitants can organize in cooperatives and engage in self-building works, in exchange for rent reductions. Calls for households willing to participate in such projects will be held regularly and dwellings will then be assigned according to Municipal waiting lists. It should be promoted through specific Regional Funds.
2. Vacancy

A survey of vacant property needs to be performed on the basis of nationally agreed criteria. As pointed out in various researches on the topic (Hoekstra & Vakili-Zad, 2011), vacancy is quite difficult to assess properly, but it does affect the price and availability of dwellings on the market. Therefore I consider it a very relevant issue to be tackled, especially in relation to my case study. The objective of the proposal is to contrast vacancy in general, but different measures are applied to different types of landlords: harsher on corporate landlords (developers, Real Estate companies, asset management companies, banks, Foundations and so on…) and less so on private landlords.

- Private landlords: vacant property will be subject to IMU and IRPEF taxation and to a specific “Vacancy Tax”. This tax is progressive and increases yearly, and the incomes from it go into the Social Fund for Rent.

- Corporate landlords: vacant property will be subject to IMU and IRAP/IRES taxation and to a specific “Vacancy Tax”. This tax is progressive and increases yearly (higher than for private landlords), and the incomes from it go into the Social Fund for Rent. Moreover, if the property is vacant for more than 1 year, the vacancy tax triplicates. If the property remains vacant for over 2 years, it will be forcibly assigned as social dwelling for 5 years. The landlord will keep the ownership, but the property will be managed as Social Housing by ex-IACP (Community Branch). The income from rent will go for 50% to the owner and for 50% to ex-IACP. If

The strong taxation and the expropriation system find their basis in Spanish and Italian examples. The Spanish situation is in many ways similar to the Italian case, though sensibly worse (Hoekstra & Vakili-Zad, 2011; Cano Fuentes et al., 2013). It has therefore been considered as a benchmark for the evaluation of issues and policy measures. Especially in Andalucia, fines have been imposed over vacant dwellings and temporary expropriation has been used as a measure to contrast the growing number of evictions following foreclosures1 (Dol et al., 2013). In Italy, Rome has already seen examples of expropriation of vacant dwellings of corporate landlords as a temporary solution for housing shortage2.

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These measures have a specific impact in the case study of Porta di Roma. Developers can decide to entrust the vacant property they have in the neighbourhood to ex-IACP (or to private asset management companies) or the dwellings will be forcibly assigned as social housing for a limited period of time and only if vacancy continues after that, they can be expropriated. The choice of the developers affects the future of the neighbourhood. Cooperation between different stakeholders can lead to a better result: more social integration, more respect and maintenance of the stock, changes in buildings and common spaces. In this way the existing residents won’t feel disturbed by the introduction of social housing in Porta di Roma because they will get benefits from it and they will have a chance to express their opinion and concerns (see chapter on Abitare Sociale). Working together can be profitable for all the parties involved, while forced assignation and expropriation are a form of hostile takeover and make a successful intervention harder to achieve. No collaboration means fewer chances to make physical improvements, therefore less chances for integration and a higher probability that existing residents will just leave the neighbourhood.

### 3. Reform of Public Housing Agencies

Given the importance of competition to improve the efficiency of non-profit making providers (of which local authority agencies are the most important example) - and therefore the offer of affordable housing solutions - it is essential to reform the Public Agencies for Housing to make them fit for this more dynamic system.

Ex-IACPs have a great potential to become leading actors in the provision of affordable housing for different categories. In my proposal they will gain a new role, becoming providers of both Public and Social Housing. Through public money they will be able to provide a good offer of Public dwellings for the lower income population, but they will also be allowed to invest in local Real Estate ethic funds and develop Social Housing projects. They will turn into something more similar to a “Housing Corporation”, like in the Netherlands, but also in England, where the owners and managers of the stock remain formally in the public or social sector, but use private finance to fund additional provision, usually with the help of subsidy (Oxley & Un-Habitat, 2009; Czischke & Pittini, 2007).

This will allow them to compete with private (both profit and non-profit making) providers on the grounds of Social Housing, therefore better tackling the housing needs of the “limbo people” (see page.....).

Social Housing will provide a higher income for ex-IACP, allowing them to continue with the offer of public dwellings at very low rents and also allowing them to achieve a better social mix, avoiding segregation. Of course, since they are public agencies, their main focus will remain Public Housing, but they will be more flexible and free from municipal budgetary constraints in their investments. This is similar to what happens in Sweden, where Municipal Housing Companies are run independently from municipal budgets; or in England, with ALMOs managing council housing with quite a degree of independence from the local authority ((Oxley & Un-Habitat, 2009). These are guidelines for the national and the regional level; they have to be implemented locally with agreements among Regions, Municipalities and Public Agencies.
- Increased public financing for Public Agencies for Housing: a larger amount of transfers, on a certain and regular basis, is needed to properly deliver the fundamental public service of affordable housing. Transfers should be more conspicuous in the beginning, to face the efforts in restoring and enlarging the stock and the new investments in Social Housing. When financial flows will be stabilized thanks to Social Housing and new stock revenues, public transfers can be reduced, though still remaining the main source of income for ex-IACP.

- Public Agencies for Housing will enjoy a lighter fiscal treatment, in light of the fact that they provide a public service. They should also enjoy tax benefits and incentives for renovations in terms of energy efficiency and sustainability.

- In order to contrast black market regular controls on incomes and eligibility will be performed in connection with Tax Office. Additional measures against black market are increased local controls on dwellings, and regular checks on empty apartments.

- Increase of the housing stock: next to increased public transfers, there are additional ways to enlarge the number of available dwellings.
  - no discounted sale of stock decided at national level: each Agency has the possibility to independently evaluate its own stock and decide how much and which parts of it is worth selling. Prices and conditions can be set by the Agency, with the only requirement that the dwelling be vacant of grantees. The guiding principle should be the overall increase of the available stock, so no excessive or discounted sale will be allowed.
  - refurbishment and self-renovation (autorecupero) of dilapidated dwellings already in stock.
  - unused public buildings (both residential and non residential) are given cost free to ex-IACP to refurbish and turn into Public and Social Housing.
  - acquisition of bare ownership of dwellings belonging to elderly people that are struggling to cover housing expenses. Elderly can remain in the dwelling until the end of their life. After that, ex-IACP has full rights on the property and can turn it into Public or Social housing according to needs.
  - dwellings entrusted to ex-IACP by Real Estate developers to manage as social housing.
  - dwellings forcibly assigned as social housing (see Vacancy thematic area).
  - expropriated dwellings (see Vacancy thematic area).

- A “Community Branch” of ex-IACP will be established: an experimental mode of management that couples the pursuit of functional, social and cultural mix with the empowerment of the existing organizations and movements operating on the regional territory to defend the right to housing. This new branch of the Agency will be formed by local associations, groups and movements, which will manage specifically acquired stock, in order to achieve an innovative way of providing housing and living environment. The Community Branch actively promotes “Abitare Sociale” by involving residents and grantees in the setting up of spaces for services and in the management of new activities and functions that can be used by the whole neighbourhood. Abitare Sociale through the Community Branch is a way of promoting active participation and a sense of community, to increase responsibility and attachment to the living environment, but also an active and socially engaged way of understanding social housing. It aims at finding smart ways of dealing with social and functional integration and at cancelling the social stigma placed on social housing. At the same time the Community Branch makes use of already
public agencies for housing

“community branch”

- ex IACP
- right to housing movements

Entrance of Metropoliz, squatted former factory in Rome - photo by author

Empower community

Allow for bottom up approach

“I AM SCUP” - campaign for self organized socio-cultural activities - source: comune-info.net
existing actors that successfully operate in the field of affordable housing, though in a sometimes illegal way. Mostly through squatting of abandoned buildings, these groups provide deprived households with housing and cultural services that would otherwise be out of their reach. With the Community Branch of ex-IACP, these valuable experiences can be reconciled with the legal framework and successful patterns can be replicated for the benefit of all households in distress. A specific part of the stock will be subject to this experimental management: unused public buildings entrusted to ex-IACP, a percentage of dilapidated public dwellings, dwellings entrusted to ex-IACP by private developers, forcibly assigned dwellings, expropriated dwellings. Self-renovation (autorecupero) will be the preferred modality of rehabilitation of rundown property. The implementation of this new management experiment is demanded to Municipalities and ex-IACP, with the collaboration of local action groups. Dwellings managed by Community Branches will be assigned based on Municipal waiting lists, with freedom as to the percentages of Social and Public Housing according to the specific project and location. If the experimental initiatives work, this type of management can be extended to more property. In several countries, including Finland, Sweden and Germany, there are different forms of cooperative home ownership (Oxley & Un-Habitat, 2009) that, though the Community Branch does not have ownership as its final result, can be taken as example of cooperative models of management. Abitare Sociale through the Community Branch is the type of management that will be applied to the dwellings acquired with different means in Porta di Roma, adding to the residential area all sorts of other functions. The ground floors of the buildings, which are also sitting there empty, will be given out for social rent and some of them will be managed by the “Community Branch”: in this way the plinths will be activated, involving also the public space in front of them and offering opportunities for social interaction, cultural activities and commercial functions.

4. Social Housing

This is the typology of housing provision where the competition at the basis of the unitary system can be seen. It is of course provided by public, private, profit and non-profit making actors and it is targeted at middle income households as well as low income families.

- Plurality of Social Housing providers, including asset management companies and ex-IACP. 

- System of Real Estate Investment Funds (FIA) as developed by the 2009 Piano Casa. Moreover, local authorities will encourage the creation of Local Ethic Funds with social housing purposes, managed by no profit operators. Ex-IACP can also invest in the funds and participate in Social Housing projects.

- Corporations, developers and Real Estate management companies can turn their vacant property (only if already built) into Social Housing in exchange for tax benefits. The change in use can only happen when the property has been vacant for at least 6 months, and such interventions have to comply with urban plans and are subject to approval by the Municipality. The owner can decide to manage the dwellings or to entrust asset management companies or ex-IACP with this responsibility. This is exactly what is supposed to happen in Porta di Roma, hopefully with ex-IACP Community Branch being entrusted with the vacant stock.
Objectives and strategy

The design proposal stems from the idea that Porta di Roma needs to be “generated”. The steps of this “generation” strategy start from the observation of the current issues and propose actions and objectives to tackle them.

These actions pave the way to the “Utopia of Normality”: if all this were to happen for real, it would be a real Utopia!

Of course the actions and objectives are multiple, complex and connected to each other and they need a spatial framework to hold them together. This framework is based on the concept of “borders” and “connections”. A “border” is not a limit, it is a place of transition, the place where two different elements or realities touch. A “connection” is a link, something that combines and bonds things, places and people. These two concepts are used to shape the interventions in Porta di Roma. According to the different scales and places in the neighbourhood, a connection or a border is created, generating a system of relations between all the different elements.

At the large scale this means increasing the relation of every piece of city located around the Parco delle Sabine with the park itself. Accessibility here is the common element.

Parco delle Sabine is a huge archaeological park, a beautiful place filled with buried ruins of an ancient time. All the neighbourhoods around it are also ruins in their own way: Porta di Roma is a contemporary ruin of Real Estate speculation, Serpentara and Val Melaina are ruins of Modernism (and in a way of the Welfare State) and so on. They belong together, and should form an integrated system, but they are currently completely detached. There is an accessibility problem and the borders between the park and the built areas are unsafe, unfriendly and confused.

The role of the park is clear: it works as the only outlet for leisure and green for the inhabitants of the modern ruins and it attracts people from quite a large catchment area. However, the physical relationship between the elements is unclear and needs to be improved.

At the same district scale, a new urban role is needed for Porta di Roma. At present it is only a residential satellite for the large shopping mall, with no role of its own. I argue that it needs to become independent from the shadow of the mall and it needs a special character, able to attract people on its own.

Every issue and connected action has a spatial meaning that helped to design the crucial interventions. There are three structural ideas for the project: “Abitare Sociale”, “Altra Economia and Public Space”, “The Wall”.
vacant apartments

social housing

vacant and blind plinths

activate ground floors

no activity

functional mix, diffused activities

generic spatial characteristics

specific spatial characteristics

car oriented mobility

public transport oriented mobility
car oriented neighbourhood: no public space

pedestrian & bike friendly neighbourhood with cozy public space

unclear relations between elements

system of relations between elements

isolated urban units

increased accessibility
pedestrian & bike friendly neighbourhood with cozy public space

system of relations between elements increased accessibility

one social and income group mix of social and income groups

individual use of space collective use of space

anonymity, powerlessness participation, appropriation, community

collective use of space

consumer economy sharing economy

dependent & subordinate to shopping mall autonomous & independent urban element
Increased accessibility to Parco delle Sabine and new urban role for Porta di Roma - map by author
Spatial strategy for Porta di Roma - own work
strategy
objectives

Make Porta di Roma less dependent on the shopping mall for daily needs and opportunities for social interaction and free time.

Make Porta di Roma less dependent on other neighbourhoods for amenities and services.

Create an environment that challenges the market logic of production of space: self management and bottom up approach open the way to the empowerment of civil society.

Make Porta di Roma a place where people from other areas of the city go to engage in meaningful activities.

Provide an alternative to the type of lifestyle represented by the mall.

Enhance the relationship with Parco delle Sabine.
"Abitare Sociale" entails different ways of living and types of dwelling, more connected with sociability, communal life, the direct appropriation and shared dimension of common spaces; including social housing with a more community based management.

"Altra Economia and Public Space" is what connects the Abitare Sociale with the public sphere. Sociability and communal life are integral aspects of the sharing economy model that I seek to implement in Porta di Roma as an alternative to the "shopping mall model". For those aspects to grow and for sharing economy to flourish the direct appropriation of public space and the shared dimension of common space are needed. A connection between private and public space and between inside and outside is needed.

"The Wall" is the special and extraordinary element that allows for "Normality". It represents an ideological statement: it is not a limit, it is a border, a “purification space” between the mall (neoliberal space - non place - consumerism) and the neighbourhood (counter culture - anthropological place - production). It is an element with a life of its own that attracts people and even provides job opportunities.
Abitare Sociale

The Community management branch of Public Housing Agencies should ensure a better integration between housing and other functions, like spaces for social activities, commercial and even productive spaces. The goal is to create what can be called Abitare Sociale (Social Living): an inclusive living environment, where not only one could live in a decent dwelling but could also access enriching experiences and relations.

The objective of Abitare Sociale is to empower the grantees and the movements and community members: they would choose, create and manage some of the extra activities and services. The goal of this bottom up approach is to achieve a more successful integration of different functions but also of different background and income groups and a more active use of common and public space. The aim is to go from one to multiple social and income groups, and from an individual to a collective and shared use of space.

The different types of housing proposed follow the vacancy pattern. While most of the stock stays as it is (enclosed condos with no common space and parking at the ground floor), some of it becomes Abitare Sociale. That includes the newly built Cohousing, in which community life plays a big role, but most importantly the stock in which vacant dwellings are transformed into social housing and extra community and public functions happen at the ground floors.

Of course introducing lower income population in a middle class residential neighbourhood presents some risks. Social housing still comes with a stigma, but design can help in the form of a bonus system that gives extra advantages to the existing residents. They can have parking spots, extra storage space, an extra room or balcony to help them with the integration process. In blocks that face a public street or a square, the ground floors will host social, commercial and cultural activities. This is the place where the integration should take place. The use of the same materials and spatial elements for the additions in the upper floors and the interventions at the ground floors provides unity, hopefully improving spatial quality.

The ground floor spaces will also be put on social rent and they will host all sorts of activities, like shops, bars, small companies, day care for kids and elderly, cultural activities to improve one’s skills or knowledge, job placement, do it yourself spaces, spaces for arts and crafts, time banks, acting and music schools and so on. Of course, the community management branch of the housing agencies will run some of these activities, ensuring a good social control.
Different types of housing follow the vacancy pattern - map by author.

Officine Zero, occupied factory with self managed production, coworking and housing - source: ozofficinezero.org
<30% social housing
parking lot at ground floor
independent living units
no common space

30% > <50% social and public housing
active ground floor
independent living units
common space in plinth

co-housing
active ground floor
private life can be collective
common space at every floor

Scheme of different types of housing: market housing and Abitare sociale (social housing and cohousing) - own work
I do not like the idea of social housing in Porta di Roma. I am afraid that people with a lower social condition can bring social problems to the neighbourhood. We already have safety issues, we do not need also poverty. I am afraid the quality of the neighbourhood and buildings will decrease...

The social rent for ground floor spaces will increase the amount of activity on the street, making it safer. The social activities will help to build a sense of community, and education and cooperation will improve integration.

Design can help! Existing residents will have a "spatial bonus", in the form of extra storage space, an extra room or some extra balcony to help the integration of different income groups. With this physical changes and a more lively public space also the spatial quality of the neighbourhood will increase.

Social problems come from a high concentration of deprived households in a neglected urban environment. Porta di Roma is a quite good residential neighbourhood which won't have a very high concentration of social housing. Social housing will indeed make a good use of the vacant stock and the social management will increase the possibilities for integration.
bonus system

Explanation of the Bonus System for the existing residents - own work
Porta di Roma residents

> 35,000 €/year income to afford a 40m² flat in Porta di Roma

Limbo people

20,345 €/year < > 30,000 €/year between public housing threshold and minimum income to afford rent in Rome

Low income people

< 20,344,92 €/year income threshold for public housing in Rome

Everybody will have the opportunity to express their opinions and concerns during the participation process. Existing and future residents can shape their new neighbourhood together, with the help of planners and designers, along with us, IACP and the developers.

It will mainly be social housing, so "limbo people" are the target group and their income is not so different after all, neither is their socio demographic profile. The "community management" will help the integration and the maintenance. Social housing should not be scary, let's break the stigma!

Concerns about social housing have multiple answers: policy, participation and economic profiling - own work
Visualization of the implementation of the Bonus System on existing blocks - own work

Detail of the facade after the Bonus System interventions - own work
Given the failure of Porta di Roma as an example of “market city” it is worth trying to apply a different ideology there. Through bottom up initiatives and the ideas of the sharing economy, my project aims at “re generating” Porta di Roma. Right to housing movements are empowered and given a role in the legal framework and a process of participation helps the cooperation among different actors.

With the different ideology of Altra Economia, the way of experiencing and producing space changes. Social interaction and sharing are allowed and encouraged by the spatial configuration of buildings and public space: open and active ground floors, spaces for bottom up socio-cultural activities, areas for communal life and cozy public space.

The urban space is changed in order to actively promote a different lifestyle, a different way of experiencing the urban environment: using it and producing it instead of consuming it and being used by it.
Activation of public space through social, cultural and economical activities

PRIVATE SPACE:
apartments

TRANSITIONAL SPACE:
community activities and spaces at and in front of ground floors
services within the housing block
communal green space

PUBLIC SPACE:
square
local and urban services
streets
green areas

Degrees of publicness - own work

Activation of public space through commercial, cultural and social activities in the ground floor spaces - map by author
Design of the square in Via Adolfo Celi - own work
Visualization of square in Via Adolfo Celi - own work

Visualization of activated ground floors - own work
How can the counter culture way of experiencing and shaping the public space be placed in a “neoliberal space”? It is necessary to detach from the symbol of that socio economic model, the shopping mall. In order to achieve normality you need to eliminate the anomaly (the mall) that prevents normality from happening. That can be done through a utopian ideological statement, represented by The Wall: at the same time a limit, a barrier and a border between Porta di Roma and the shopping mall. A utopian tool is necessary to achieve the Utopia of Normality.

How can a wall be not just a limit but a border? Because it is not simply a wall, a surface, it is an object that contains a space. It is inspired by the idea of the Medieval wall: a fortification in which things happen on both sides, but also inside the wall itself. It is like a corridor: a linear secret garden. A “garden of experiences” hidden between two brick walls: a path to and from the mall, that aims at showing the difference between the two sides of it and hopes to convince you that The Wall itself and the other side are much better than the shopping mall.

The idea that overturns the meaning of this design device is that of creating, by way of the architectonic form and structure of “the wall - the limit”, a double function: on one hand closing off the neighbourhood against the shopping mall and on the other hand, at the same time, highlighting a specific connection between the two elements. The Wall manifests itself as the only possible path between Porta di Roma and the shopping mall, creating a privileged contact: in order to go to the other side it is necessary to go through the experience of “The Wall - the border”.

The two-faced character of The Wall - a flat surface with billboards on the mall’s side and an articulated surface of different elements on the neighbourhood side - is meant to reflect the substantial difference of the two places: the non-place - consumerism paradise - represented by the mall versus the anthropological place - space for sharing and living - envisioned in Porta di Roma.
Cross section of the Wall, inspirational sketch - own work

Visualization of the inside of the Wall - own work
The Wall on the shopping mall’s side - own work
Visualization of Porta di Roma’s side of the Wall - own work

Visualization of the entrance to the Wall - own work
Of course I am aware that this is my Utopia and that it doesn’t necessarily match the reality, so I investigated stakeholders and possible scenarios. There are many stakeholders involved in such a project, each of them with their own needs and desires. They also have different levels of economic and institutional power and different levels of interest and engagement in the issues at stake.

I presented my project proposal to the Municipality, the developers, some right to housing movements and associations and to a few residents and I got different reactions, from which I learned that each stakeholder is sensitive to a specific issue, so it is essential that my project speaks to them in the most appropriate way. That’s why I made different pamphlets for different stakeholders, with tailor made stories to present the project in the light that is best for each of them, addressing the critical issues. In this way I hope to convince them to consider my Utopia as a goal to work for.

There are two key factors in my project - social housing and the Wall - and depending on which choice the stakeholders make, different things will happen that will lead to different scenarios.

It is important that stakeholders understand that their choices will shape the future of Porta di Roma. If they persist in their positions of rejection and non-cooperation we won’t go much further than the current situation and we will end up in what can be called a nightmare scenario, where Porta di Roma is just another dormitory suburb, with very little appeal, very little property value and very big problems.

With this project I am trying to push the stakeholders to consider different options, because they could be the future. I want to seduce them into a crowded square where people can do many things, and into inclusive housing solutions for everyone.

If we do nothing, nobody wins. In my Utopia of course everybody wins. But if we keep the Utopia in mind and start compromising than we can at least start playing!
...“is the process of working collaboratively with individuals and groups to achieve specific goals” (Francis, 2003).
...can result in an engaged and informed society that feels better connected to its own environment (Francis, 2003).
...can reduce the feeling of anonymity in culture and society (Davidoff, 1965).

**participation**

Who does what? Why? How? Different levels of power and interest

**Porta di Roma residents**
want to improve their quality of life, are scared of poverty, want a lively and safe neighbourhood, need public space

**limbo people**
need a house, can afford social housing, might need a job, can bring in social capital, need public space

**low income people**
need a house, need IACP to have it (public housing), need a job, can bring in social capital, need public space

**right to housing movements**
want housing for all and a liveable neighbourhood; want to challenge real estate speculation and neoliberlal model of urban development, increase small scale and self organized activities, improve public life and public space, increase citizens’ participation

**planners, designers, facilitators**
want a liveable neighbourhood and more equitable production of urban space; want to involve residents in decision making, improve public life and public space; are concerned about vacancy and job opportunities

**developers**
own buildings and land, want to make money out of it

**shopping mall**
wants to make money, does not care for PdR, can organize events, works on regional scale

**Municipality**
wants PdR to be a centrality; wants to fix housing emergency, preserve the park, improve job opportunities; needs office space

**ex-IACP**
wants vacant buildings for social housing, can bring in extra activities and social management, can offer job opportunities

**FIA**
wants to invest in housing projects: buy vacant buildings to turn them into social housing

**companies and investors**
want to invest in profitable property, might need office space, can offer job opportunities
Stakeholder engagement in Porta di Roma

Stakeholder engagement in Housing Emergency

Stakeholder engagement in the Wall
Stakeholders are sensitive to different issues.

Municipality

Residents

Pamphlet - Municipality version - own work

Pamphlet - Residents version - own work
MOVEMENTS

Tailor-made approach.

Need for a tailormade approach.
Scenarios

Social housing

key issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>stakeholders choice</th>
<th>cooperation of stakeholders</th>
<th>result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes, public management</td>
<td>yes,</td>
<td>+ social integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes, private management</td>
<td>cooperation of stakeholders</td>
<td>0 social integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no, public expropriation</td>
<td>hostile takeover</td>
<td>- social integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no cooperation</td>
<td>- spalatial improvements</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

UTOPIA COMPROMISE NIGHTMARE
The Wall

key issue

stakeholders choice

yes, built bottom up in cooperation

yes, built top down by the shopping mall

no, unbuilt

cooperation of stakeholders

advantage of one stakeholder

advantage of one stakeholder

result

opportunity for empowerment of civil society

opportunity for commercial and economic activities

no opportunity

UTOPIA    COMPROMISE    NIGHTMARE
Current situation
Utopia Scenario

2015: implementation of new housing policy and beginning of process of participation.

Developers agree to turning vacant stock into social housing and entrust management to Public Agencies for Housing (ex-IACP). Real Estate market keeps sinking, developers find themselves in need for good options for the vacant stock, but selling seems impossible and the option of entrusting the stock to ex-IACP is good. They would keep the ownership of the stock and at the same time get a revenue, though small. Incentives are more appealing than an increasing vacancy tax. Moreover the social management might increase the value of the stock in the long run and public sector represents a guarantee of a safe investment.

Due to the Community Branch management there are Bonus expansions in the upper floors and new social, productive and commercial activities in the ground floors. Existing residents, thanks to participation, Bonus system and spaces for integration, remain in Porta di Roma. As a result of these choices, the housing blocks become highly mixed in terms of income and social background.

Associations, and ex-IACP convince developers, shopping mall and Municipality to invest money in building The Wall, because it could be an attraction and a venue for events. The Wall will be built in cooperation: the structure will be built by the developers and the shopping mall, while the enclosed path and gardens and the actual “Wall” as an attraction will be realized by the old and new residents, together with designers. The Wall will be managed by the Community Branch and it will offer job opportunities for local residents.

The “failed square” in the shopping mall gets filled with office buildings: Municipality agrees to move their offices in exchange for the developers building The Wall. This, together with other office buildings in the neighbourhood, allows to keep the central area open and green, a venue for a flea market and events.

A church, a library and culture centre and a professional school are built as public services, along with the Alzheimer centre and housing for the military in a nearby area. Also Porta di Roma finally has its metro line stop.

People win a square on both sides of the green area: roads are modified and a pedestrian public space is created in via Adolfo Celi, where The Wall begins, and another smaller square will be built next to the library/culture centre.

After the positive experience of integrated social housing, cohousing blocks are built at the edge with Parco delle Sabine.
Scenario steps - own work

step 1 - 2020

step 2 - 2025

step 3 - 2030

step 4 - 2035
Utopia 2040

own work
Nightmare Scenario

2015: implementation of new housing policy and beginning of process of participation.

Developers do not agree to turning vacant stock into social housing. Real Estate market keeps sinking, therefore vacancy continues, leading to forced assignment and temporary expropriation.

The expropriated stock is entrusted to ex-IACP Community Branch management. This means that new social, productive and commercial activities in the ground floors can happen, but no Bonus expansions in the upper floors can take place. As a consequence, many existing residents decide to leave Porta di Roma and there is an increase in low-middle income population. Prices go further down and, as a result of these choices, the neighbourhood loses appeal, but at least it has people.

After 5 years, developers sell the expropriated stock to FIA, in order to realize private social housing. This is the best option they have for the stock, because the loss of appeal of the neighbourhood has decreased their chances to get good selling deals. Ground floors are partially sold to FIA and partially put on the market at lower prices. In this way social acivities can keep going: residents can form coops to rent or buy the spaces and continue with their commercial, productive or cultural activity.

After a few years the real estate market starts to improve again and new housing gets built, even though it has to be sold at much lower prices. Almost no office buildings get built, except for the ones in the former shopping mall’s square, because the Municipality has agreed to move their offices over there.

The Wall does not happen, neither does the large pedestrian square in via Adolfo Celi. Also the central park area is not fully realized: it gets partially filled up with residential buildings.

A catholic church and a Geovah’s Witness church are built, along with the Alzheimer centre, housing for the military in a nearby area and a lot of parking lots, but no professional school, culture centre or cohousing. However, Porta di Roma finally has its metro line stop.

Porta di Roma becomes less attractive: poorer population, no social mix, no new investments. It remains an unfinished sleeping neighbourhood with some small local activities.

**Who wins?**

- **inhabitants**
  - proximity to services and people
  - choice of activities
  - improved public transport
  - improved safety, eyes on the street
  - increased value of apartments
  - better usability of public space
  - opportunities for community life

- **‘limbo’ people**
  - alleviate housing emergency with minimum expense
  - increased power and leverage in public-private negotiation on urban development
  - achieve urban regeneration of a failed centrality project

- **associations**
  - more institutional power
  - increased control over real estate speculation
  - increased value for other properties due to increased activities and urban life
  - opportunities for community life

- **developers**
  - real estate market
  - sure rent, even if lower
  - temporary arrangements
  - chance to finish the development project
  - chance to manage housing stock and services in a fairer way
  - increased control over urban life

- **municipality**
  - alleviate housing emergency with minimum expense
  - increased power and leverage in public-private negotiation on urban development
  - achieve more equality
  - achieve urban regeneration of a failed centrality project

**nightmare**

who wins?
Scenario steps - own work

step 1 - 2020

step 2 - 2025

step 3 - 2030

step 4 - 2035
Nightmare 2040
Compromise Scenario

2015: implementation of new housing policy and beginning of process of participation.

Developers and shopping mall agree to building The Wall, because they see it as an attraction and a venue for events. It will only be a part of it, the one right in front of the mall, connected with a little square, and both The Wall and the little cubes on Porta di Roma's side will be managed by the shopping mall as a place for creative industry and small hipster shops. This will gain more revenues for the mall, and job opportunities for local people. Even though there will be no empowerment, this intervention will still guarantee more commercial activities and a more active life in the square in front of it.

Developers won’t turn vacant stock into social housing, because they hope that building The Wall will increase selling opportunities. They do agree to social housing in buildings under construction though, and they entrust it to ex-IACP Community Branch, as well as some of the vacant ground floor space in via Celi, in order to reactivate the plinths and be able to sell or rent the remaining spots. The citizens manage to achieve the removal of parking lots from via Adolfo Celi in order to have more space for pedestrians and public space.

Community Branch management on buildings under construction entails changes in the buildings, with different types of apartments and the Bonus system for non social housing residents.

Developers’ intuition proves right: after The Wall is completed, all the housing stock is filled with people, therefore investments continue and more housing and offices are built. The “failed square” in the shopping mall gets filled with office buildings: Municipality agrees to move their offices in exchange for the developers building The Wall.

The central area remains only partially open and green, but a church and a professional school are built as public services, along with the Alzheimer centre and housing for the military in a nearby area. Also Porta di Roma finally has its metro line stop.

After the positive experience of integrated social housing, cohousing blocks are built by FIA at the edge with Parco delle Sabine.

As a result of these choices, Porta di Roma become “sectorialized”: some areas are just a dormitory, while some parts are more lively. There is a prevalence of high-middle class. with pockets of well integrated social housing. There is however the risk of gentrification in the future.
step 1 - 2020

step 2 - 2025

step 3 - 2030

step 4 - 2035

Scenario steps - own work
Compromise 2040
Utopia
Nightmare
Compromise
conclusions
People struggling through taxation and non resident students families in waiting list 50,000 new eviction requests 7000 families are squatting rent available income is real estate transactions a bonus system per year since 2009 for housing POLICY NEW HOUSING DWELLINGS AND THE OBJECTIVE IS associations existing residents limbo people corporate property owners Asset management companies Real Estate developers, Territorial Agencies for Public Housing Municipality, Province, Region, State Institutions

In which thousands of people demanding an affordable housing. There is an urgent need for new solutions to the housing emergency.

The lack of housing policies and the designation of market forces have created a paradox in which thousands of vacant dwellings are the only response to the great numbers of people demanding an affordable dwelling. There is an urgent need for new solutions to the housing emergency.

THE OBJECTIVE IS TO MATCH VACANT DWELLINGS AND HOMELESS PEOPLE

NEW HOUSING POLICY

rent over 30% of available income is not affordable.

50,000 families are on the waiting list for public housing
30,000 families are on the waiting list for housing
50,000 non resident students
2000 families are squatting
7000 new eviction requests per year in 2020
2000 families are squatting in 2013

The housing emergency is no longer involving only the poorest social strata, but it affects a growing segment of the population, previously unaffected by the problem. These people live in a "limbo", too rich for public housing but too poor for rented places. They are turned to the alternative solutions, see squatting.

Corporately owned vacant dwellings

I do not like the idea of social housing... I am afraid that people with a lower social status will not like it. I do not like the stigmatization of the people who live here, they like it here because it's empty and there is no social life. People do not interact very much here, they like it here because it's empty and there is no social life. People do not interact very much here, they like it here because it's empty and there is no social life.
Reflection

Theme and case study
The project was carried out within the Design as Politics Graduation Studio. The topic of the studio for this year is “New Utopias on the Ruins of the Welfare State”.

We are living in an age where nation states seem to become weaker and weaker, under the influence of privatisation, localism but also of globalisation and supra-national politics like that of the European Union. Countries seem to be both falling apart in small fragments as well as being dissolved into huge global networks.

Architecture and Urbanism have for a long time been dependent on the nation state. We cannot imagine doing without a strong government and huge public investments for developing housing projects and public buildings, or for designing huge and even utopian visions for new cities and regions. In Italy a functioning Welfare State is a Utopia itself. We know how it feels not to have a strong government and huge public investments: no public housing projects, money wasted on public works that are never completed, no chance to afford utopian visions for cities and regions. As a matter of fact we are facing a great housing emergency, a failure of the state in regulating market dynamics and a widespread corruption. The lack of housing policies and the deregulation of market forces have created a paradox in which thousands of vacant dwellings in anonymous middle class housing developments are the only response to the great numbers of people demanding an affordable dwelling. With these premises, the new Utopia would be to live in a functioning nation state.

That is why with my project I propose a “Utopia of Normality”. The distorted model of urban development and the mismanagement of the public thing make it exceptionally hard to achieve a “normal” urban environment, especially in the peripheries, which is why the standard, plain and functioning neighbourhood becomes a Utopia that is almost impossible to reach. My argument is that it would take only so much effort to make things better, but that it will probably never happen, making it relevant to talk about a “Utopia of Normality”.

With this project I seek to draw attention to what is wrong in Rome’s housing market by proposing a utopian solution to it in the chosen location of Porta di Roma. This case study should serve as a showcase and reference of how tackling housing shortage and revitalizing peripheral areas can go hand in hand, achieving the desired “Utopia of Normality”.

The question that arises from the studio theme, the problem definition and the chosen case study is: how to tackle the housing shortage in Rome
Reflection

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The question that arises from the studio theme, the problem definition and the chosen case study is: how to tackle the housing shortage in Rome
by regenerating the vacant housing development of Porta di Roma through the social capital of the right to housing movements?

Research and design

The research conducted during the beginning of the graduation process contains an analysis of the economic and social context of the city of Rome, in relation to urban development, housing market dynamics and housing shortage. The research also provides insight in the phenomenon of illegal squatting and in the alternative housing realities in the city of Rome. Moreover an extensive research has been carried out on housing policies, with a thorough analysis of the existing situation in Italy and in the province of Rome.

A deeper knowledge on these general aspects led to an informed choice of the location for my case study. After the project location was chosen, a broad analysis on its spatial issues was carried out, along with an investigation of the economic and bureaucratic dynamics that led to the present situation of deadlock.

The aim of the research is to investigate how urban development and the housing issue in Rome are related and if there is a possibility to combine the alleviation of the housing emergency with a more coherent and balanced urban development.

The design task represents the coming together of my multiple lines of research, from housing shortage and market driven developments to public initiative and bottom up organization. The final objective of the project is to design tools and processes to increase the power of the local government, in order to provide more affordable housing and a policy that prioritizes the welfare of the citizens instead of the interests of the developers. The strategy to achieve these objectives is that of triggering a spatial and social regeneration of Porta di Roma, which capitalizes on the enormous potential of community associations.

Methodical line of approach

The studio offered a lot of freedom to the students to fill in their own project and method. Further knowledge in the studio’s theme and the first theoretical research led to picking the location and object of my case study. By doing this I could define the goal of the project as achieving a more equitable provision of affordable housing and an overall social sustainability of the chosen location.

In order to achieve the aim that I had set out at the beginning of the process, my research questions were:

1. What are the possible policy strategies to face the housing shortage?
2. What is the role of public space in a residential district like Porta di Roma, which is born around a shopping mall?
3. What is the role of ground floors, plinths and common spaces in the perception and use of public and private space?
4. How can the right to housing movements be empowered and how can they cooperate with other actors to improve the spatial quality of the housing development?
5. How can urban regeneration help in promoting social integration of different income groups?

In order to answer the main research question and all the other subsequent questions I carried out an extensive literature review, including newspapers, journals and bureaucratic papers. This input mainly related to the social and economic context, therefore I needed to use different methods to gain knowledge on different topics and scales. I used in-depth interviews with different stakeholders to deepen my knowledge on the aspects of stakeholder analysis and interaction, trying to grasp the needs and perspectives of the different actors. In order to understand the spatial issues related to my project location I used desk analysis of the site combined with fieldwork and short questionnaires to the inhabitants.

Being almost at the end I feel that my approach to the project mostly proved successful, especially in the research an analysis part. However, I think my theoretical background on regeneration strategies and public space could have been
stronger, and maybe could have led to more consistent design solutions.

**Social context and relevance**

Investigating the issue of urban development and how this influences that provision of affordable housing is relevant on two sides. On one hand it is necessary to reflect on the social implications of the urban planning of a city like Rome: the debate on the right to decent housing for all has never been more passionate and it is the duty of our discipline to understand what can be done from a spatial point of view to improve the conditions of the urban dwellers. A Welfare State that is retreating and a long lasting economic crisis, followed by austerity measures, force municipalities to a struggle in provision of welfare services to their citizens. In this context it becomes relevant to explore new possible ways of supplying the deprived households and neighbourhoods with their basic rights, using the different tools that are in our power: policy making, urban planning and urban design.

From a scientific point of view, this research is relevant because it wants to investigate the relationship between the profit driven model of development of the city of Rome and its ability to provide affordable housing. The relevance of the spatial structure of the city of Rome in the managing and provision of services, including affordable and socially sustainable housing is enormous: the urban development as carried out since after WWII has created a “pulverized” urban fabric, that dissolves into low density settlements, incoherently dispersed in the roman agricultural land. This research seeks to challenge the assumption on which the last 20/30 years of urban planning in Rome have been based: that the market alone is able to regulate the supply and demand of housing in a socially and economically sustainable way.
Conclusions

This graduation project forced me to engage myself in a learning process that was for the most part different than anything I had previously done. Working on your own fascination is a privilege and I am grateful for being allowed to research and design on this particular topic. At the same time working by yourself is a great challenge. You learn a lot about your interests, your talents and most of all your limits. The way graduation is structured at Urbanism here at TUDelft makes you actively reflect on what is your methodology, whose shoulders you are building upon, what are your objectives and how exactly you want to achieve them: you learn how to conduct research on your own. This task proved quite hard, but it is the most interesting part of the whole process.

A great part of the graduation process for me was represented by fieldwork. On one hand I used it as an analytical tool to get knowledge about the specific location of Porta di Roma, through site visits and interviews. On the other hand I used it as a design tool to get input for my project by understanding needs and desires of the different stakeholders through in depth interviews and questionnaires (the outputs can be found in Appendix A). In the last trip I made to Rome, I also used fieldwork as testing ground for my project. I looked for feedback on my proposal from the different actors and discussed options for design and policy making.

The feedback I received was very useful to understand how the different stakeholders would react to a similar project in reality, even though I am aware that my samples are not always relevant. For instance, while an in depth interview with the developers’ architects can be descriptive of the way they would approach such a project, ten small interviews with local residents cannot be considered representative of the way the Porta di Roma community might react to my proposal. Similarly, in depth talks with a few “limbo” families (threatened with eviction, coming from public housing, struggling with market rents and mortgages) might not be quantitatively relevant, but gave me an insight in what the problems and the needs of these families might be. As from the reactions of civil servants and members of community organizations and right to housing movements, I am still not sure whether they can be considered descriptive of the whole organization and therefore relevant for my project, or if they are just personal opinions and should be considered as such.

In April 2015, when I felt I had a solid proposal for social housing and for Porta di Roma, I engaged in a very telling conversation with two architects working for the developers of Porta di Roma, Lamaro Appalti and Parsitalia. I had the feeling that they had very little interest in looking at how to change the mechanisms of urban development in Rome because, as inefficient and complicated
had a different outcome and would also have rather than an informal conversation, would have idea. Probably a more structured presentation, diagrams to convince them of the goodness of my at that stage I did not have appealing visuals or decided not to present the whole project, since has to be said that after a while I gave up and Porta di Roma is a successful development. It they put a lot of effort into convincing me that development. The idea of tackling vacancy was and unaware of the real dynamics of money and almost unheard with them, discarded as too naïve for all these reasons my policy proposal went almost unheard with them, discarded as too naïve and unaware of the real dynamics of money and development. The idea of tackling vacancy was perceived as detrimental for them and incentives were not really taken into consideration. They did not seem willing to challenge this assumption and fail to understand the potential of innovative ways of providing social housing, for example by tackling vacancy. The two architects I talked to were also reluctant to admit that the vacancy rate in Porta di Roma is too high, and kept saying that it is normal and not surprising in times of crisis. To them, and to the developers they work for, Porta di Roma is a successful real estate operation and they do not seem to care about the urban quality of the place, though they admitted it did not exactly turn out as planned.

For all these reasons my policy proposal went almost unheard with them, discarded as too naïve and unaware of the real dynamics of money and development. The idea of tackling vacancy was perceived as detrimental for them and incentives were not really taken into consideration. They did not seem willing to really listen to what I had to say, a naïve student that has a lot to learn, while they put a lot of effort into convincing me that Porta di Roma is a successful development. It has to be said that after a while I gave up and decided not to present the whole project, since I had the feeling it would have been useless and at that stage I did not have appealing visuals or diagrams to convince them of the goodness of my idea. Probably a more structured presentation, rather than an informal conversation, would have had a different outcome and would also have changed their approach towards me.

From the interview it was clear that they have profound distrust in the public sector, from local authorities to national government, and they do not believe any changes could work. Even if new tools are presented developers, constructors and real estate operators do not trust their implementation. For instance, the incentives of the Piano Casa are not considered sufficient, and keeping property vacant rather than turning it into social housing is still deemed more convenient. It is also seen as the safer option: public authorities might change their mind tomorrow and make them lose millions in the operation. Roman private developers perceive public administration and bureaucracy as the reason why urban development in Rome is so slow and out of date. They blame local governments for inefficiency and lack of flexibility.

In this context, developers still look at social housing as something they are required to do in exchange for more benefits; a necessary task to perform in order to unburden themselves from further responsibility. They still rely on the premise that in order to build social housing Municipalities should provide them with low to no cost land. They are not willing to challenge this assumption and fail to understand the potential of innovative ways of providing social housing, for example by tackling vacancy. The two architects I talked to were also reluctant to admit that the vacancy rate in Porta di Roma is too high, and kept saying that it is normal and not surprising in times of crisis. To them, and to the developers they work for, Porta di Roma is a successful real estate operation and they do not seem to care about the urban quality of the place, though they admitted it did not exactly turn out as planned.

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From what I could learn through casual interviews to people in the neighbourhood and from online forums and blogs, Porta di Roma current residents are struggling between two very different feelings. On one hand they are happy with their choice of living in a middle class and very green neighbourhood, outside the big mess of the city, but on the other hand they feel cheated because the neighbourhood is not finished, lacks services and public space and has safety issues, which brings their property value down and makes their life just a bit harder than what they expected while buying their new house.

They are certainly unhappy with the high vacancy and the unfinished buildings, and would like “someone” to do “something”, but at the same time they strongly reject the idea of social housing. In Italy, and especially in Rome, public and social housing are still associated with social issues, criminality and a general idea of “trouble”. Poverty and diversity are scary for Porta di Roma residents: they chose the middle class dream and are afraid it would be spoiled.

Therefore my proposal felt strange and uncomfortable to them. Not only they refused the idea of welcoming different income and background groups in their neighbourhood, but they were also puzzled at the idea of participation. To participate means to learn and to engage, while Porta di Roma itself represents the desire to disengage from urbanity and to live a quiet suburban life with as little disturbance to one’s tranquility as possible. They want something to be done to fix the issues in their neighbourhood but they are reluctant to get engaged.Again I believe that if I fully presented my project to a group of residents, with drawings and diagrams to truly show them ideas and possibilities, instead of just talking to single individuals in the street with no visual support, the reactions would have been different.

The civil servants I talked to were very positive about my approach towards vacancy and in general about my housing policy proposal. They thought it fell in the range of feasible interventions to tackle the housing shortage in a smart way. Comments were positive and it felt like there is political will to address the problem from a policy making point of view. However, it was also clear from their words that will is not the only (and not the most important) factor in decision making. Larger interests and political dynamics in Italy and in Rome often override even urgent needs or feasible proposals for change.
This was the only case in which I could present my proposal in a more or less structured way, and the feedback was sensibly different than with the other stakeholders. Reactions were enthusiastic, though mitigated by the awareness that we were talking hypothetically and with not much solid ground for decision making. If the proposal did not come from a university student, it might have found many more objections in its way, especially regarding the spatial consequences on the case study. However, the good feedback for my research shows the willingness of local government to address the issue in a more inclusive and integrated way.

I talked to many right to housing movements and associations, finding it quite difficult to win their trust and be listened to. The ones I managed to approach were very different in terms of dimension, local presence, power and political affiliation: Blocchi Precari Metropolitani, Action and Casa Pound. Regardless of the differences among them, I was always confronted with suspicion, mistrust and a sense of moral superiority. It was unclear to them why I was interested in what they are doing and what my “real purpose” was. Apparently research was not contemplated as a valid reason and I had to be hiding some darker intention.

Casa Pound represents an exception in the local panorama of right to housing movements since it is a right wing association (they call themselves a nazi-fascist organization) with very strong political affiliations and protection, which does not cooperate with any of the other movements. Their cultural and political background, as well as their requests and objectives, put them at the opposite side of what I am referring to as a model of social cooperation. They do not believe in integration – they only help Italian families – and they only squat for their own dream, hence the Bonus System and the urgency of their request to build more public housing for struggling Italian households.

On the other side of the spectrum there are BPM and Action, left wing associations with less political affiliation (Action is more politically active than BPM) that are trying to promote an alternative to the current system of public housing, private rents, unsustainable urban development and social segregation by giving new life to vacant plots and buildings. They run many illegal occupations of both public and private abandoned property and try to make their squatted buildings a model of inclusion and socio cultural integration by setting up housing and all sorts of other activities in there. They achieve results for people in housing emergency by operating outside the legality framework and against “the system”. In this definition they include local governments, public agencies, developers, banks and any structured form of authority. They identify “the system” as corrupt and inherently unfair, therefore any public initiative to address the issues they are dealing with is perceived with suspicion and mistrust.

When confronted with my proposal they appreciated it in its utopian potential and agreed with both its premises and consequences, but were very sceptical about the process. They did not want to get involved with “the system” as an ideological standpoint. They felt that cooperating with public agencies and maybe even with developers would get them entangled in the same kind of mechanisms they want to fight. They could not look beyond their ideological position and failed to see the potential of cooperation between all the stakeholders. As in the previous encounters with the other groups, I did not manage to present my whole story; therefore my message was fragmented and probably misrepresented, generating contrasting reactions.

Given the feedback I received from the stakeholders, it looks like my project would make everybody equally unhappy, proving itself truly utopian. However, I believe it is more feasible than these reactions show, because in all these meetings I could only throw a couple of ideas at my audience, without fully explaining the complete proposal. I strongly feel that this lack of proper communication was the main reason for this hesitant feedback. I believe that presenting the project in its whole utopian power would have generated different reactions. Moreover, I felt that my ideas were regarded as very interesting but still in need for a proper framework that would give them more credibility. Perhaps including my proposal in an existing network of people and organizations operating in the same field will give it the visibility and realism it still lacks.

This testing fieldwork gave me the chance to adjust my project according to the new findings and make it stronger. Developers need more incentives, but also the perspective of punishment in the form of profit loss, fines or higher taxation, hence my carrot and stick proposal. Organizations fear to be “corrupted” by the system, hence the high degree of freedom of my “Community Branch”. Municipality seems to be dependent on economic power in their decision making, hence the effort to take the developers on board. Porta di Roma residents fear “the other” and the loss of their dream, hence the Bonus System and the specific spaces for interaction. Each stakeholder is sensitive to a specific issue, and with my project
I tried to touch upon all these different issues to seduce the actors into working together. Roman civil society might not be ready for a participatory Utopia of Normality yet, but the objective of this project is that of defeating diffidence and scepticism.

In conclusion, the policy part of my project is rather realistic and feasible, while it seems that the spatial consequences of this policy implementation are perceived as Utopian. Through this process I learned that the value of this project lies in the potential it can stimulate. Possibilities, however fragmented and dispersed, are there already and the strength of my project is to show how to collect these fragments and make them work together to achieve the Utopia of Normality.
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INTRO:
C’è emergenza abitativa, il mercato immobiliare è drogato da troppi nuovi edifici che rimangono invendute per mancanza di domanda. Domanda e offerta non si incontrano più. Porzioni crescenti di popolazione non possono più permettersi di accedere al mercato della casa, né in affitto né in vendita. Porta di Roma è un ottimo esempio di come le grandi ambizioni immobiliari si siano scontrate con la crisi e abbiano reso ancora più evidenti le storture del sistema, in cui c’è gente senza casa e case senza gente. Nel mio lavoro cerco di individuare e modificare le relazioni tra i due fenomeni.

- Qual è il ruolo dell’architetto in una società come la Lamaro Appalti o Parsitalia? Qual è il vostro lavoro, cos’è che fate esattamente?
  
  R.C. Ci occupiamo di tutto, spesso anche del masterplan. Il mio lavoro va dalle autorizzazioni amministrative al progetto dell’arredo di interni, fino al dettaglio della vite del mobile.
  
  L.B. Io non lavoro dentro Parsitalia, ma collabo con loro come architetto “free lance” diciamo. Quindi di volta in volta ho compiti diversi, a seconda del progetto.

- Qual è il ruolo degli architetti del developer in un progetto come quello di Porta di Roma? Il masterplan è stato redatto dallo studio Valle, quale ruolo ha avuto Lamaro Appalti nella definizione del progetto?
  
  R.C. Gino Valle ha lavorato a stretto contatto con noi (architetti di Lamaro Appalti), che poi hanno fatto la progettazione architettonica sulla base del masterplan urbano di Valle. Lamaro Appalti definisce le priorità, le esigenze e mette limiti e vincoli al progettista, lavorando fianco a fianco per trovare la soluzione migliore. Io sono oltre 15 anni che lavoro su Porta di Roma, l’ho visto nascere.
  
  L.B. Io lavoro per Parsitalia sul progetto di Porta di Roma da anni, e curo la parte più urbana e amministrativa.

- Personalmente, in quanto architetti, com’è lavorare per un developer, tradizionalmente inteso come il “nemico” dell’architettura e della progettazione urbana?
  
  R.C. In realtà è molto appagante. Io lavoro in Lamaro Appalti da 25 anni e mi rendo conto che la filiera dell’edilizia in Italia è distorta, c’è un’opinione sbagliata dei costruttori e la burocrazia rallenta molte ipotesi di cambiamento. Toti e Panasi poi sono costruttori illuminati, sono giovani e dinamici, quindi producono edilizia di qualità, con grandi progetti che, se la filiera fosse più sana, potrebbero significare un grosso sviluppo.

- Parlando del progetto di Porta di Roma nello specifico, qual è il ruolo di Lamaro Appalti, di Parsitalia e di Caltagirone. Come è andata la storia di Porta di Roma dal punto di vista dei costruttori?
  
  R.C. Semplicemente ha seguito il mercato. Li ci doveva essere un polo logistico secondo i piani fino agli anni 90. Poi il gruppo Toti ha acquistato l’area e, insieme a Parsitalia ha deciso di svilupparla, concordando col Comune una nuova destinazione per l’area, quella di centralità, quindi un polo residenziale, commerciale e di servizi. Il progetto è iniziato nei tardi anni 90, con il masterplan di Gino Valle, e con una seria campagna di scavi archeologici. Poi è stato finalmente costruito il centro commerciale nel 2006, il vero motore di tutto l’intervento, e poi si sono iniziati a costruire i compatti residenziali.
quel punto il mercato ha fatto il suo corso. Caltagirone ha fatto un’offerta per comprare i terreni edificabili da noi urbanizzati e per noi era più conveniente venderli che costruirci sopra. E così è stato, è il mercato. Anche perché con un progetto urbano così forte come quello di Valle, l’importante non è la qualità architettonica del singolo edificio quanto la qualità urbana del complesso.

- Di quanta e quale porzione del progetto Lamaro e Parsitalia sono ancora responsabili? I lavori sono stati consegnati? (il presidente del III Municipio lamenta di no) E il Parco? È ancora vostra responsabilità?

  R.C. I lavori non sono ancora terminati, quindi il quartiere non è stato ancora consegnato. Ha ragione il presidente del municipio, la manutenzione spetta ancora a noi, che infatti per stare appresso a queste cose ci andiamo a perdere. Però c’è da dire che è pieno di vandalì. La gente distrugge tutto, non c’è rispetto. Abbiamo dovuto rifare gli arredi del parco mille volte perché erano stati vandalizzati. Tra l’altro il Parco delle Sabine sarebbe anche pronto, ma il Comune non ha i soldi per prenderlo in carico. Come molte altre zone di verde in giro per la città.

- Cosa pensate di Porta di Roma come operazione di Real Estate? È un progetto riuscito, un successo, dal punto di vista di Lamaro Appalti e Parsitalia?


- Porta di Roma doveva essere una Centralità di livello urbano, Pensate che possa essere considerato un successo da questo punto di vista? O concordate che Porta di Roma come centralità sia un fallimento? (Il modo in cui PdR è descritta sui vostri siti web illustra bene il concetto: testo dal sito – Personalmente non mi sembra sia questo il caso, quali fattori hanno fatto deviare dal progetto originale?). È mai stato fatto un vero tentativo per riuscire nel difficile obiettivo di costituire un quartiere che si possa definire centralità?

  R.C. Secondo me non c’è mai stata una vera vocazione di Porta di Roma ad essere una centralità. Semplicemente non è il luogo adatto, non sarebbe mai potuta diventare una centralità, è troppo isolata, anche se ben collegata. È il Piano Regolatore che ha sbagliato a prevedere. Poi non c’è che si può decidere a priori che tipo di posto è, il luogo ha delle sue esigenze. Porta di Roma ha proprio una vocazione residenziale, è il luogo stesso che chiama la residenza. Perché un’azienda vorrebbe avere gli uffici lì? Invece avere una bella casa nel verde e nella tranquillità ha molto più senso.

  L.B. Tra l’altro il Comune non ha mai nemmeno decentratato i suoi uffici. Se volevano davvero che diventasse una centralità potevano almeno metterci dell’impegno. Non dico decentrare gli uffici della Camera o i Ministeri, ma almeno quelli comunali, per far vedere che Porta di Roma doveva diventare un nuovo polo direzionale. Non è che le aziende si spostano perché lo dice il PRG, bisogna incentivare. Poi questo in realtà è il problema di
tutte le centralità che sono state pianificate: nessuna si è davvero realizzata, spesso per colpa della burocrazia.

- C’è la possibilità di “recuperare” la centralità secondo voi? Verranno mai costruiti gli uffici e i servizi o un “buon quartiere residenziale” è tutto ciò che si può sperare per Porta di Roma?

  **R.C.** No, come ho detto Porta di Roma è naturalmente un insediamento residenziale, è proprio la sua vocazione. Non c’è domanda per nient’altro, che poi è il motivo per cui sono state fatte molte modifiche alle destinazioni d’uso, per adattare il progetto alle esigenze del luogo. Non avrebbe senso cercare forzatamente di recuperare la centralità, i piani terra sono vuoti perché così vuole il mercato, non per colpa del centro commerciale. Gli uffici non sono costruiti perché non c’è domanda. È la società attuale che ci chiede una città di quartieri residenziali e centri commerciali. Se il mercato promuove la grande distribuzione e punisce la vendita al dettaglio noi possiamo solo adattarci.

- Quindi per lei una città fatta di quartieri dormitorio senza servizi e di grandi poli commerciali isolati va bene? È bella? È sana?

  **R.C.** È la società che va in questo senso. Il piccolo commercio, la vendita al dettaglio, non va più. La gente compra su internet o al centro commerciale, per questo i piccoli commercianti stanno scomparendo. Se il mercato promuove la grande distribuzione e punisce la vendita al dettaglio noi possiamo solo adattarci. Ci adeguiamo al trend, per questo Porta di Roma è un quartiere prettamente residenziale che ha nel centro commerciale il suo motore e anche la sua ragion d’essere. Ormai la gente va a fare la spesa grossa in macchina al centro commerciale il sabato pomeriggio per tutta la settimana. È più conveniente, perché dare più soldi al commercio al dettaglio quando la grande distribuzione è così conveniente e facilmente raggiungibile?

  **L.B.** L’idea che l’urbanistica eduichi la società o la possa indirizzare e formare è un’utopia, una cosa da università. Nel mondo reale l’urbanistica e l’edilizia seguono la società. E se la società va in questo senso non possiamo fare altro che adattarci. Tra l’altro la rigidità del sistema non è che aiuti ad assecondare o neanche a guidare, se proprio si volesse, la trasformazione urbana e sociale.

- I cambi di destinazione d’uso da terziario a residenziale che si sono succeduti negli anni fanno pensare che il residenziale sia molto più redditizio. È ancora così? Anche se rimane poi in gran parte invenduto?

  **R.C.** Sì, rimane comunque più conveniente, perché almeno si costruisce. Gli uffici a Porta di Roma non hanno proprio domanda. Poi in realtà non è che non siano rimasti per niente nel progetto, sono solo diminuiti a favore del residenziale che è molto più adatto, oltre che più remunerativo. Anche se in realtà è difficilissimo modificare un progetto, anche se ti rendi conto che magari non è adatto, perché il sistema e la burocrazia sono lentissimi, poco flessibili e ci si rimane impelagati per anni. La tempistica è quella di anni o decenni per avere approvazioni o varianti, quindi il sistema davvero è vecchio e non adatto.

- Ci sono dati “ufficiali” sull’invenduto a Porta di Roma? Dalle mie indagini personali, fatte attraverso interviste off the record con agenti vendita incrociate con i dati locali del mercato immobiliare, emergono dei picchi molto alti di vacancy, tra invenduto originale del costruttore e case in vendita o in affitto da privati. Quali sono le percentuali che voi sappiate?

  **L.B.** Le percentuali di invenduto nostro sono relativamente basse. Intorno al 10/15% è fisiologico, assolutamente non preoccupante. Poi ovviamente noi non possiamo sapere quale sia la quota di “inabitato”. Nel senso che la gente ha comprato per investimento,
perché non approfittarne? Cosa vi ferma?

Il problema è che i consumatori del mercato dell’edilizia sono i più ignoranti, paragonati ad altri mercati, tipo quello dell’auto o dei prodotti cosmetici. Non hanno idea di cosa stanno comprando, si basano principalmente sul prezzo, e possono essere facilmente convinti a fare un investimento più conveniente sul breve termine a scapito di uno più sostenibile nel lungo periodo. E parlo di qualità edilizia, ma anche ambientale o di gestione. Poi il mercato è lento e c’è pure la crisi, se poi ci aggiungiamo la lentezza della burocrazia è un disastro. La filiera dell’edilizia romana è distorta e poco flessibile.

- A dispetto del masterplan dello Studio Valle, la qualità dello spazio pubblico risulta piuttosto scarsa. Non ci sono piazze o spazi pubblici per sedersi. Perché?
  
  **R.C.** La piazza in realtà c’è ed è nel centro commerciale. Doveva essere il cuore pulsante del quartiere, anche se in realtà è un po’ fallita. Vorremmo ripensarla ma il Comune è lento ad autorizzare le varianti. Vorremmo adattare il progetto, compreso lo spazio pubblico, mano a mano che comprendiamo i problemi, i vantaggi e le dinamiche sociali, ma la tempistica della burocrazia è troppo lunga e ci limita.

  **L.B.** Effettivamente Porta di Roma non ha spazi pubblici, se si fa eccezione per il parco, che però è su tutta un’altra scala. Lo spazio esterno a più livelli del centro commerciale non può essere considerato propriamente una piazza, perché è comunque dentro un’area privata, quindi non può essere davvero uno spazio pubblico. D’altronde però nella normativa italiana e romana la piazza non è definita, nonostante sia una tradizione molto presente nella storia urbana italiana. Cos’è? Standard? Viabilità? Verde? Non c’è una categoria, quindi progettando secondo i regolamenti e gli standard le piazze semplicemente non escono fuori, perché l’ordinamento non le prevede.

- Sì, ma da Gino Valle ci si aspetterebbe qualcosa di più, di migliore, che progettare solo secondo il regolamento urbanistico o gli standard, o no?
  
  **L.B.** Effettivamente si (ride). È un punto debole del progetto, che vorremmo cambiare, magari spostando delle volumetrie da un lato all’altro per creare una piazza qui (lotto di fronte al centro commerciale, ndr), ma come già detto è un processo lungo e difficile.

- All’apparenza sembrerebbe che sia più conveniente mantenere invenduti o vuoti degli appartamenti già costruiti, piuttosto che venderli ad un prezzo sensibilmente più basso o magari dedicarli ad altra funzione, per esempio ad affitto sociale. Perché nulla di tutto ciò succede? Perché non costruire/trasformare/gestire social housing (con qualche società derivata o simili) sul modello delle housing corporations europee, al fine di rilasciare la pressione dell’emergenza abitativa? Il Piano Casa (sia Berlusconi che Renzi) aiuta in questo senso, perché non approfittarne? Cosa vi ferma?
  
  **L.B.** Come prima cosa, per il progetto di Porta di Roma abbiamo deciso di non aderire proprio al Piano Casa, perché preferiamo comunque portare avanti una politica di collaborazione col Comune al fine di ottenere un progetto migliore, piuttosto che “scavalcarlo” ricorrendo al Piano Casa (regionale, ndr).

  **R.C.** A fare edilizia sociale ci si va a perdere, perché non ci sono terreni a costo zero. Il Comune o la Regione dovrebbero mettere a disposizione terreni demaniali a costo zero o
quasi, così noi costruiremmo social housing senza problemi. Per esempio in altre regioni già collaboriamo con Cassa Depositi e Prestiti per progetti di questo tipo.

**L.B.** Se non c’è terreno a costo zero i costi di acquisizione rendono un progetto di social housing non sostenibile. L’acquisizione del terreno rappresenta la gran parte dei costi, quindi con i ritorni di un progetto simile ci si perderebbe. Che è un peccato... e anche qui la colpa è del settore pubblico e della burocrazia.

- Qual è la vostra opinione sulla partecipazione della cittadinanza ai processi di pianificazione e trasformazione urbana?

**R.C.** La partecipazione è una cosa per cui la società italiana non è ancora pronta, e forse non lo sarà mai. Il pubblico è ignorante, non sa di cosa parla e chi viene agli incontri di partecipazione lo fa solo per sfogarsi di quello che non va. Quindi sostanzialmente ci prendiamo gli insulti e basta, perché la gente viene coinvolta quando ormai il progetto è già definito e possono solo lamentarsi di mille cose che ovviamente non gli vanno bene.

**L.B.** Sì, concordo che il processo di partecipazione avviene troppo tardi, quando già il progetto è autorizzato e cambiarlo è quasi impossibile. La comunicazione, e anche l’informazione, andrebbe fatta prima di mettere mano al progetto, per capire esigenze e desideri e poterli integrare efficacemente nel progetto.
INTERVIEWS WITH PORTA DI ROMA RESIDENTS

Date and time of the interview:
Friday, April 3rd (Good Friday).

Context:
Interviews carried out in Porta di Roma, outdoors, standing in the street (R.2. and R.3., interviewed together) and in a café (R.1.) between 11.00 and 15.00, very sunny and warm day.

Profiles:


R.3. Woman, in her late thirties, married couple with one child (pre school age). Jobless at the moment. Husband can provide for the family. Lives in Caltagirone property, in via Adolfo Celi.

- Le piace vivere a Porta di Roma? Perché? Quali pensa che siano le qualità e i problemi del quartiere?

  **R.1.** Si mi piace, perché è verde e ampio, che è una rarità a Roma. Non è incasinato, c’è tanto spazio, anche per parcheggiare, le case non sono tutte vicine. E poi c’è il Parco delle Sabine, casa nostra ci affaccia proprio, è molto bello. Uno dei problemi più grandi è quello della sicurezza. Ci sono moltissimi furti di auto e furti negli appartamenti, soprattutto negli edifici più isolati. Anche un sacco di vandalismo e poi vicino al centro commerciale ci sono i parcheggiatori abusivi e i venditori ambulanti, che non contribuiscono certo a dare una sensazione di sicurezza.

  **R.2.** Si mi piace. È verde, ampio, pieno di parcheggio, a parte nel finesettimana che la gente che va al centro commerciale parcheggia ovunque ed è un disastro. Si sta bene ed è tranquillo, però un problema vero è quello della sicurezza. Rubano un sacco di macchine, oppure te le lasciano sui blocchetti, senza ruote. E poi li al centro commerciale ci sono gli abusivi e pure i parcheggiatori, e nel finesettimana i parcheggiatori arrivano fino qui e davvero non i piace. Diventa il far west, con un sacco di vandalì, specialmente su via Carmelo Bene è pieno di scritte e di spazzatura.

  **R.3.** Si mi piace. È molto verde, però forse è un po’ troppo tranquillo. Ma le case sono belle e si sta bene. Si l’unico problema è la sicurezza, non solo rubano un sacco di auto, ma rubano tanto anche negli appartamenti. Sono già un paio di persone che sento nella mia palazzina che hanno subito furti. Infatti vorremmo installare un sistema di sicurezza.

- Come mai ha scelto di venire a vivere qui?

  **R.1.** Decisamente non la scelta più conveniente, ma mia suocera vive nella zona, quindi ci siamo avvicinati a lei. C’erano altre opzioni, ma abbiamo scelto Porta di Roma appunto perché è verde e poco denso.

  **R.2.** Mia madre abita a Talenti, quindi volevamo una cosa vicina ma più tranquilla, Porta di Roma era in costruzione e all’epoca ci hanno dato il mutuo e abbiamo comprato che non era ancora neanche finito il palazzo.

  **R.3.** Io non ho proprio scelto. Il mio compagno viveva qui e quando ci siamo sposati mi sono trasferita.
- È in affitto o ha una casa di proprietà?
  **R.1.** Abbiamo una casa di proprietà, nell’edificio curvo su via Carmelo Bene. Abbiamo acquistato 3 anni fa e siamo entrambi nell’appartamento 2 anni fa.
  **R.2.** Siamo in proprietà. Siamo stati tra i primi a comprare, il quartiere era proprio agli inizi. Era il 2007 quando abbiamo comprato e il 2008 quando siamo entrambi.
  **R.3.** Anche noi siamo in proprietà, che è il motivo per cui mi sono trasferita io e non lui, anche se io stavo più in centro prima.

- Lo considera un buon investimento, anche se il quartiere non è finito?
  **R.1.** Sì, direi di sì. È un palazzo molto bello. La casa è piccola, un bilocale, ma la qualità è alta, e infatti non costa poco!
  **R.2.** Beh, abbastanza, anche se la casa è proprio piccina, pure se è uno dei tagli più grandi. Sono 81mq, ma la stanza dei bimbi è una sola. Quindi se ne viene un altro ci tocherà cercare qualcosa di più grande.
  **R.3.** Beh, in generale sì, però per esempio quando abbiamo comprato non ci avevano detto che ci sarebbe stata una torre a bloccarci la vista. Quindi siamo un po’ delusi da questo fatto, anche se poi la torre era già nel progetto ed è mio marito che si è fatto infinocchiare.

- Vorrebbe vendere il suo appartamento?
  **R.1.** In generale no, mi piace. Però al momento siamo solo io e mio marito e se la famiglia dovesse allargarsi la casa sarebbe troppo piccola e dovremmo spostarci. Però vorrei rimanere a Porta di Roma, possibilmente nello stesso palazzo. Sappiamo che ci sono ancora appartamenti in vendita e davvero il palazzo ci piace molto e non vorremmo lasciarlo, specialmente la vista sul parco.
  **R.2.** No no, ancora siamo pagando il mutuo, che vendere!! Infatti non lo so come faremo se arriva un altro pupo!
  **R.3.** No, per il momento stiamo bene così, poi il mercato è stagnante, non conviene vendere adesso.

- Quanto spendete per affitto/mutuo? È sostenibile?
  **R.1.** Beh, non poco. Tra mutuo e spese condominiali se ne vanno circa 1000 euro al mese. Lavoriamo entrambi, e per il momento non ci sono bimbi, quindi ce lo possiamo permettere.

- Prevede di vivere qui a lungo?
  **R.1.** Sì, soprattutto se riusciamo a spostarci in un appartamento più grande nello stesso palazzo quando avremo figli.
  **R.2.** Dipende dai bambini, dal futuro. Però in generale sì, mi piace stare qui.
  **R.3.** Direi di sì, la casa è di proprietà, quindi è un progetto di vita.

- Cosa pensa dell’accessibilità del quartiere? (automobile, mezzi pubblici)
  **R.1.** Io mi sposto in macchina o in scooter e per quello è perfetto, visto che il raccordo è a un passo e che comunque la viabilità è abbastanza buona. Poi non c’è tanto traffico locale e si trova sempre parcheggio... anche se in realtà noi abbiamo il box privato. Per i mezzi pubblici non saprei, li prendo raramente da qui, al massimo vado in macchina fino alla metropolitana. Però so che ci sono un paio di autobus, uno va addirittura fino in centro. E poi dovrebbero arrivare la metropolitana, no? Magari io sarò morta quando arriverà, però...
R.2. Con la macchina è fantastico, c'è il raccordo a un minuto, poi certo rimani imbottigliato, ma di solito in mezzora, quaranta minuti sono al lavoro. Anche se ora sono in maternità. I mezzi pubblici non lo so, non li prendo quasi mai. Però non credo ci sia molta differenza col resto di Roma, come non ci stanno qui non ci stanno nemmeno altrove, quindi è uguale.

R.3. Io non lavoro, quindi mi muovo raramente da qui e quando lo faccio lo faccio in macchina, e col raccordo è un attimo. Mio marito per esempio invece prende l'autobus tutti i giorni. Lavora in centro e c'è l'80 express che lo porta direttamente a Piazza Venezia.

- Cosa pensa del Parco delle Sabine? (accessibilità, usabilità, manutenzione)
  R.1. È molto bello, adoro avere l'affaccio sul parco. Purtroppo lo usiamo meno di quanto vorremmo, per problemi di tempo. Certo a volte, specialmente nei periodi di bel tempo, siccome c'è tanta gente che ci va e la manutenzione scarseggia, è un po’ sporco.
  R.3. Il parco è la cosa più bella del quartiere, mi piace molto l’idea di avere tutto questo verde intorno. Però poi in realtà non ci andiamo quasi mai. Paradossalmente siccome non c'è nulla tra casa nostra e il parco ci sembra quasi troppo lontano.

- Cosa pensa dello spazio pubblico del quartiere?
  R.1. In realtà non saprei. Viviamo in un edificio un po’ isolato, non vado mai nella parte di quartiere più vicina al centro commerciale, non ne ho motivo, quindi non saprei dire nulla sullo spazio pubblico. Per il nostro edificio, che è davvero staccato da tutti gli altri, lo spazio pubblico è o il parco o la strada.
  R.2. Non c’è!! Non ci sono panchine, cestini, pochissimi lampioni e manco funzionano. Se non vai al centro commerciale oppure dentro al Parco delle Sabine non puoi manco sederti!!! Non ci stanno nemmeno le pensiline per gli autobus! Per noi che abbiamo i bimbi piccoli e li vogliamo portare un po’ in giro per non stare sempre chiuse dentro casa è un inferno!
  R.3. Concordo pienamente! Dove ci sediamo a chiacchierare mentre i pupi giocano? Per terra?!?!

- Come considera l’offerta di servizi nel quartiere? (servizi pubblici, attività commerciali al dettaglio, svago, posti di lavoro)
  R.1. Non me ne interesso molto a dire la verità, come ho detto siamo piuttosto isolati. Di solito prendo comunque la macchina per andare a fare la spesa, non necessariamente al centro commerciale, ma anche dall’altro lato, verso Fidene, per andare al Pam o al Castoro. Poi con la macchina si va dappertutto in un attimo, se vuoi uno svago serale o qualcosa di questo tipo. Se cerchi lo shopping c’è il centro commerciale. Certo se avessi dei bambini magari mi farebbero comodo dei negozi di generi alimentari più a portata di mano, o qualcosa da far fare ai miei figli raggiungibile a piedi. Effettivamente non ci sono molte attività. Ho scelto questo posto per la sua tranquillità, ma effettivamente forse è troppa, qualche opzione in più non guasterebbe. Credo che se ci fossero più attività le userei, piuttosto che andare altrove come faccio ora.
R.2. Posti di lavoro praticamente zero, tranne che nel centro commerciale. In realtà tutte le cose che hai detto sono praticamente zero qui. Quando ci siamo trasferiti pensavo che in pochi anni sarebbe stato un quartiere vivo, ma ogni giorno di più mi rendo conto che mi sbagliavo... non ci sono negozi tranne che nel centro commerciale, per fare la spesa devo per forza prendere la macchina, non ho nessun posto dove portare i bambini a fare qualcosa. Ma nemmeno se volessi fargli fare un corso di inglese per dire!

R.3. A parte la scarsità di negozi, svaghi e posti di lavoro c'è pure un basso livello di servizi pubblici. Per dirti le scuole... io non manderò mica i miei figli a scuola qui! Le strutture sono carenti pure se sono nuove e il personale è solo precario. Nessuna delle due scuole (materna ed elementare, NdR) ha una buona reputazione. Li mando a Talenti o a Montesacro, tanto ce li porto in macchina.

- Qual è la sua opinione sul centro commerciale? Ci va spesso? Per quale motivo? Le piace?
  
  R.1. Lo uso parecchio, mi piace. E di solito ci vado in macchina, anche se è vicino, perché è comunque più comodo.
  
  R.2. Ci vado a fare la spesa e poi nel weekend se fa tanto caldo o tanto freddo andiamo lì coi bambini. Ci stanno i giochi, la sera il cinema o gli spettacoli e poi ci sono tanti posti dove mangiare e a me di cucinare nel weekend proprio non va. Però lo odio per alcune cose... tipo nei finesettimana è impossibile trovare parcheggio qui nel quartiere perché arrivano migliaia di macchine! I parcheggi del centro commerciale non sono sufficienti e la gente invade i nostri posti con le loro macchine solo per andare a fare la spesa!
  

- Cosa pensa dei piani terra commerciali vuoti?
  
  R.1. Di sicuro contribuiscono alla poca sicurezza del quartiere. Se non ci sono attività appena fa buio può diventare il far west e non c’è nessuno che controlla. Poi sono anche un po’ tristi tutte quelle saracinesche abbassate, non danno una sensazione di sicurezza o di vita. E poi questo significa anche che non ci sono posti di lavoro nel quartiere, a parte quelli del centro commerciale. Ma mi sa che quelli sono proprio un’altra cosa.
  
  R.2. Mi danno un’idea di trascuratezza e di desolazione. Sono tristi, ma penso che siano lo specchio della crisi economica.
  
  R.3. Penso che se Caltagirone non abbassa i prezzi rimarranno vuoti per sempre!!! E si, penso anche io che siano tristi, ma soprattutto sono un problema per la sicurezza. Se non c’è nessuno per strada perché non ci sono attività, chiunque può fare quello che vuole.

- Crede che ci sia qualche relazione tra il centro commerciale e i piani terra vuoti?
  
  
  R.2. Non saprei, ma di sicuro i prezzi sono troppo alti.
  
  R.3. In effetti adesso che mi ci fai pensare deve essere difficile aprire un negozio qui con tutta la concorrenza di quelli nel centro commerciale. Poi certo, i prezzi non aiutano!

- Il quartiere non è finito, tutta la parte non residenziale non è stata ancora costruita e l’orizzonte temporale è alquanto incerto. Come considera questa situazione? La infastidisce/preoccupa?
  
  R.1. Non mi disturba in generale, lo sapevo anche quando ho comprato che il quartiere è ancora in costruzione e che ci vorrà un po’ a finirlo tutto. Però il fatto che sia ancora a
metà aumenta i problemi di sicurezza e illegalità, e questo si mi preoccupa. Soprattutto perché a volte manca anche l’illuminazione stradale e non è molto sicuro.

R.2. Si mi infastidisce. Pensavo che sarebbe stato finito molto prima. Adesso è un posto vuoto, senza niente da fare che non sia andare al centro commerciale e con grossi problemi di sicurezza.

R.3. Io penso che dobbiamo armarci di pazienza, perché qui tra crisi e lentezza burocratica ci vorranno decenni prima di avere un vero quartiere. Intanto però possiamo goderci il verde e la tranquillità, e questo mi basta. Anche se è vero che la questione sicurezza va affrontata, mica possiamo stare per sempre senza illuminazione stradale!

- Cosa pensa del fatto che Porta di Roma possa essere/rimanere/diventare un quartiere dormitorio?

R.1. Beh lo è già. Però la cosa non mi disturba. Sono venuta qui perché è tranquillo e verde e ampio, se cercavo la movida andavo a San Lorenzo.


R.3. Io nel complesso mi trovo bene. Un quartiere residenziale, o dormitorio come dici tu, è un posto tranquillo, senza traffico e senza casino, che è una cosa molto buona da avere qui a Roma, che è la patria del caos più totale.

- Percepisce il fatto che molti appartamenti sono disabitati? La infastidisce/preoccupa l’invenduto?

R.1. Sì, si percepisce molto e mi disturba. Un conto è che il quartiere sia ancora in costruzione, un altro è che sia vuoto. C’è poca gente, e anche quella che c’è si vede molto poco. Se gli appartamenti sono invenduti da un lato c’è il problema sicurezza, dall’altro mi si svaluta casa e poi magari non posso permettermi di vendere e ricomprare un appartamento più grande, anche se c’è in vendita nello stesso palazzo.

R.2. Beh, l’unica cosa che si percepisce è che c’è davvero poca gente in giro. E ci sono un sacco di annunci di case in vendita o in affitto. Però non mi sono mai davvero fermata a pensarci.

R.3. Più che altro con tutte queste case in vendita o in affitto ci si abbassa il valore dell’immobile...

- Cosa pensa dell’edilizia residenziale pubblica? E dell’housing sociale?

R.1. Ho vissuto per tutta la vita con la mia famiglia in una casa popolare, quindi decisamente so cosa significa. Detesto le case popolari perché sono brutte, di scarsa qualità e con zero manutenzione. Però non mi mette paura la gente che ci vive. So che c’è discriminazione verso chi non può permettersi di pagare l’affitto, ma è sbagliato, mica vuol dire non essere brave persone! Certo, io quando sono andata via ho cercato qualcosa di completamente diverso perché potevo permettermelo, ma il mio fastidio era verso le case, lo spazio, la bruttezza e il degrado, non verso la categoria sociale. Qui è tutto molto bello, ma non ci si conosce. Non so neanche che facciano i miei vicini. Se parto non so a chi lasciare le piante o il gatto. Sono proprio due estremi.

R.2. È una cosa necessaria, perché ci sono categorie che non possono permettersi un affitto normale. Però si sa che le case popolari sono posti problematici e senza troppa speranza. Io non andrei mai ad abitare in un quartiere popolare, ma nemmeno vicino (evidentemente ignora che Casale Nei è fatto di edilizia residenziale pubblica, NdR).

R.3. L’edilizia pubblica serve, ma va cambiata. Adesso le case popolari sono ricettacolo di umanità varia e c’è un sacco di illegalità e criminalità. Sporcizia, trascuratezza, niente manutenzione e un sacco di occupazioni abusive. La gente ci marcia. Fanno finta di essere
poveri e poi magari hanno tre macchine! Non mi piace la gente che si aspetta che lo Stato si prenda cura di loro senza fare nulla per migliorare la propria situazione e soprattutto senza dare niente in cambio.

- Cosa penserebbe se l’indevuto diventasse housing sociale?
  
  **R.1.** Non mi disturberebbe. Il degrado sociale viene dal degrado fisico e dallo scarso controllo, qui queste due cose non ci sono! Non sarò certo io a discriminare qualcuno che non può permettersi di pagare 1000 euro di affitto e viene aiutato per pagarne solo 300.
  
  **R.2.** No, è un’idea che non mi piace. Porterebbe solo problemi e ulteriore degrado.
  
  **R.3.** Non piace neanche a me. Già abbiamo tanti problemi di sicurezza adesso, figuriamoci se ci aggiungiamo le case popolari.

- E se i piani terra fossero affittati a canone calmierato sia per attività commerciali che sociali? (dopolavoro, nidi sociali, banche del tempo, centri culturali, laboratori creativi, ludoteche)
  
  **R.1.** Sarei d’accordissimo e parteciperei volentieri. Faccio volontariato, e sarebbe bello poter contribuire a qualcosa di bello qui nel quartiere. C’è un’associazione qui, ha addirittura un gruppo Facebook. Organizzano attività nel parco, ma partecipa pochissima gente. Un po’ più di partecipazione e solidarietà non guasterebbero, e invece qui la gente ha paura del diverso e non vuole essere coinvolta.
  
  **R.2.** Ecco, questo è diverso. Se i prezzi sono accessibili e i piani terra si riempiono è un vantaggio per tutti.
  
  **R.3.** Se i prezzi fossero più bassi sarebbe meglio, così ci sarebbero negozi e più controllo. Ma di certo non voglio un centro sociale sotto casa!

- Prenderebbe parte alle attività?
  
  **R.1.** Certamente!
  
  **R.2.** Non lo so, però di sicuro userei i servizi e negozi a disposizione. Tipo i miei bimbi li manderei sicuramente in ludoteca, e magari io farei qualche corso di qualcosa di creativo per esempio.
  
  **R.3.** In che senso? A “creare” certamente no, già ho abbastanza grane per i fatti miei, però userei i servizi, ammesso che siano utili ovviamente.