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**S.P.Q.R.: Space and Pride in Queer Rome.  
Critical reflections on the 2000 World Pride and its urban legacy.**

PHD CANDIDATE  
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Cada uno tiene una fábula adentro  
Que no puede leer por sí solo.  
Necesita a alguien que,  
con la maravilla y el encanto en los ojos,  
la lea y se la cuente. (Luis Sepúlveda).

Gracias por la maravilla y el encanto en tus ojos, mientras me contabas la mía.  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The relationship between urban space and queer subjectivities is no stranger to scholarly attention. The thesis intends to contribute to this debate by tackling one of its most critical limitations: a predominant emphasis on Anglo-Saxon and North European case studies, which are often interpreted as paradigmatic models aspiring to universal applicability. Rome is the capital city of a Western country, Italy; nevertheless, by hosting the Catholic Holy See, it is also imbued with a powerful religious discourse, which has led scholars to talk about an ‘alternatively modern’ or ‘alternatively global’ city. In the year 2000 Rome hosted the first official World Pride in history, while the Catholic Church was simultaneously claiming hegemony over Rome’s urban space for the celebrations of its Jubilee. The thesis looks back at the World Pride through some of the conceptual tools of the urban studies debate on mega-events: the World Pride is interpreted as the climax of a larger trajectory of queer communitarian development, which was supposed to spur dramatic improvements in terms of both sexual citizenship and the consolidation of gay-connoted urban experiences, as it was happening in many Western metropolitan areas, whose flourishing gay commercial scenes were starting to be incorporated into the cities’ branding strategies. The argument then moves onto the analysis of Rome’s Gay Village, a three-month-long summertime festival that was created in continuity with the significant trajectory of visibility in public space, which the 2000 event had set out. Participant observation during the 2017 edition revealed how the space of Gay Village is shaped by strong heterosexist dynamics, which I critically approached with a focus on bodies and corporeality inspired by Robyn Longhurst’s works. Conclusions are critical about the success of the long-term goals attached to the World Pride, in light of the quick disruption of its organisational leadership and the poor cohesion of Rome’s activist networks; similarly, the commercial success of Gay Village has progressively weakened its social significance: interviews with the organisers unveiled a vision of gender and sexual identities that is not thoroughly articulated, and does not succeed in effectively queering the space of Gay Village. The case of Rome problematises some tenets of the academic debate on queer geographies, in particular by challenging the notion of a uniformly progressive queer metropolitan ‘West’.

Keywords: Rome; World Pride; mega-events; Gay Village; corporeality.



# INTRODUCTION

Y tras la metamorfosis  
Me sentí mucho mejor  
Era un aire gris oscuro  
Y con bastante polución  
Se notaba en cualquier caso  
Que era aire de ciudad  
Que si bien no es el más sano  
Lo prefiere el ser humano.  
(*Aire*. Mecano, 1984)

It's funny. We all sit around mindlessly slagging off that vile stink-hole of a city. But in its own strange way, it takes care of us. I don't know if that ugly wall of suburbia's been put there to stop them getting in, or us getting out. Come on. Don't let it drag you down. Let it toughen you up. I can only fight because I've learnt to.

Being a man one day and a woman the next isn't an easy thing to do.  
(*The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. Clark & Hamlyn & Elliott, 1994)

It is safe to say that, in many societies around the world, a same-sex couple engaging in Public Displays of Affection (PDA) is still regarded as an unusual sight, notwithstanding the either positive or negative connotation that might be given to such ‘unusualness’; this is a simple yet clear manifestation of *heteronormativity*, the sociological concept that refers to a specific social configuration in which heterosexuality is conceived as the predominant form of affection and it is socially constructed as ‘the norm’, in a process that is defined ‘naturalisation’ (Bertone, 2009; Warner, 1991). The same example of homosexual PDA also highlights how heteronormativity is well embedded in public space; on the other hand, the initial *Priscilla* quotation indicates how the *queer subject* – here intended as an umbrella-definition that refers to the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) community, as well as all the other sexual and gender identities, positionalities and practices that are not purely cisgender and heterosexual<sup>1</sup> – has traditionally been associated with the city, as a landscape of liberation in opposition to both rural and suburban contexts, which have always been more faithful keepers of the heteronormative status quo (Weston, 1995). Lawrence Knopp (1995), Jon Binnie and Gill Valentine (1999) and Cesare Di Feliciano (2015) are among the authors that, in the past decades, put forward literature reviews on the urban geographies of non-conformist sexualities. Canadian scholar Amin Ghaziani (2015) has attempted to systematise the relationship between non-normative sexualities and the city through a periodisation of the ‘Gay Metropolis’ that finds an overall generalizable applicability onto the majority of the American cities. Though

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<sup>1</sup> Note that in this thesis the term *queer* will be mainly used in this acceptation, and not in reference to the philosophical and political queer (anti)-theories.

characterised by a somewhat deterministic approach, Ghaziani's periodisation still provides a general overview of the contemporary history of the relationship between the city and the queer subject, and a fine starting point for further, more nuanced investigations on the topic. Ghaziani distinguishes three main moments: the Closet Era (1870-World War II), when the homosexual identity would not 'set the tone' (Ghaziani, 2015, p. 307) of any of the urban spaces in which a concentration of homoerotic activity and homosexual lifestyle could be traced; the Coming Out Era (World War II-1997), when a strong emphasis was posed on the 'gaybourhood' (Ivi, 308); finally, the Post-Gay Era (1998-Present) in which the LGBTQ urban geographies are reworked in light of a general opening towards issues of sexual citizenship, both at a social and at a legislative level. This framework intends to be an ideal prototype, which however does not necessarily unfold with every single LGBTQ urban manifestation. Accordingly, scholars have often remarked that one of the main weaknesses of this academic debate is its narrow geographic focus. Case studies and contributions come predominantly from Anglo-Saxon and North-West European cultural contexts, with the ever-present risk of universalising specific theoretical frameworks that often may prove not applicable for the understanding of phenomena unfolding in other parts of the world.

However, within the 'West', too, the relationship between urban space and queer subjectivities has presented different specificities; the adoption, and eventual success, of US-born models in these contexts often required some socio-urban adjustments. Both Robyn Longhurst (2001) and Lynda Johnston (2005), for example, offer stimulating hints for a reflection on how models and conceptualisations, which are born in Europe and the United States, travel to and settle in Australia and New Zealand. The literature on Australia's main gay-branded event, Sydney's Mardi Gras (Kates, 2003; Markwell, 2002; Markwell and Waitt, 2009) shows how the branding of Sydney as the 'Gay Capital of South Pacific' at first produced some tensions within Australian society, while also representing a clear attempt at remapping the Land Down Under out of its Euro- and US-centric 'remoteness'. Similarly, cases like Paris' Marais (Sibalis, 2004) and Madrid's Chueca (Boivin, 2011; 2013), which are among the most renowned villages worldwide, both originated in light of the development of strong LGBTQ neo-communitarian discourses within their respective urban spaces (Rossi & Vanolo, 2012). Neo-communitarian approaches come predominantly from the US tradition, and have greatly influenced queer urban experiences around the world according to a *quasi-ethnic minority discourse*, which drew heavily from the history of social and urban segregation of the racial and migrants' minorities in the United States (Murray, 1979).

In both the cases of Chueca and of the Marais, neo-communitarianism was at first perceived (and at times fought) as a foreign, even disturbing element, in societies that were not organised around the notion of 'community'; the two cases, however, had meanwhile developed specific social and urban features that ultimately ended up favouring the carving out of portions of urban space,

which could be openly claimed by the LGBTQ population. Michael Sibalis concludes his paramount work on Paris' Marais precisely by critically engaging with the insertion of communitarian notions into a society, like the French one, with a strong political tradition of universalism that is centred on the rights and duties of citizenship. On the other hand, Renaud René Boivin highlights how the extremely successful gay-branding of Chueca in Madrid was intimately connected to the end of Francisco Franco's dictatorship, and Spain's insertion into a democratic process with a thick capitalist frenzy; the explosion of HIV and AIDS in the eighties, and the worldwide diffusion of US models of a gay lifestyle heavily based on consumption consolidated the foundations for the development of a gay neighbourhood in central Madrid.

The same can hardly be said about Italy, a country that shares important socio-cultural similarities with the French and Spanish counterparts, but where thus far there exists no urban phenomenon, with a neighbourhood resemblance, which has acquired a clear and visible LGBTQ connotation<sup>2</sup>. In his work on Rome's 2000 World Pride, Michael Luongo (2002) reported the generally sceptical views of the Pride organisers over the possibility of establishing a neighbourhood with a gay connotation in Rome; his interviewees showed unfamiliarity with this model, which was deemed unfitting to the Italian socio-urban context. In general, cases of overt urban LGBTQ visibility are still sporadic and limited around Italy, in an urban space that remains largely heteronormative nationwide. Nevertheless, Italian cities are clearly inserted in today's globalising patterns, and Italy itself is globally recognised as a 'Western country'. Public opinion throughout the Western world has progressively shifted in favour of expanding forms of LGBTQ social inclusion, which often have been legally formalised. This has happened in Italy as well, but certainly through a much slower and more problematic pattern: after the extremely progressive law for the change of biological sex and legal rectification, which was passed in 1982 (Legge 164/1982), the first legislative act taking inclusive action towards the LGBTQ population was the law on same-sex civil partnerships, which was passed thirty-four years later, in 2016<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, in the Italian legislative system no act deals with and takes action against hate crimes with a homo-bi-transphobic connotation. Through the analytical lens of non-normative gender and sexual identities, Italy appears to present interesting specificities that seem to challenge the homogeneous notion of 'West', and by large also the idea of a metropolitan Global North with a shared queer progressive agenda, as opposed to a backward and reactionary Global South. This thesis intends to challenge and problematise these geographic notions by focusing on Italy' very own capital: Roma.

In a previous work on the city of Turin (La Rocca, 2018), I had argued that the

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<sup>2</sup> The sole exception is, possibly, Milan's Porta Venezia neighbourhood. However, Porta Venezia has been branded only very recently, it is purely commercial in kind and has a much milder LGBTQ visible resignification compared to its global counterparts.

<sup>3</sup> Act no. 76 (May, 20<sup>th</sup> 2016), known as 'Legge Cirinnà', applicable since June, 5<sup>th</sup> 2016.

emergence of urban spaces with a clear LGBTQ-connotation (or where forms of queer resignification were evidently at play), was hard to develop due to the specificities of the Italian approach to non-normative sexual and gender identities, which had traditionally hampered the articulation of a LGBTQ communitarian sense of belonging. The Quadrilatero Romano neighbourhood, right in the heart of Turin, counts on a long-term queer history, in terms of residential patterns, activist presence, cruising and other forms of queer socialisation; however, the gentrification of the neighbourhood, which is emblematic within Turin's metropolitan area (Semi, 2004), never relied on the gay factor, nor did it make the area assume an evident LGBTQ connotation. Without delving, in this context, into the complexities of gentrification as a socio-economic process, interviews with the gay residents of the Quadrilatero Romano revealed narratives of their own identities that, though embracing their homosexuality, would constantly play it down, without interpreting it as something that inspired in them a sense of communitarian belonging. On the other hand, interviews with activists whose associations were located in the neighbourhood, revealed a fragmentation among these groups, which was mainly attributed to different positionalities along the political spectrum. The case study on the Quadrilatero Romano showed how the coexistence, within a delimited urban area, of factors pointing towards forms of queer urban territoriality, did not necessarily lead to the same developments that were manifesting in other parts of the Western world.

Nevertheless, the case of Rome appears to be more challenging and invites many more questions regarding the absence of a sound LGBTQ urban discourse. Without delving into the multi-layered complexities of the eternal city (see Herzfeld, 2009), there are at least two factors that seem to encourage the articulation of an in-depth focus on Rome from a queer perspective. On the one hand, differently from Turin, Rome is Italy's capital city and it has a much more significant global status: it is safe to say that Rome is universally considered a lifetime 'must see', a top tourist destination with constant enormous flows of visitors. Rome is much more integrated into global patterns than the vast majority of the other Italian cities, and represents a pole of attraction both at a national and at a supranational level. This means that the Roman metropolitan context is much more likely to welcome different social populations, even just for tourist purposes; the LGBTQ community is certainly one of these populations.

On the other hand, in the year 2000 Rome hosted the first World Pride in history, an extraordinary event that gathered hundreds of thousands of queer and friendly people in the streets of the eternal city, and that put Rome under the global spotlight for at least one entire year. Between the late nineties and the beginning of the new millennium, Gay Pride Parades were already common in many metropolitan areas around the (Western) world: Rome hosted Italy's first official Gay Pride in 1994; some LGBTQ appointments were also already significant in size, like Sydney's Mardi Gras (Kates, 2002; Markwell, 2003).

However, Rome's 2000 World Pride was an event of unprecedented global reach and magnitude, which offered to the capital of Italy an invaluable chance of escalating its queer urban discourse, while also affecting national politics concerning matters of sexual citizenship. The success of Rome's World Pride is symbolically considered the beginning of a social and political opening towards the LGBTQ community, in Rome as well as in the whole of Italy. The significance of this moment of spatial appropriation was all the more heightened by the fact that the event took place in the very same year of the Catholic Jubilee, thus effectively creating an urban antagonism that was extremely media-appealing (Luongo, 2002). Key informants, researchers on the subject, and *vox populi* all acknowledge that this antagonism proved to be a paramount factor for the success of the World Pride.

In LGBTQ studies, the identification of a social enemy that overtly addresses and depicts non-conforming sexualities as a danger, a risk, a sin or a perversion, has often been regarded as the best way to foster forms of LGBTQ communitarianism, and develop socio-political trajectories of emancipation. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the extraordinary work of Víctor Luis Mora Gaspar (2016), who has been elaborating a history of the medical, social and legal discourse that shaped the image of the homosexual as a deviant criminal during Spain's Francoist regime, and the implications of this discourse at the beginning of the *Transición*. Historians, in turn, have remarked how Italy has never had a legal tradition of thorough penalisation of homosexuality, not even during Benito Mussolini's fascist regime (reference? Alessandro?). Therefore, when 1997 the International Pride Committee opted for the Rome bid, and decided to widen the 2000 Europride into a globally reaching event, the ground was set for the build-up of a political momentum that would not be afraid to tackle and confront the unmistakably conservative positions of the Vatican.

This strategy proved successful because the Catholic Church is effectively a global actor. In this regard, Rome is considered a prototypical case for the development of the notion of *alternative globalities* or *alternative modernities* (Clough Marinaro & Thomassen, 2014; McNeill, 2003). This conceptualisation represents an attempt to problematise Saskia Sassen's (2013) famous model of the 'global city': this model appreciates the significance that cities have acquired in today's geographies of power structures, and establishes a metropolitan hierarchy based on the centrality that cities are able to retain within the most significant neoliberal socio-political and economic flows shaping today's world. The concept of *alternative globalities* acknowledges that the aforementioned global flows are generally regarded as the most important to attract, as they are connected with opportunities for urban growth; one can go as far as saying that they are usually regarded as constitutive elements of 'modernity'. Nevertheless, there exist other global flows, just as significant in size and magnitude, which confer a centrality to different metropolitan areas; among them, religious flows are some of the most remarkable. Urban models shaped along Sassen's theorisation may tend to dismiss these latter flows as not very relevant, or as

'non-modern'; nevertheless, they are capable to move millions of people, with the relative socio-political and economic changes and possibilities that this entails.

Because of its status as Holy See of the Catholic Church, Rome very well incarnates an alternative global centrality. This thesis acknowledges the global status of the eternal city, and the Catholic discourse and forces that profoundly shape Rome in its image, in its imagery, in its space. Nevertheless, one must not fail to appreciate the momentum gathered by the World Pride in the year 2000, at a time when LGBTQ issues massively started to come out of the closet and reach the priorities of the political agendas around the (Western) world. This thesis, then, aims at critically reflecting upon the long-term significance of the World Pride, and the extent to which it was able to queer both the urban discourse and space of the eternal city.

In order to widen the understanding of the World Pride beyond the actual organisation of the Pride Week, its unfolding and immediate aftermath, the argument adopts some of the conceptual tools of the urban studies debate on *mega-events* in order to appreciate the worldwide significance and reach of the event, and to interpret it as the climax of a much larger socio-urban trajectory of LGBTQ community-building in the city of Rome. Whilst important contributions, published in the aftermath of the World Pride, exhaustively tackled both its political implications in Rome's balances of power (McNeill, 2003; Mudu, 2002), and its impact in terms of queer tourism (Johnston, 2005; Luongo, 2002), this thesis is interested in a more micro-level of communitarian dynamics and of the capacity for agency of the LGBTQ activist groups. In light of this, the first case study re-interprets the World Pride with the aim of appreciating the extent to which the event acted as a catalyst for an upgrade of Rome's developing LGBTQ dynamics into more established communitarian structures, which could serve as a powerful basis for stronger demands in terms of both sexual citizenship and urban visibility.

This inevitably brings in another key concept of the debate on mega-events, which is the notion of *legacy*, in particular in its *immaterial* articulations, in terms of the acquisition of organisational skills and abilities, community involvement, and social progress in general. The research project appreciates the creation of a *friendlier* context in the city of Rome ever since the World Pride, which has been confirmed by Bertone and Gusmano (2013) and Corbisiero and Monaco (2013; 2017), who in their works have included reflections on and references to the gay-friendly initiatives carried out, respectively, by the public administration and at a civil society level in the eternal city. By the same token, the inauguration of Rome's permanent Gay Street in 2007 and the Italian law on civil partnerships fulfil two aspects that, over the years, have become strongholds of a classic LGBTQ neoliberal agenda: on the one hand, the recognition and branding of an official LGBTQ urban area, mainly for commercial purposes, in metropolitan contexts aspiring to either

earn or maintain a global(ising) status; on the other hand, the capacity to positively affect the national government in matters of sexual citizenship based on a minority discourse of identity politics (Chasin, 2000; Duggan, 2003). Accordingly, both Rome's Gay Street in Via di San Giovanni in Laterano, and the law on civil partnerships can be incorporated within a unified narrative of the Italian path of LGBTQ emancipation, in which the World Pride is generally regarded as the symbolic starting point.

In this thesis, however, I decided to reflect upon the legacy of the World Pride by using as a proxy a case study on Gay Village, a three-month-long summertime festival that has been organised in the eternal city since 2002; for the first time since its inauguration, in 2019 Gay Village has not been opened. The choice of Gay Village stems from the fact that many of its organisers had previously been at the leadership of the project of the 2000 World Pride: Gay Village was born precisely with the intention of retaining the momentum that the mega-event had generated, by combining together political activism and the targeting of the LGBTQ population for commercial purposes. The success of the World Pride supported a view that the Italian civil society was ready for a new phase of grander and prouder LGBTQ visibility. As I have already hinted at, at the turn of the millennium the model of the Village was experiencing an incredible success in more and more cities in the Western world; it is, then, not surprising that some LGBTQ activists and entrepreneurs decided to join forces in order to elaborate and retain the legacy of the World Pride by creating an artefact with a more permanent mark on Rome's urban space, which would be consumption-driven and inspired by the Village model.

The case study on Gay Village is interested in the historical development of the festival and in its organisation, in order to appreciate in what ways this gay-branded artefact elaborated the legacy of the World Pride within Rome's urban space, and in the Italian socio-cultural context that, as already anticipated, appears to have struggled with a communitarian understanding of non-heteronormed and non-cisgender identities and positionalities. Research on LGBTQ consumption inevitably encourages scholars to question how far gay-branded spaces prove to be liberating for all queer subject. This thesis treasures all the academic contributions that have been put forward in this regard, and which have remarked how certain cohorts of the LGBTQ population enjoy a privileged status in this type of contexts, in particular cisgender gay men who are white, able-normed, healthy (possibly also masculine and hot) top spenders. The case study on Gay Village aims at enriching the critical debate on gay-branded spaces of consumption by presenting an approach that attempts to conjugate together the social geographies of the venue, the discourse on gender and sexual identities that shapes the space, and a first-hand experience of its clubnights, in an effort to appreciate whether Gay Village successfully queers a portion of urban space, and offers a liberating context to the queer subjects.

The argument will be articulated as follows: firstly, an overview of the literature

on Pride Parades will be presented, and integrated with some key references from the debate on mega-events, in order to delineate the theoretical framework within which I am inserting my analysis of the World Pride. The argument will then move on to the presentation of the findings and the discussion of this first case study. Following on, I will introduce the debate on the Village model and gay consumption, and then I will present Robyn Longhurst's work on the centrality of the body in the production of knowledge; these frameworks will be leading the analysis of Gay Village, whose findings and discussion will be presented in the following chapter. The thesis adopts a qualitative methodology, which appears to offer the most fitting tools to tackle the issues that are at the centre of the two case studies: the communitarian perception, the experience of the parade and the political aftermath of the 2000 World Pride; the organisation of a big LGBTQ-connected festival and the dynamics of the clubnights at Gay Village. The specific ethnographic methods adopted will be spelled out separately in the two chapters dedicated to the case studies. Conclusions will critically reflect on the results of the investigation, and will attempt to evaluate the extent to which the legacy of the World Pride was retained within Rome's urban space. In light of the analysis of the findings, conclusions will also delineate how the case of Rome informs the academic debate on the relationship between urban space and the queer subject, and the wider geographies of sexualities.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Mega-events and Pride Parades: literature review and theoretical frameworks.**

### **MEGA-EVENTS**

It is pretty safe to say that Rome's 2000 World Pride does not represent a typical case of mega-event, like the Olympics or the Expos; one could even go as far as arguing that the World Pride could hardly fall into a mega-event category at all, due to the fact that it does not share many of the key characteristics that the literature has identified as defining features of all those urban appointments that present that kind of magnitude. Contributions to the debate on mega-events have tackled different aspects of these phenomena: their massive size and global reach, which confer international visibility to the host cities; their 'extraordinary nature', which suspends and transforms the usual, consolidated dynamics of the hosting metropolitan area, by imposing specific timing and necessities; and clearly, the grand architectural complexes that they usually require for their successful unfolding. However, scholarly focus on mega-events has particularly been driven by the acknowledgement that mega-events are powerful tools for urban agendas, and they respond to political goals that are strategically set out. Urban elites and political regimes aim at exploiting all the advantages that come with a mega-event hype, so as to intervene upon the city as undisturbed as possible, thanks to huge injections of money, tax eases, the loosening up of regulations and political control, and public consensus or euphoria. Thenceforth, scholars have analysed the political regimes and coalitions that bid for the hosting of a mega-event, as well as the bidding process itself. Most importantly, however, academic contributions have reflected upon the notion of *legacy*, that is, what the mega-event 'leaves behind', 'what remains' in terms of both material and immaterial items, especially in light of the urban political goals that the bidding elites attaches to the organisation of the mega-event.

According to this introductory general overview, Rome's 2000 World Pride can hardly be considered the paradigmatic example of a mega-event: it was certainly not supported by a governing coalition, nor by an urban elite, and it did not affect the physical space of the city, aside from ephemeral and temporary changes that were connected and circumscribed to the parade itself

and the initiatives of the Pride Week. Nevertheless, the World Pride undeniably represented a novelty in the ways Pride Parades had been conceived and organised up until then, and it was charged with a globally orchestrated magnitude that had put Rome under the queer spotlight since 1997, when the eternal city won the hosting bid. Meanwhile, the mere fact of presenting Rome's candidacy meant that there existed a local group or network of people who was prepared to take on the organisation of the event, who felt that there could be a solid consensus around this global queer appointment, to which some political goals would be inevitably, and legitimately attached, in order to retain forms of legacy, particularly in terms of positive social impact for the LGBTQ population. In light of these reasons, I believe that picking up some concepts and tools from the debate on mega-events could be intellectually stimulating for an investigation on Rome's 2000 World Pride. In turn, the specificities of this huge queer appointment could inform the scholarly understanding of mega-events because the World Pride was, at least in its unfolding, a successful global convention, which could not count on the full support of a powerful elite or regime. The debate on mega-events has not thoroughly reflected yet on the specificities of big-sized urban appointments that are organised 'from the bottom', or that are not supported by the 'people that count'.

In his work on the Expos, Maurice Roche (1998) proposes a two-dimensional conceptualisation of mega-events, combining together an *exhibitionary complex*, which appreciates a mega-event as an act of grand display orchestrated by a precise rationale, and a *performance complex*, which is more comprehensive because it includes also a reflection on the participatory dynamics of the event. In this regard, Roche makes a specific reference to forms of 'staged authenticity' of exotic cultures: in the late XIX century and early XX century, tribesmen from the host country's colonies were brought to the Expo to be displayed: they were required to act out their ways of living, which were regarded as primordial. This stemmed from a profoundly positivist view of modernity that was intimately connected with the notion of civilisation: the tribesmen reassured the Expo-goers of their own 'evolutionary development', which in turn was a powerful political tool for restating the 'civilised status' of both host city and nation-state. Roche incorporates these reflections within a larger discourse on the relationship between mega-events and public cultures, which are intimately connected with the build up of national identities. Roche interprets national identity building as a dialectic between internalities and externalities; in this mechanism, mega-events become circumstances that allow to either introduce or part away from features and characteristics that are not traditionally integrated in the (imagined) national culture. This requires a strong political vision, hence a solid political leadership that must be able to shape a sound national cultural narrative by smoothly deciding both the elements to incorporate and the ones to get rid of.

Roche's conceptualisation finds resonance in Harry H. Hiller's work (1995) on conventions as mega-events; the author identifies two models in which a city

can approach the hosting of a mega-event convention: the *intrusion-reaction model* and the *interactive-opportunity model*. Conventions are peculiar events because they have a potential to be predominantly self-contained: they usually involve a program of activities that keep the attendees busy for the vast majority of their time in the host city. The interaction that the conventioneers establish with the locals and the surroundings may be extremely limited, thus rendering destinations mere add-ons to the purpose of a convention itself. As participation in a convention is usually voluntary, Hiller draws attention to dynamics of *packaging*, the development of specific extra arrangements aimed at encouraging people to embark upon long and expensive trips to attend the gathering. In order to highlight the potentially impermeable coexistence of local residents and convention attendees within the host city, Hiller talks about *ecological differentiation*, in an attempt to understand how local residents can be affected by the foreign presence. Hiller questions *volume* (the actual number of participants in the event) to be the main source of impact on the host city, and shifts the focus on those factors that may heighten tension and conflict, like cultural distance and economic disparities between conventioneers and locals, or the spatial distribution of the activities around the urban space; this scenario depicts a paradigmatic case for the intrusion-reaction model. However, when local organisers successfully present the convention as a source of opportunities to enrich their community, through benefits that can go beyond economic impacts (like image building or the enhancement of culture), these events stop being viewed as intruders and their participants become guests and partners in a civic experience.

Hiller's work on conventions can then be connected to his renowned linkage model (Hiller, 1998; 2000a), which interprets mega-events as tip of the iceberg in much larger processes, where the event itself is the product of an ensemble of antecedent factors (*backward linkages*), and in turn becomes the cause of specific outcomes (*forward linkages*), which stem out of the encounter between the rationale of the event and its actual unfolding. Hiller includes also the notion of *parallel linkages*, the collateral effects that are not necessarily anticipated and planned, or whose connection to the event is not always straightforward. In a longitudinal interpretation of the linkage model, the backward linkages constitute the *pre-event*, the socio-political background that shows how the event was both intrusive and transformative of a prior situation; accordingly, the *post-event* deals with legacy, which includes the readjustments to normality and the adaptation to changed conditions that were caused by the event.

Hiller (2000b) is also among the first authors to tackle the social and human dimension that is connected with hosting a mega-event. In his case study on the Cape Town bid for the 2004 Olympics (which was eventually lost), the author appreciates how a thick rhetoric on social development, which proclaimed as its primary aim the ending of apartheid, was the key tool that managed to gather public support and widespread consensus for the hosting bid. Hiller was keen

on understanding how the elitist move of hosting a huge sport event, which would not be easily accessible for the less privileged population of the host city, could gain such popular support, especially in cities from the Global South. How can ‘circuses’ become misplaced priorities, when ‘bread’ is what is lacking? In the end, Hiller praises the case of the Cape Town bid because it ‘raises some new options for consideration that could give mega-events new humanitarian urban value [...] The Cape Town candidacy attempted to redress a legacy of urban inequality’ (Hiller, 2000, pp. 455-456). Hiller concluded, however, that had the bid been victorious, the hosting of the Olympic Games would have certainly risen strong tensions between the urban transformations they would have required, and the social scope proclaimed in the bid.

Laura Misener and Daniel S. Mason (2006) have dedicated a substantial part of their scholarly work to deepen the understanding of the legacy of mega-events; their focus on immaterial legacy tackles primarily the production of social capital and the thickening of community networks in both the organisation and the aftermath of the event. Their case studies are usually sporting gatherings, and they developed a thorough comparative analysis of events happening in Edmonton (Canada), Manchester (United Kingdom) and Melbourne (Australia). The authors aim at assessing the extent to which local community fits into a city’s pro-growth agenda that is attached to the hosting of a sporting event. Their thesis moves from Coalter’s (1998) consideration that ‘the profit-oriented and supposedly exploitative nature of commercial provision does not automatically mean that it does not provide satisfying forms of social membership and identity’ (Coalter, 1998 in Misener & Mason, 2006, p. 42). They draw from the re-elaboration of Bourdieu’s notion of *social capital* that is put forward by Coleman (1988), who interprets strong and healthy community networks as a paramount factor for productivity and economic gain. Misener and Mason connect urban growth with a process of improvement of the living and social conditions of the communities residing in the areas where the mega-event paraphernalia will be set up and developed, via the articulation of governance networks that would involve the residents in the decisional processes regarding their neighbourhoods. The strengthening of horizontal and vertical ties appears necessary in order to both ensure community involvement and facilitate system change; the authors also include the development of skills and abilities that would eventually encourage the participation of community members in the organisation of future events. In their following papers, Misener and Mason (2008; 2009) carried on with their work on the development of social capital around the hosting of mega-events, by shifting their focus onto the creation of urban regimes of growth revolving around event bids. The authors analysed the ways in which public-private partnerships can foster inclusivity within their local communities: they feel positive about the fact that the public and private actors they had interviewed all showed an awareness of the urgency to integrate the community level in their plans of development. Misener and Mason look at social processes that shape community involvement with a top-down approach; this inevitably raises questions over the extent to which these

processes are effective forms of inclusive participation, and not just instruments for social co-optation.

In their work with Meaghan Carey (2011), Misener and Mason shift their focus from social capital to social responsibility, and how the latter is successfully played out in the bidding process. The case study the authors analyse is Rio de Janeiro's winning bid for the 2016 Olympic Games. The Carioca delegation presented a thorough discourse of social inclusion and community development, which aimed at allowing Rio de Janeiro to meet the 'Northern' standards of urban infrastructure and social programming. Rio de Janeiro's candidacy was profoundly framed as the best opportunity for a big metropolis of the underdeveloped South to achieve not just economic, but also important social and cultural goals; this strategy proved extremely successful, and Rio de Janeiro overshadowed the other final runner-ups (Chicago, Madrid, Tokyo), which were all cities from the Global North, whose bidding dossiers did not centre mainly on a strong social agenda. Even though the Chicago presentation did include a well articulated social discourse, the authors suggest that the Southern rhetoric accompanying Rio de Janeiro's candidacy turned the Olympic bid into a no-brainer. The article highlights how constructing a hosting bid around a social agenda that successfully gathers consensus can prove to be an effective tool for winning the competition; however, the presentation of sound social discourse in a hosting bid does not ease the complexities of carrying out an effective social agenda that is attached to the organisation of an onerous mega-event.

Stefano Di Vita and Corinna Morandi (2018) turned the task of drawing some short-term conclusions for the 2015 Milan Expo into an opportunity to reinvigorate the debate on mega-events and their legacies. The two authors appreciate how mega-events set up a *state of exception* within the urban space in which they are hosted, and inevitably affect the local political agenda. Di Vita and Morandi distinguish the immediate successes of a mega-event per se from the potential long-term benefits that it could bring to the urban context; legacy, however, is necessarily anchored to effective post-event organisation and management. Di Vita and Morandi do not underestimate how legacy is usually the reason why an elite of governance bids for the host of an event; there is a significant imbalance between the ephemeral time-space of an Expo or of the Olympic Games, and the onerous and long-term projects that are usually attached to them as urban legacy. Moreover, the articulation of a sound discourse on immaterial legacy is complex because, as the authors appreciate, this type of legacy is difficult to track down, it can be temporarily delayed or definitely lost. In light of this, Di Vita and Morandi sketch out potential paths for lasting and robust developments of immaterial legacy: in the case of the 2015 Expo, the insertion of Milan in the socio-geographic global map of the growing industry of food points at the set-up of an infrastructure that could foster developments related to the specific cultural theme of a mega-event. On a different note, Di Vita and Morandi interpret immaterial legacies as the wide

array of professional skills and abilities that can be acquired for the organisation and management of big-sized events, going from the training of volunteers to the articulation of inter-institutional and private-public initiatives, which can also produce important socio-political outcomes.

This paragraph has put together some contributions of the debate on mega-events, which provide concepts and tools that might come in handy when investigating Rome's 2000 World Pride. The seminal work of Maurice Roche provides an overview of the conceptual frameworks that are at play in the discourses and the actual unfolding of urban mega-events. Roche's references to the notion of modernity that the Expos convey vividly highlight how these huge conventions can powerfully insert elements of both material and immaterial novelty, with which the hosting urban, regional and national contexts necessarily have to dialogue and interact. This certainly resonates with the dynamics of Rome's 2000 World Pride, in which Roche's notion of *staged authenticity* was certainly crucial, because Pride Parades convey, by definition, the idea of performing identities and positionnalities in public display. Harry H. Hiller's work on conventions as mega-events certainly proved to be particularly fitting for a reflection on the World Pride within this theoretical framework. The concept of *ecological differentiation*, between conventioneers and locals find many echoes when discussing how the 2000 World Pride powerfully entered an urban space and agenda that were monopolised by a Catholic discourse in light of the upcoming Great Jubilee. Moreover, Hiller's famous *linkage model* offers a solid guideline to interpret the World Pride as part of a much larger process, which both had profound roots and produced very articulated outcomes. Hiller was also one of the first scholars that started a thorough conceptualisation on legacy, on its immaterial implications and, in general, on the social aspects that are connected to a mega-event. The final contributions that I collected tackle specifically the social character of these big urban appointments. With this conceptual toolkit from the debate on mega-events, let us now to turn to an overview of the academic contributions on Pride Parades.

## **PRIDE PARADES**

Chris Brickell (2000) was among the first scholars to look more closely at Pride Parades in order to grasp and appreciate their articulated characteristics. Building from ethnographic work on the HERO Parade, annually organised in Auckland (New Zealand), Chris Brickell analyses the Pride Parade as an urban experience that challenges the dichotomy between public and private spaces. This dichotomy naturalises the social hegemony of heterosexuality in public space, hence toning down its sexual character; on the contrary, homosexuality is constructed as a private matter, which always maintains a strong sexual connotation because it does not correspond to a normative sexual orientation, and it is considered extraordinary and deviant. Brickell highlights how this binary configuration is likely to foster a discourse that interprets Pride Parades as the tyrannous attempt of a sexual minority to impose themselves on the larger sexually normalised majority. The call for the homosexuals to 'keep it private' is the outcome of the encounter between conservative social stances and neoliberal democracies, whose political foundations are unlikely to allow the articulation of outright forms of sexual prohibition or condemnation. Pride Parades constitute an act of politicisation of homosexuality, which questions the normative neutrality of heterosexuality and its hegemony over public space. By proudly proclaiming and displaying a non-heterosexual identity, during Pride Parades the queer subjects blur the boundaries between what is considered private and what is considered public, which are the boundaries upon which the heterosexual hegemony rests.

Kevin Markwell (2002) develops a case study on Mardi Gras, Sydney's gay festival, which at the turn of the millennium started to experience an escalation in popularity, which promptly earned Sydney the title of Gay Capital of South Pacific. The consolidation of Mardi Gras as one of the most participated appointments of the global LGBTQ calendar boosted Sydney's gay-friendly status and fostered an increasingly open-minded attitude among its population. Nevertheless, Markwell is keen on clarifying that the establishment of a solid queer brand does not necessarily equal social progress. The author adopts a multi-scalar geographic approach: Mardi Gras is, in fact, the local event of a specific metropolitan area, which however has acquired global significance, by appealing to a community that is transnational in kind. Markwell then wonders whether the globally acclaimed success of Mardi Gras provides an opportunity to favour important changes at the intermediate national level: the strong economic and political interests that were gathering around Mardi Gras certainly had become crucial pressing factors in shaping a more favourable official attitude of the Australian government towards the LGBTQ community, and in creating a more friendly image of Australia. At the same time, Markwell notices how this particularly privileged environment had not developed yet into

more substantial forms of government recognition, and homophobic attacks seem to remain frequent around both Sydney and the city's gaybourhood, particularly in the aftermath of the Mardi Gras week. According to Markwell, the development of Mardi Gras as a pivotal event for tourism and consumption-driven industries, in both Sydney and Australia, had not yet turned into an effective tool for social change.

It is Steven M. Kates (2003) who delves into the escalating commercialisation of Mardi Gras, which quickly turned into an official 'hallmark event' in both Sydney's and Australia's calendars. The commercialisation of pride parades plays a crucial role in shaping the nature of this type of events, in light of processes of appropriation and re-signification of their seemingly progressive and even deviant imageries to promote and prioritise capitalist aims. Drawing from the conceptualisation on Carnival and the carnivalesque, Kates wonders whether Mardi Gras, and pride parades in general, can be considered *liminal* events, which carry a genuine potential for effective social change, or *liminoid* ones, which offer a temporary break of the status quo, without fully challenging it. The author interprets Mardi Gras through a spiral model that appreciates the continuous intertwining of economic interests and social demands, which is what ultimately determines the social impact of the parade; the organisation of a counter-parade is interpreted by Kates as an indicator of the heavy mainstreaming of Mardi Gras' official events, which compromises their social message. At the same time, sponsoring Mardi Gras binds the companies to promote internal policies that secure rights and benefits for their LGBTQ employees. Kates concludes by remarking that Mardi Gras seems to have become a tool to strengthen an image of both social progress and economic prosperity for Sydney and Australia, as if social acceptance were a *fait accompli*. This successful image, however, overshadows many social and political complexities.

It is also worth mentioning Gordon Waitt (2003)'s work on the 2002 Gay Games in Sydney; even though the case study is not a Pride Parade, the paper analyses another outstanding event with a defined LGBTQ-connotation, which was hosted in Sydney at a time when the city was effectively consolidating its gay-friendly brand. Gordon Waitt delineates the complexities of hosting a sport event with a LGBTQ connotation: some of his interviewees, who were all gay men, found it hard to reconcile sport with sexual politics, by underlining the neutrality of sport as a field in which performance is all that matters; however, other interviewees revealed that they were very much intimidated by body shaming, so they ultimately decided not to register for the competitions because they felt that their bodies were not fit enough. Waitt makes reference to the strong sexualisation of the sportsman's body, which exalts an athletic corporeality at the expenses of the less fit ones. The author uses these results to reflect upon the notion of LGBTQ community that events like the Gay Games put forward, together with the urban phenomena that are orchestrated around these communitarian notions. Waitt acknowledges how the LGBTQ branding of

the games was not enough to gather the consensus of all the community, and it did not secure the universal inclusivity that it was preaching, by failing to tackle the stigmas that shape the social construction of sports as a neutral (hence heteronormative, hence male-dominated) territory, and of the erotic fit body.

Markwell and Waitt (2009) joined forces in a paper that analysed the experiences of pride parades in the four other main metropolitan areas in Australia: Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide. The paper investigates how gay festivals change their connotations according to the different urban and social context in which they take place. Pride Parades are conceived as relational and performative events, which are also contingent and contested. Pride has become a sort of global franchise: everyone knows loosely what it is and the community and subjectivities that it celebrates; however, Pride Parades assume specific connotations and characteristics according to the spaces, subjectivities and sexualities of the locations where they actually take place. The authors draw on Hetherington's (1997) notion of *heterotopias*, 'sites that are constituted as ambiguous or paradoxical through socially transgressive practices, and Massey's (2005) rethinking about 'space' and subjectivities as mutually constituted through social interrelations' (Markwell & Waitt, 2009, p. 145). Markwell and Waitt highlight how the Pride format was first imported from the United States in Sydney, as a way to commemorate the Stonewall riots; in Sydney, Mardi Gras developed exponentially and fostered the organisation of other parades around the country. However, the new Pride Parades present different specificities: some retain a strong political tone (Perth), while others are inserted in a mainstream trajectory with significant commercial interests. The authors highlight how the local developments of a pride parade create diversified settings in which homosexuality is renegotiated in space, and also multiply the ways of challenging mainstream ideas about sexuality.

Taking a leap from the Land Down-Under to a European context, Begonya Enguix (2009) develops a case study on the Madrid Pride, and on the exponential success that it built up, while also making some remarks on other LGBTQ-connected festivals taking place in other cities of the Comunidades Autónomas, in particular Barcelona and Seville. Enguix treasures all the main issues that the scholarly debate on Pride Parades already highlighted, as they clearly manifest in the Spanish context, too: the problematic notion of community that Pride Parades articulate and convey, and the extent to which Pride participants feel identified; the attempt to affect the heteronormativity of public space; the conjugation of the globally shared struggle of the LGBTQ community with the specific local issues and demands; the delicate balance between commercialisation and social demands. The author holds together all of these issues in order to understand how they are worked out during the organisation of a Pride Parade, and ultimately how this affects the experiences of the participants, in terms of representation and visibility. Within this framework, Enguix focuses on the dichotomy juxtaposing a view of Pride

Parades as either protest or *fiesta*. The author notices how the Parades that are organised along more defined discourses of social protest usually tend to tone down some of the edgiest and most exuberant queer expressions, so as to produce a feeling of ‘normality’ that would strengthen the social legitimisation of the queer struggle; on the other hand, the Parades with bigger tones of *fiesta* are usually more provocative and indulging in the carnivalesque, but they are also more divisive because more people are likely to feel unidentified by those kinds of queer expression, something that inevitably threatens to hamper political legitimisation. While the Barcelona Pride Parade was developing along more political lines, the Madrid one was undergoing a profound ‘party-fication’, as it became more and more integrated into the city’s Neoliberal branding strategies. Begonya Enguix’s work is remarkable because, by studying Pride Parades, she is able to highlight the complexities of identity building and its multifaceted relationship with public visibility for the queer subjectivity. Because of the significance and magnitude that Pride Parades are acquiring in many urban contexts, they quickly turn into large urban artefacts, which convey many more interests and meanings that go beyond the simplistic ‘protest versus *fiesta*’ dichotomy. Enguix concludes with a note of preoccupation upon the neoliberal success of the Pride Parade format, wondering how it is affecting the trajectory of LGBTQ social emancipation and the way queer subjects understand and perform political representation, public visibility and space appropriation.

Shannon Woodstock (2009) offers an extremely interesting analysis of the organisation of Pride Parades in Bucharest, as Romania was entering the European Union (2007). Woodstock delineates the complexities in the political scenario of a post-Soviet country meeting the democratic requirements that the entrance into the European Union demanded, especially in terms of citizens’ rights. A very interesting topic of the article is the focus on what Woodstock calls the ‘NGO-isation’ of Romania, the set up of Non-Governmental Organisations, sponsored by donors connected to International Organisations, which had the practical aim of stimulating the development of civil society platforms concerning multiple ‘hot’ social issues. The dynamic of NGO-isation of society worked along the lines of a top-down protection of subaltern groups, like women or the queer subjectivities, rather than forms of bottom-up enhancement and empowerment of these populations; accordingly, many of the initiatives that the NGOs organised were meant to cater to a ‘quantifiable minority’ that was ‘supposed to be there and attend’ (Woodstock, 2009; p. 10). Woodstock’s account highlights how the NGOs often failed to understand and tackle the actual needs and preferences of the local LGBTQ population; many interviewees felt that Pride Parades were ultimately just the tangible evidence of the fulfilment of an EU social requirement. The author notes how many of the people who were attending the Pride Parades were in fact the non-Romanian employees and activists working for the organisations: because of their status, these people were the least likely to come face to face with the neo-fascist threats of physical violence, which each year had accompanied the organisation of the parades, and had led many Romanian queer people to

decide not to attend, for fear of being identified. The NGOs proved not effective in tackling the significant problems of neofascism, homophobia and sexism that were characterising public space in the city. Furthermore, Woodstock shows how the Romanian government imported the tolerance discourse of the European Union, in order to police and contain social diversity within the NGOs' activities, without ever actively promote initiatives of social change and safety in public space that would tackle the whole Romanian population.

Barrientos *et al.* (2010) offer an interesting take on Pride Parades, drawing from the experience of Santiago de Chile. The authors are psychology researchers, and look at Pride Parades in an effort to understand how participants elaborate discrimination, violence and victimisation. Barrientos and his colleagues present a very interesting socio-geographic positionality of Chile in regards to LGBTQ issues: they include their country within the notion of a Western World, identified by a progressive advancement in the emancipation of queer subjectivities; then Chile is depicted as *part of* Latin America, and *different from* the Western World, in light of the presence of specific social factors that hamper further queer progress; finally, Chile is singled out from a general notion of Latin America, in light of many indicators that seem to show the country's tendency to a decidedly slow social change. Santiago Pride takes place in September, within the context of a series of national holidays that celebrate the milestones of Chilean democracy; the LGBTQ event, then, is integrated within a larger national social discourse. The authors connect the steady increase in Pride participation precisely with the democratic and anti-dictatorship discourse that loudly resonates in the Chilean September. By the same token, they highlight how the Santiago Parade has diversified itself over the years, by including groups and associations representing different stances over queer issues, and yet united by an overall anti-discriminatory principle, which is strongly connected to the simultaneous democratic celebrations. Still, the figures account for around 10.000 participants, a much lower turnout compared to other big metropolises and capital cities in the Western World. Barrientos and his colleagues note how the Pride crowd showed a very low presence of homosexual men and women over 25 years old, and/or with greater stability at home or at work: they connect these results to an unwillingness to face heavy repercussions due to public exposure. By the same token, the authors notice that the transgender population in the parade is usually the most diversified, as they constantly have to deal with public exposure. Conclusions remark a still widespread tendency to pass as heterosexual in a society that is perceived as heavily homophobic, where Pride Parades are not always effective in providing the queer population with a moment of freedom to overcome victimisation.

By carrying out a visual ethnography, Francesca Romana Ammaturo (2015) engages in a comparison of the experiences of Pride Parades in different cities around the United Kingdom and Italy, respectively. Ammaturo is interested in understanding how participants in Pride Parades rework issues of

homonationalism and of identity consumerism. By looking at the creative practices that Pride participants carry out during the marches – ‘hand-written posters, impersonations, anthem singing and ironic skits’ (Ammaturo, 2015, p. 20), the author captures the ambiguous relationship between the urge to be included in the nation and the protest for the exclusionary dynamics of national belonging. She appreciates how

The higher degree of institutionalisation of the LGBT movement in the UK seems to facilitate the ‘assimilation’ into nationalist and consumerist normalcy, as opposed to Italy. It can be argued that, at the local level, forms of resistance to the globalisation of sexual and gendered identities may exist and flourish, preserving the original radical allure of LGBT movements. At the same time, however, the logics of both nationalism and consumerism may catalyse the emergence of passive neoliberal sexual and gendered identities, leading to a reduced ability to use protest as an instrument of social change (Ammaturo, 2015, p. 20).

Cappellato and Mangarella (2014) develop a case study that centres on the participation in Pride Parades of Italian parents, who define themselves as accepting of their sons’ and daughters’ homosexuality. Their participation in Pride Parades reflects their view of the homosexual orientation of their kids that is based on a neat division between the private sphere, in which parents urge for their kids to be able to fully enjoy freedom and recognition, and the public sphere, in which they call for a context-appropriate performance of a non-straight subjectivity. There is a common cry, among the sample of parents, for the normalisation of their kids’ behaviour when they are in public, like in the case of Pride Parades; this generally refers to the toning down of sexual aspects, the avoidance of provocative attitudes, and the proper adherence to their gender roles. The two authors appreciate, however, how for these straight individuals heterosexuality is not an unchallenged social norm any longer, as they come to approach homosexuality not directly, but through the experiences of theirs kids. Moreover, by marching in the parades, these parents put forward a dynamic of *familisation* of rights in public space. Their presence in the marches shows that demands for sexual citizenship positively affect (traditional) family contexts; this way, they offer to the non-queer onlookers an easier grasp on the struggle of the queer subjectivity, through the socially more intelligible lenses of the family.

This overview of the literature on Pride Parades has highlighted some of the most relevant aspects of these urban phenomena: the challenge to spatial heteronormativity and the politicisation of the queer identity that comes out of the private sphere; the tensions between the queer-friendly branding of a city and its effective social progress; the multi-scalar levels intertwining in the goals, organisation and unfolding of a Pride Parade: its local settings and the transnational community that Pride appeals to and represents, in an attempt to positively influence the national legislative levels concerning LGBTQ issues. The issue of commercialisation has progressively become more and more crucial, as it highlights the problematic attempt to combine together social demands and

economic interests, especially once Pride Parades become fully integrated in urban strategies of branding.

After having identified some key features usually recurring when Pride Parades unfold, the debate has then progressively moved on to look at these phenomena with more relational and positioned approaches, by understanding Pride Parades as outcomes of the interaction between Pride as a widespread broad concept and urban experience, and the specificities that it assumes according to the different contexts in which the parades are organised. Enguix highlights how the specific connotations that a Pride Parade presents necessarily affect the extent to which queer subjects identify with it. Accordingly, I have then selected two case studies from Bucharest (Romania) and Santiago (Chile), respectively; these are urban contexts that do not fall within the notion of 'West', at least not entirely. I wanted to highlight how the organisation of a Pride Parade in non-Western contexts inevitably produces a confrontation between the socio-urban space of the city and the ideas of neoliberal progress and modernity that a Pride Parade can powerfully convey, especially when heavily commercialised. The two final case studies present references to Italian examples and deal with the delicate issues of homonationalism and the relationship between a public queer identity and traditional family dynamics. Waitt's article on Sydney's Gay Games represents a unique case study on a gay-connoted event with a 'mega' resonance, which showed how this type of event inevitably revealed tensions and different approaches to non-conforming sexual identities and communitarian belonging: some gay men interpreted the Games as an occasion to enhance gay athletes, according to a rhetoric for which in sports all differences are erased, because only performance matters; others assumed a more critical stance, by claiming that the notion of sport itself needed to be deconstructed as not neutral, as intrinsically shaped around the notion of an athletic, healthy, able-normed sexual body, which is extremely gendered, heteronormed and masculine, thus inevitably exclusionary for many.

The notion of *community* is a Pandora box in the social sciences, especially in queer and gender studies. One of the approaches to the notion of 'community' that has most informed this thesis is the *quasi-ethnic minority discourse* (Murray, 1979) that already came up right in the Introduction, which was long hegemonic in the way we made sense of queer identities, especially in their spatial configurations; since Stonewall, this discourse has very much informed identity politics and the agendas on sexual citizenship. Nowadays, the quasi-ethnic minority discourse is profoundly problematized by queer, transfeminist and intersectional approaches to gender and sexuality, which challenge its essentialist tones and question its construction of a political agenda centred on the notion of *sexual minority*. On the other hand, this thesis makes reference to the theorisation put forward by Gill Valentine (1995), who reinterprets Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation as an *imagined community* to make sense of the shared feeling, among queer subjects, of belonging to a transnational, loosely defined group, which is held together by the common

experience of identitarian trajectories in which sexual and gender non-conformities play a crucial role. Pride Parades are the manifestations of this global borderless community within an urban space that is inevitably inserted in specific political dynamics, and which belongs to a nation-state, the legislative actor that Pride Parades ultimately aim to influence. The notion of community rises to both inform and challenge the notion of citizenship, in the constant effort to achieve more inclusive forms of effective social equality (Plummer, 2003; Richardson, 2005). This was the main legacy that was attached to Rome's 2000 World Pride, the case study the thesis now turns to.

## CHAPTER 2

### ***Urbi et Orbi: a case study on Rome's 2000 World Pride as a Mega-event.***

#### **THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION AND METHOD**

For his analysis of Rome's World Pride, Pierpaolo Mudu (2002) introduces Marcuse's notion of *repressive tolerance* to tackle the relationship between Church, State and the LGBTQ movement in Italy. Repressive tolerance refers to a social setting in which there occurs no official articulation of either a neatly positive or negative stance towards an issue that is deemed controversial, like non-normative sexualities and gender identities; therefore, while *de jure* said issue is not tackled by any repressing policy or measure – hence it is tolerated –, *de facto* it is prevented to reach full disclosure and recognition. Mudu shows how the political and social debate that anticipated the Pride Week centred precisely upon the attempt to maintain a condition of repressive tolerance: rather than blatantly condemning the parade, the statements of many politicians and public figures, both from the left and the right wing, emphasised the inconvenience of its timing, of its outright insertion in the middle of the celebrations of the Holy Year. By framing their arguments along notions of decorum and respectfulness, many politicians intended to avoid political turmoil and guarantee the privileged position of the Church, in the firm conviction that it was also in the LGBTQ population's best interest to do so: by defusing an overt conflict with the Vatican, the significance of the World Pride could be more easily toned down, and ultimately the Pride Parade could unfold pretty undisturbed. This had happened both in 1998 and 1999, when Rome's Pride Parades, which were unmistakably anticipating the huge 2000 event, received very little media coverage and public attention.

Mudu interprets the World Pride as a successful break of the social mechanism of repressive tolerance: by exposing the Catholic Church's utter condemnation of sexual and gender diversity, the Roman activists organising the World Pride succeeded in inserting the LGBTQ issues in the national political agenda, in order to acquire visibility and full articulation. At the same time, writing in the aftermath of the event, Mudu acknowledged the preponderant influence of the Catholic Church on Italian society and politics, and reminded the readers that a one-time-event like the World Pride was to be interpreted as just the beginning

of a profound social process in which the LGBTQ population would constantly have to confront the power of the Holy See, and face the possibility of a return to a politically more reassuring condition of repressive tolerance.

Michael Luongo (2002) approaches the World Pride with a defined focus from tourism studies, in which the effectiveness of the event in the progress of queer social emancipation is conjugated with an assessment of the consolidation of the LGBTQ community as a significant commercial target for tourism in the capital of Italy. Luongo specifies that a LGBTQ tourist target is predominantly composed of white gay men with a middle-to-upper class income and, to a lesser extent, of lesbians with a similar socio-racial background; a mainstream notion of gay tourism refers to a specific sector of the LGBTQ community and does not problematize the inequalities that thoroughly play out within the community itself. Nonetheless, Luongo collects and works with some very interesting data related to the attendance of the Pride Week. In particular, he highlights how the global naming of the event in reality conveyed a strong process of Americanisation of the Italian Pride experience; in terms of foreign attendance, organisation of events and activities, and in general of the philosophy holding together urban space, political claims and the LGBTQ population, Luongo shows how the Pride Week was constructed around US models, and ultimately aimed at attracting visitors from across the Pond (and from Western countries in general).

By the same token, Luongo makes reference to the presence of activists from less developed countries, who were invited, encouraged and often also funded by the international committee to come to Rome for the World Pride; the organisation of workshops targeting precisely these activists was intended to provide a toolkit for political action in their own countries, and appeared to reveal an attempt to gather queer momentum on a global scale, according to specific American models. This philosophy discloses many complexities, especially as a large majority of the activists from non-Western countries shared a middle-to-upper social status that, on the one hand, did not render them truly representative of their queer compatriots, and on the other it intertwined their cry for emancipation with a desire to fully embrace a Western lifestyle. In regards to the contrast between American models and the specificities of non-American urban contexts, Luongo dedicates a section of his paper to highlight the different views of both American and Italian activists on the opportunity to create a gaybourhood in Rome; while the American activists held a generally positive view on the set up of a LGBTQ-connected space within a metropolitan area, their Italian counterparts were much more sceptical and revealed their social unfamiliarity with such urban artefact.

Lynda Johnston (2005) develops a case study on Rome's World Pride as part of a larger project on Pride Parades as catalysts for queering tourism, with the aim of highlighting how the rationale of the June 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations can take on different meanings according to the objectives their organisers are

aiming to achieve. In Johnston's book, Rome's World Pride is recounted along other Pride experiences happening in different areas of the world; however, much attention is obviously devoted to the confrontation with the Jubilee and the attempt of the Pride organisers to positively affect and alter the anti-queer stance of the Catholic Church. In her work, Johnston hints at a very crucial line of interpretation, that is, the dual nature of Rome as both a city of the West and a city that holds specific non-Western peculiarities, first and foremost its religious component. While the author encounters similarities between Rome's case study and other Pride parades across the Western World (like the set up of a Pride Park that was inspired by the Gay Village model), Johnston also appreciates how the Roman event did not hold a significant commercial dimension, as it lacked both heavy private sponsorships and the set up of a big entertainment machine for the Pride Week. This is in contrast with the strong Neoliberal commercial turn that other LGBTQ events, like the Sydney's Mardi Gras and the Auckland's HERO March, had already taken, as these successful annual appointments had turned into key tourism attractions.

Johnston specifies how the celebrations of the Catholic Jubilee did not leave much room for the establishment of a strong queer tourism platform; under many aspects, the Holy Year pretty much monopolised the incoming tourist flows of the eternal city in 2000; nonetheless, the worldwide queer event was successful and did manage to differentiate Rome's tourist base at least for its short timespan. Lynda Johnston informs the debate on Pride Parades and queering tourism by focusing on how queer subjectivities embody their differences in a way that can potentially challenge and affect the heteronormativity of urban space. In this regard, Johnston inserts Rome's World Pride within a larger framework that aims at queering tourism, and through that, reflecting upon non-normative uses of public space. She brings in Rose's notion of *paradoxical space*, in order to challenge the Self/Other dichotomy that is at the base of traditional notions of tourism. The concept of paradoxical space appreciates how

we can simultaneously occupy space that is both centre and margin, inside and outside. Pride parades represent just such a paradoxical space. On the one hand, it can be positive, empowering and supportive to be involved in a pride parade. On the other hand, parades can simultaneously be a site of danger where lesbians, gay men, transgender, bisexuals and so on can encounter a range of social risks and be subject to public abuse and social exclusion. (Johnston, 2005, p. 123).

Donald McNeill's (2003) analysis of the World Pride is inserted in a wider discussion on Rome as a global city. The author reflects upon the famous notion theorized by Saskia Sassen, and then problematizes it with alternative approaches to globalisation and modernity that take into account different factors, other than the economic ones, in order to appreciate and acknowledge the equally global status of other cities, and their significance in the international arena. McNeill is keen on emphasising that the global claims and

status of a city are always the product of precise political moves and discourses; therefore, in order to address the global status of the city of Rome, his article focuses on the two key figures who are supposedly the most entitled to exercise forms of power that can shape the narrative and image of the eternal city: the Pope and the Mayor. The article specifically delves into how both John Paul II and left-wing Mayor Francesco Rutelli tried to incorporate the Jubilee in the discourses they wanted to assert upon the city of Rome: while the Vatican's stance aimed at re-establishing the Holy City discourse around Rome in light of John Paul II's centralist political views, Rutelli worked to use the success of the Jubilee as a testament of his solid and effective urban leadership, which could also legitimise his upward political trajectory towards the political leadership of the country. In this context, the World Pride inevitably became a testing ground for the global discourses set out to construct the image of Rome for the new millennium. The 1984 revisions of the Lateran Accords had very much downsized the status of Rome as a Holy City, together with many other major steps towards the secularization of the Italian civil society.

McNeill interprets the World Pride as possibly one of the few, and very significant episodes in which the Catholic Church was directly challenged in its claims over Rome's public space by a demonstration tackling an issue – sexual diversity – for which the Vatican had steadily expressed its utter condemnation. In McNeill's account the World Pride becomes a proxy also for the understanding of the Mayor's position, whose mandates unfolded during a very tricky time, in which not only the upcoming Jubilee, but also the crush of Italian politics after Tangentopoli and the new national political scenario called for a redefinition of the status of Italy's capital city. McNeill draws attention on how Francesco Rutelli shaped his public figure through the rhetoric of the Mayor as *primo cittadino* (first citizen), in order to emphasise his bond with the urban collectivity; by claiming that 'the Mayor of Rome is the Mayor of everyone' (who lives in Rome), Rutelli constructed a discourse hinting at an urban universalism that, on the one hand, aimed at re-asserting the secular nature of the Roman government and leadership, thus not turning the Jubilee entirely into a form of urban revanchism of the Vatican. On the other hand, the same rhetoric worked just as perfectly to justify his progressive retreat of support for the World Pride, as the claims of a specific group are not universal by definition, hence they cannot expect to be endorsed by the 'Mayor of everyone'. In the end, even a leftist Mayor like Rutelli opted not to let the World Pride be officially endorsed by the city of Rome, which ultimately meant that the eternal city did not undergo much of a diversification in its image and discourse.

McNeill invites his readers not to underestimate the significance of the World Pride as a factor that successfully challenged the global religious discourse around Rome: during the Jubilee hype, the religious aura of the city could have very well remained undisturbed, and could very easily have covered up the very contested nature of Rome's urban space at the beginning of the new millennium. McNeill presents a very interesting analysis on the relationship

between the Catholic Jubilee and the World Pride by insisting explicitly on the performative nature of cities, as they are the privileged sites of multiple forms of spectacle. Some cities, then, become the naturalised stage for certain discourses that, though global in reach, still need a defined and recognisable space where to be rooted in and acted out; this is the case of Rome with Catholicism, just like all the other cities that hold a special significance for worldwide spread faiths and creeds (Mecca, Jerusalem).

As McNeill highlights, the World Pride interrupted the “urban choreography” the Vatican had set out for Rome 2000, which evidently had its core on Saint Peter’s and the other three Papal Basilicas. The hosting of a different kind of international convention, like the World Pride, which had been constructed in an antagonistic relationship with the Jubilee, was going to unfold in different areas of the city and receive significant media coverage. On the one hand, this would divert the public’s attention from the geography of Rome that the Vatican aimed to turn into the official one for the year 2000; on the other hand, the spots where the World Pride events were going to take place (Circo Massimo, the Aventino neighbourhood) could potentially acquire a specific meaning and imagery because of their association with the queer convention: this again could provoke a diversification of landscapes of meanings within the city of Rome, at a time when the Catholic Church was aiming at a renovated strengthening of the Holy City discourse. By the same token, McNeill makes reference to the role of the Municipal administrative machine in either supporting or undermining a specific political discourse, by either easing up or complicating important bureaucratic procedures, like the issuing of permits for the use of public space. In 2000, the bureaucratic apparatus made it particularly difficult to acquire such permits for political demonstrations, precisely in light of the Jubilee. The World Pride organisers, too, experienced such difficulties; according to McNeill, this rendered the success of the event even more significant, in the context of a city that was predominantly devoted to articulate a different kind of discourse for itself.

All the contributions that I engaged with provide stimulating takes on the Word Pride and offer interesting conceptual tools in order to acquire a thorough understanding of the event in the specific socio-urban context where it took place. Pierpaolo Mudu’s application of the notion of repressive tolerance sheds some light on the socio-political backdrop in which the World Pride was organised; Michael Luongo’s approach centres on Rome’s tourism industry at the beginning of the new millennium, and highlights the strong Americanising tendencies that played out during the World Pride organisation and development; Lynda Johnston tackles the dichotomy between Western and non-Western elements that appeared during the Pride Parade, and introduces the concept of paradoxical space in order to analyse how this type of events are able to challenge the sexual and gender normativity of public space; Donald McNeill inserts a reflection on the World Pride into a much larger debate on Rome as a global city caught between a religious discourse and a secular one.

However, some critical aspects and alternative paths of investigation seem to emerge from a review of the existing literature on Rome's World Pride. When acquainting myself with this literature, I could not help but perceive how some of the Anglo-Saxon authors were conveying a certain exoticism towards Italy and the Italian culture, which was not always thoroughly problematized; this becomes particularly evident in their approach to Catholicism and its role in the Roman context and the Italian culture. While Donald McNeill shows a thorough attempt to constantly reflect upon and deconstruct the role of the Church in Rome's urban context and in the Italian society (as this is the primary focus of his article), at times both Johnston and Luongo fail to grasp the social and political complexities that the presence of the Holy See within the Italian national borders entails. In his paper, Pierpaolo Mudu promptly clarifies the ever-growing discrepancy between the Church as an institution and Catholicism as a faith, which has progressively lost much grip onto the Italian society. This invites much carefulness when establishing causal relationships that way too easily make very loose references to 'Catholicism' in order to understand the social dynamics that in Italy are still hampering the LGBTQ political agenda. By the same token, Michael Luongo's references to the traditional openness of Mediterranean men to homosexual practices, citing indistinctively both the Romans and the Renaissance in a sort of cultural continuum, almost falls into a cliché form of gay mythology, and most importantly is based on an unproven essentialism and on an epistemological fallacy that applies contemporary notions of identity and (homo)sexuality onto completely different historical settings.

On a similar note, we could argue that the articles that specifically focus on the World Pride, in the end turn out to be primarily reflections on the Jubilee: Mudu's article delves into the strong centralist and 'territorial' aspirations of John Paul II's mandate, while both Johnston and Luongo account for the monopolisation of Rome's tourism industry by the Vatican during the Holy Year. As it is certainly paramount to read the two mega-events within the intimate relationship that they shared, a shift of focus leaning heavily towards the celebrations of the Holy Year runs the risk of reducing the understanding of the urban phenomena of Rome 2000 predominantly to the motives and moves of its most powerful actors, without fully appreciating the power of agency coming from civil society, which in an urban context is supposed to find its sublimation. The articles that I examined all pay little attention to the analysis of both the actual agency of the World Pride organisers and Rome's socio-cultural queer background that led to the hosting of such a massive convention. This way, the motives of the organisers run the risk of being oversimplified; in the papers that focus on tourism, for example, there are plenty of references to a LGBTQ tourism agenda pursued by the World Pride organisers, which did not emerge as a significant theme in the interviews that I conducted with them. This is not surprising, as at the turn of the millennium the Roman and Italian LGBTQ population had not yet become a significant commercial target with the

development of substantial pink economy flows – something that, on the contrary, was already underway in other Western countries, and that the authors of the papers might already have experienced and become conversant with.

And this is precisely how my case study offers to give a contribution. While not losing a grip on the socio-political background in which the World Pride took place, and more precisely on the delicate simultaneity with the celebrations of the Holy Year, the chapter borrows some important conceptual tools from the urban studies debate on mega-events in order to widen our view on Rome's World Pride beyond the short timespan of its actual organisation and development. The aim is to understand the World Pride not just as a sporadic episode, but rather as part of a larger process in which the event both developed out of a specific background, and in turn produced some effects. In particular, the case study aims at tackling the build-up of thicker communitarian dynamics among Rome's LGBTQ population, and how this new social setting favoured the hosting of the World Pride; consequently, the chapter articulates a discussion on the aftermath of the mega-event, and ultimately on its legacy in terms of the queering of Rome's urban space, community building and the push of the LGBTQ political agenda. As the papers on Rome's World Pride were all published in its aftermath (the most recent one is Johnston's, out in 2005), writing about the event almost twenty years later aims at providing a long-term perspective on its trajectory, by integrating the already existing literature with some reflections on the concluding dynamics of the hosting of the convention, and on the urban legacy that it has left to the city of Rome.

The case study adopts a qualitative methodology, which is based on in-depth interviews with key informants. This method appeared to be the most suitable to fulfil the investigative purposes of the case study, which intends to earn a deeper understanding of both the motives of the World Pride organisers, and of how this mega-event affected the LGBTQ communitarian experiences and networks of the city of Rome. Key informants were identified through a preliminary documentation analysis at the archives of Circolo di Cultura Omosessuale Mario Mieli, undoubtedly one of the most important LGBTQ associations of the eternal city. Documentation analysis indicated some of the most relevant personalities that had been involved in the organisation of the 2000 World Pride. In-depth interviews were, then, carried out with seven key informants, four cisgender lesbian women and three cisgender gay men, all in their forties to early fifties; in this text, their names have been changed so as to protect their privacy. Key informants were contacted through snowball techniques, which I was able to start thanks to some initial contacts that I had received from LGBTQ associations, mainly Circolo Mario Mieli and DiGay Project. Interviews took place in spring 2018, and mainly centred on the narratives and memories of the interviewees concerning the World Pride; recurring topics of discussion were: all aspects of the organisation of the event,

from the establishment of international LGBTQ networks to the relationship with the public administration in light of the Vatican's utter condemnation; Rome's LGBTQ scene in the nineties and its significance from a communitarian perspective, and in the development of the World Pride bid; the definition of the route of the parade, its urban articulation and the first-hand experience of the interviewees; the social and political aftermath of the event. In regards to the post-event phase, five key informants are (or were) also among the organisers of Gay Village, the second case study of the thesis. Their interviews also focused on the creation of Gay Village, the philosophy behind it and its many developments over the years. This second set of data will be more thoroughly presented and elaborated in the chapter that is specifically dedicated to the case study on Gay Village.

## ROME'S 2000 WORLD PRIDE: FINDINGS

### ORGANISING ROME'S WORLD PRIDE

It is certainly interesting that the InterPride foundation, the international association that supervises the organisation of the international Pride parades, decided to officially coin the term 'World Pride' in the year 2000, when the host city was Rome. The new global naming of the event was connected to the turn of the millennium, but more precisely, to the identification of a universally known antagonist: the Catholic Church, which in that same year was celebrating its Jubilee. Rome's World Pride cannot be fully understood without recognising the role that the Catholic Jubilee, and its magnitude as a mega-event, played in its developments (Luongo, 2002; McNeill, 2003; Mudu, 2002). All the interviewees agree that the single most effective factor that secured the success of Rome's World Pride was the Pope's public condemnation of the event during his habitual 12pm Sunday Angelus in Saint Peter's Square: John Paul II expressed his disdain for and disapproval of the World Pride, by defining it as an act of offense and disrespect towards the celebrations of the Holy Year. All the interviewees agree that the Church provided the best 'press office' the Pride committee could ask for (and would never have been able to afford), because with their negative claims, the Pope and all the Church representatives were able to reach a worldwide audience that felt indignant towards those very statements; there was a globally shared feeling that an act of utter discrimination and injustice was being carried out against the LGBTQ population. Such resonance could not have been expected, let alone achieved, had the Church not been a global actor (Clough Marinaro & Thomassen, 2014; McNeill, 2003). What this highlights is how the success of the World Pride was heavily connected to the materialisation of an opponent that boosted solidarity and action possibly more than any other factor. This is a feature that resonates with many significant examples of LGBTQ trajectories for social emancipation around the world (Mora Gaspar, 2016).

The organisation of a World Pride in Rome during the Holy Year revealed the intentions to gather a strong political momentum around the LGBTQ population. This confrontation elevated the status of Grazia, LGBTQ activist and main local organiser of the event, who automatically became the natural antagonist of an already very media-friendly Pope, thus rendering the coverage of the event even more effective through the structure of the duel, a classic tool of *spectacularisation* used in political communication and media coverage (Roncarolo, 2012). Grazia played this card quite shrewdly during the Millennium March organised by the Human Rights Campaign in Washington, D.C. at the end of April 2000. Such an invitation dramatically increased the sense of legitimacy for the Roman event. Grazia's speech was centred precisely

around the religious antagonism: she pointed at religions and creeds as forces of division and hatred among people; she then invited and encouraged everyone to come to Rome so as to be ‘an army of peace’, an eloquent war metaphor that channelled the rhetoric that queer people were fighting the good cause and were on the right side of History. Possibly, it was precisely in that moment that Rome’s Pride effectively acquired its worldwide magnitude and status.

Just like the Pope with his Sunday Angelus, in Washington Grazia addressed a crowd that she identified as her own community; just like the Catholic Church, the community Grazia was speaking to was international in kind, and worldwide spread. Accordingly, Grazia affirms that she knows what a community is because she was able to see it in America. The cooperation with international LGBTQ associations, like InterPride and the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), provided a solid and articulated structure that heightened a sound feeling of international communitarianism. The creation of a World Pride committee with an international staff secured both transnational connections and some learning possibilities from contexts that were more experienced with this type of events. Grazia travelled untiringly in the two years before the event, and was invited to other important LGBTQ events, like the World AIDS Day charity dinner in London. The endorsement of public figures that had publicly come out as gay, like George Michael and Ellen DeGeneres, was another factor that increased the sense of community and opened up more channels of visibility and reach for the World Pride. By the same token, Grazia associates this newly perceived communitarian feeling with the financial support provided by those that she calls the “rich gays”: Grazia and Lorenzo, who later joined in as creator of Gay Village, remarked in particular the case of entrepreneur Wicky Hassan, who donated an extremely generous and substantial sum that served to fund the organisation of the event and help extinguish the financial dues that had been accumulated. Grazia estimated that the event cost around 1 billion liras, that is, approximately half a million euros: for an event with a very limited duration, it was by all means a significant amount of money, which the committee would not have been able to afford without some very generous help. These new transnational communitarian developments resonate with Gill Valentine’s (1995) elaboration of Benedict Anderson’s notion of *imagined communities* in relation to lesbian networks and the LGBTQ community as a whole.

The networks where Grazia inserted the organisation of the World Pride did not just provide help and strengthen legitimacy; they also served as a learning experience. In my opinion, one of the most significant learning outcomes of the organisation of the Pride Parade was the set up of a Pride Park for the entire Pride Week. According to Grazia, all the non-Italian members of the organising committee, in their shared obsession with project-planning, suggested that the organisation of the event needed to include the set up of an area, both in proximity of the march route and permanent throughout the whole Pride Week,

that could serve as a point of reference for all the people arriving in Rome for the event; such delimited area should host all the Roman LGBTQ and friendly groups and commercial activities that expressed the intention to participate, thus creating a space where the community could be *seen*.

This idea was fairly new into the Italian scenario: the occupation of public space not just through genuinely political practices, such as an itinerant demonstration, but also with a prolonged and more permanent setting, which could allow the development of activities that were more cultural in kind, and could encourage people to enter and have a look. Featuring a Pride Park as an integral component of the organisation of the World Pride indicates a significant shift in the build-up of a LGBTQ discourse because it expanded the socio-political dimension that the march represented into a more communitarian understanding that focussed on a shared cultural and lifestyle patrimony, which everyone could get to know. The creation of a Pride Park served the purpose of providing an identity setting for the queer individual, and of making such an identity accessible and understandable to the non-queer. This is a dramatically radical shift for the Italian LGBTQ experience, which with the Pride Park officially starts to embrace a communitarian typology that is not rooted in its socio-cultural tradition, and hence it is adopted from the Anglo-Saxon world. Whether this process is a form of socio-cultural colonisation or not, there is little doubt that, when it comes to LGBTQ issues, the American models have imposed themselves as hegemonic all around the world, and have consequently influenced many other national LGBTQ experiences (Luongo, 2002). The creation of LGBTQ urban artefacts, like the Villages, is an important part of the contemporary LGBTQ experience; hence, the Pride Park introduced an element of modernity in Rome's urban and social context, at a time where the paradigm of the Gay Village was reaching its prime and was about to be successfully incorporated into the creativity models of urban growth (Florida, 2002; 2005). It comes as no surprise, then, that Pride Park is at the origin of what would later become Rome's Gay Village.

As already mentioned, the attitude of Rome's public administration and political government towards the World Pride can be described as a progressive retreat of support: the hosting of the event had initially been warmly welcomed by left wing Mayor Francesco Rutelli, who at first guaranteed the support and collaboration of the city's municipality. Such positive disposition had been formalised years before, in 1993, when the newly elected Mayor created an extraordinary administrative figure, the advisor to the Mayor on LGBTQ issues, to which long-time LGBTQ activist Vanni Piccolo was appointed. However, as Mudu (2003) points out and Grazia remembers, quite soon the Mayor seemed to turn to a misuse of this newly-opened administrative figure, through which he tried to manoeuvre and control the organisation of the World Pride according to a gradual retreat in enthusiasm for and support to the event: the Pride organisers began to be asked to tone down the character of the event, and ultimately to move it to 2001, in light of the overt unhappiness of the Holy See

with it. The relationship between the Pride committee and the Municipality of Rome deteriorated quite quickly: Rutelli revoked the 200 million liras the city of Rome had set out to finance the event, but was then pushed to secure them, together with an ease-up on all the bureaucratic procedures, by a major mobilisation of all the Italian political left; however, the Rome's official seal was not accorded, hence the city's sponsorship was not formalised. This is all the more significant if we think that, as Mayor of Rome, Rutelli had opened Rome's first official pride parade in 1994. By the wake of Pride Week, Rutelli's administration had revealed a weak and half-hearted endorsement to the event, let alone an unwillingness to overtly oppose the Church.

The unsatisfying political back up of Rome's Municipality was contrasted by the incredible turnout to the event; in particular, what impressed the organisers was the steady support shown by many heterosexual cisgender people. We might wonder whether the World Pride helped foster a change in the perception the public opinion had on this type of events, especially concerning their participation. The World Pride, with its significance, magnitude and escalating momentum is likely to have encouraged more and more non-queer people to publicly embrace the cause and participate in the actual demonstration, in light of a thorough understanding that the fight of a discriminated group is, by nature, universally liberating for everyone. Claudia was part of the organising committee and now works for Gay Village; in her interview, she emphasised the importance of a significant heterosexual participation in the Pride Parade:

I saw an ocean of heads; I saw couples with kids, coming from everywhere. We would talk to them, and they would say: 'I am here because I want my son to know that when he grows up he can do whatever he wants'. What an unforgettable emotion! Millions of people, an unexpected success, so unexpected because so many straight couples participated, too.

The attendance and support of many non-heterosexual people was in contrast to the homophobic threats that the organisers had received during the months prior to the event. The Questura designed a short and carefully guarded route for the march. Claudia recalled that the policing of the route evoked a sense of containment and control: the Questura's plan was to channel all the participants along the straight and wide avenue (approximately 1.5 kilometre-long) connecting Piazzale Ostiense (gathering point) to Circo Massimo (arrival point); however, the oppressive nuances of Claudia's memory are then contrasted with the liberating feeling provoked by the enormous turnout of participants in the parade: Claudia was marching at the forefront and vividly remembers how, when she arrived at the end of the itinerary and entered Circo Massimo, by turning around and looking at the myriad of people behind her, she realised that the people at the front had completed the route before those at the very end could even begin it; all the other interviewees remember similar anecdotes, too. Arriving at Circo Massimo was symbolically noteworthy, as this archaeological site is one of the most important spaces, in the centre of Rome, which are usually destined to host large-sized rallies; the occupation of Circo

Massimo consolidated a sense of legitimacy and public recognition. The parade was, however, denied to end at the Coliseum, as the organisers had first requested; nonetheless, a delegation was allowed to detach from the main march and make a symbolic arrival also at the most renowned monument of the eternal city.

## THE BACKGROUND OF THE EVENT

The possibility of hosting a Pride Parade in Rome, with an international echo and a high degree of success, built up from a specific background that, in the years before, had thickened the communitarian feeling and structure of the Roman LGBTQ population. We cannot talk about this social dynamic without acknowledging the paramount role played by the Circolo Mario Mieli and its clubnight, Muccassassina. The Circolo di Cultura Omosessuale Mario Mieli is the longest-lived, and possibly most important, LGBTQ association in Rome; Muccassassina is the clubnight that the Circolo organises in order to finance its activities. The Circolo was founded in the early eighties, while Muccassassina opened in the early nineties, and nowadays is still the most crowded LGBTQ clubnight of the eternal city, and in general one of the top parties around the entire metropolitan area. The birth of Muccassassina represented, *per se*, quite a dramatic novelty in the Italian context, for the LGBTQ political and entertainment realms had traditionally been quite separated from, when not overtly hostile towards one another. Muccassassina immediately became extremely successful, so much that it has had to change its hosting venues multiple times over the years, in order to accommodate the ever-increasing club crowd. The first national Pride Parade, which took place in Rome in 1994, contributed to boost its rising popularity. This way, the party quickly turned into a moment of visibility, which also strengthened a sense of communitarian belonging, while also cashing in a lot of money. Grazia estimates that every year Muccassassina managed to amass almost two billion liras, which is almost 1 million euros: these are astonishing figures for a weekly entertainment event with a LGBTQ connotation in an era when, at least in Italy, the gay commercial scene had not undergone a significant mainstreaming yet.

Grazia's arrival at Circolo Mario Mieli, and her subsequent election as President of the association, marked a crucial turning point. When she rose to the leadership of the association, Grazia introduced a highly managerial system of organisation, which aimed at structuring more efficiently the different activities of the group and the relative committees that dealt with them; more importantly, she set up a tight control on the Circolo's finances. With these beneficial changes, the Circolo Mario Mieli certainly grew in relevance and attractiveness: the success of Muccassassina made it so that more and more people were drawn to approach the association and become its volunteers; by

the same token, the association inaugurated its famous Tearoom, which has become a regular Sunday afternoon appointment, thus effectively offering a more communitarian moment of LGBTQ socialisation. The flourishing of the association allowed the steady development of paramount social activities; most importantly, more money could go to what is possibly the Circolo's main activity: providing home care to HIV and AIDS affected people.

While the spread of the disease produced a very tense atmosphere within the LGBTQ networks, it also gradually fostered a sense of mutual help and communitarianism. The Circolo started to provide an invaluable home care service for HIV-positive LGBTQ people in 1989, and later launched Muccassassina primarily to secure funds for the assistance to the ill. The significance of this service was such that the Municipality soon acknowledged it, and eventually also supported it financially. I think that this is a key element in order to fully grasp the evolutions of Rome's LGBTQ activism in the nineties: since the explosion of the HIV epidemic, the invaluable help provided by the LGBTQ associations to the public administration could not have gone unrecognised for much longer. Grazia vividly describes the significance of the homecare service provided by the Circolo Mario Mieli:

One of the biggest expenses of Circolo Mario Mieli was homecare assistance to the people affected with HIV or AIDS. At that time they were many; some families even abandoned them. So our volunteers would go and take care of them in their own homes, they would go food shopping for them etc. And this is something that was born precisely as a service provided by the LGBT associations, and it was recognised by the Ministry of Public Health and by the local administration; slowly they also started to finance it. The fact that the patients could be assisted in their own homes was acknowledged as an invaluable help.

The social significance of this service also facilitated a change in the public opinion's perception of the LGBTQ community, whose image started to be polished of some of its infamous stigmas. In this regard, Grazia reported that the episode that symbolically marked a positive change among the public opinion was the HIV-positive coming out of activist Rosaria Iardino, a volunteer at Circolo Mario Mieli, who in 1991 publicly shared a kiss on the lips with HIV-negative immunologist Fernando Aiuti, in order to show that the virus could not be transmitted through kissing. Grazia's political rise in this context accelerated this change in perception: she was a well-educated, high-status professional who was ready to pursue a structured political agenda. In her own words, she was not a 'professional faggot', neither did her image evoke the somewhat perverse, sexually deviant world that homosexuality had traditionally been thought to be. We witness the unfolding of a thorough process of *homonormalisation* that, though very risky and problematic, usually lies at the foundation of a classic paradigm of development for the contemporary and globalised LGBTQ mainstreamed process of Neoliberal emancipation (Bell & Binnie, 2004). One final aspect that is important to highlight in order to

appreciate the social trajectory that set the ground for Rome's World Pride was a new approach to the political and social issues concerning the LGBTQ community. For the first time, every fact or happening where a queer person was involved, or that had a queer connotation, even when not blatantly political, was thought of and presented as affecting the LGBTQ population as a whole. In particular, the Circolo Mario Mieli was prompt in taking action to honour queer victims of tragedies. The two most important cases that were mentioned in the interviews were the suicide of Sicilian gay man Alfredo Ormando, and a father's murder of his homosexual son in the Apulian town of Foggia.

Alfredo Ormando was a homosexual man who, in 1998, decided to take a train from his hometown Palermo to come to Rome and set himself on fire right in Saint Peter's Square; in his suicidal note he denounced the discriminatory attitude of the Catholic Church towards queer people, which intimately affected society and had made his own life miserable. Grazia and the whole Circolo Mario Mieli were extremely shook up by this fatal gesture, and decided to assist Alfredo until his death seven days later, after a week of immense pain. In the case of the Foggia tragedy, some activists of the Circolo Mario Mieli travelled to the Apulian town in order to attend the young man's funeral. They were not let into the Church, but after the service the victim's mother accepted their act of solidarity, allowing them to access the cemetery and lay a flower on the young man's grave. Claudia also mentioned the murder of a 16-year-old gay boy, whose corpse was found in the Caracalla cruising area, with his pants pulled down. It is in fact not surprising that both Grazia and Claudia included these episodes in their personal narrations of the reasons that led first to the organisation of the World Pride, and later to the creation of Gay Village. By giving a political queer meaning to these events, the activists certainly fuelled a process of community building based on the creation of a shared history, a collective memory with its own recognisable turning points and highlights.

In a way, the World Pride symbolically sealed this newly found queer communitarian perception because Rome's two most important LGBTQ associations, Circolo Mario Mieli and the local Arcigay section, collaborated in its organisation. Arcigay was the first group to advance the idea of Rome's candidacy, which was then embraced by the Circolo Mario Mieli, thus proceeding with the application. Grazia described this cooperation as a genuinely new circumstance, extraordinary in Italy, as the two associations decided to overcome their traditional antagonism in order to develop a shared bigger project. The preparation of the World Pride dramatically affected the life of its organisers. Grazia was not able to take a proper vacation for almost three years, while Claudia decided to quit her job, which she defines as one of the last full time tenured contracts in the history of the Italian job market, in order to dedicate herself entirely to the organisation of the World Pride. I think that such an abnegation did stem also from this newly-built communitarian feeling: like the soldiers on a battlefield fight for their motherland, the Pride organisers must

have felt that they were working for a bigger purpose, which ultimately was the improvement of the life of those they now saw truly as ‘their people’.

## THE AFTERMATH OF THE EVENT

The enthusiasm for everything that happened in the year 2000 came to a drastic turn of events in 2001, when the Circolo Mario Mieli faced troubles with the Fiscal Police, who was carrying out a thorough checking of the whole Rome’s club scene, eventually knocking on Muccassassina’s door; the Circolo Mario Mieli was accused of tax evasion and charged a huge fine. Muccassassina had not been officially made sponsor of the World Pride, thus its club nights did not enter the tax regime that applies to special events, ultimately overlooking any form of taxation. As a consequence, the Circolo faced huge economic problems, and also the perspective of a legal trial. As President of the association, Grazia found herself immediately under attack: she tried to defend herself by insisting that, though she was the President, she was technically just a volunteer of the association; she in turn started questioning the activities of the professional figures that were under a job contract with the association, who dealt precisely with finances and, she felt, had to be held accountable for the economic problems. The climate within the association quickly turned extremely tense, so much that Grazia’s contribution in the Circolo’s upward trajectory, culminating with the World Pride, started not to be fully acknowledged. She suffered forms of ostracism that ultimately upset and exhausted her.

The tension that escalated out of the economic problems and the possibility of a legal follow up sparked a much bigger debate on a most inevitable question: what next? Grazia wanted to continue along a trajectory of mega-events. She did not encounter a proactive enthusiasm, and felt that after the World Pride everything was falling back into a dull and ordinary meaninglessness. This scenario revealed the limitations among the team of people organising the World Pride: according to Lorenzo, the World Pride was a success, which was not determined by the community. He holds an extremely negative view on Roman (and Italian) activism, as he finds that it is mainly composed of people with no vision, who would get into an association, reach the peak of its leadership, and then occupy it for endless periods of time, in the hope of maybe getting some political appointment. This negative view is echoed in Anna Chiara’s interview, where she affirms that the World Pride was an opportunity that had to be ridden and it was not, due to the associations’ litigious attitudes between one another, which did not help achieve significant long-lasting results. Ultimately Grazia decided to leave the Circolo and founded a new association, DiGay Project, precisely with the intention of treasuring the legacy of the World Pride and continuing along a path of bigger-impact projects. The need for a more permanent project manifested unmistakably.

Around the time of the World Pride, Lorenzo, Anna Chiara and their teams had established themselves as reference names in Rome's clubhouse scene, representing a non-antagonist alternative to Muccassassina, which has always been more mainstream in kind. At the same time, Lorenzo too suffered a significant economic loss after the Pride event he had organised. Lorenzo and his team built up a high level clubnight with top house music djs, by importing the American format of the White Party (also mentioned in Luongo, 2002): it was LGBT-born, it was fresh and new, and had never been proposed in Italy. The initiative of Lorenzo's team was based on the specific assumption that many people would arrive in Rome from all over the World, and particularly from the United States, where house music had already thoroughly entered the LGBTQ clubbing networks (Peterson, 2011). There was a huge money investment, which however did not get compensated, as not enough people attended the party.

Lorenzo's experience is particularly significant as he is an entrepreneur whose main investments are in the production of LGBTQ-targeting contents. In his opinion, the hosting of a global class event like the World Pride had to be used as an opportunity to establish and consolidate the LGBTQ community as a strong commercial target in Italy as well, in a process where pink profit and political discourse could go hand-in-hand and benefit one another. According to Lorenzo, this proves the incapability of the leadership of the LGBTQ community to channel the high potential of the World Pride in a fruitful, effective and successful follow-up. So at the end of the World Pride, Rome's LGBTQ community was left with a significant economic problem that revealed a fragile political cohesion and a poor long-term vision, which weakened the political leadership at least in its main component: the Circolo Mario Mieli. Those who were at the leadership of the phenomenon, rather than jumping at this great opportunity, fell back into their insecurities and turned petty against one another; when they had a chance to upgrade themselves, they failed. Lorenzo calls the World Pride a failure, which however produced an important cultural change, thus paving the way to do more things and create new projects. In particular, private companies had acknowledged the existence of the gay target, and new possibilities for business were opening up: the gay consumer target proved to be potentially top spender, with its own specific organisation and aggregative capacity, which made it even fairly easy to tackle. All of these elements were spelled out in Grazia's letter of resignation from President of the Circolo Mario Mieli: Lorenzo read that letter, shared the majority of its points and decided to invite her to dinner and discuss what they could do together, parting away from the failures of the Pride experience, and building up from the good things that had come about from it. This is how Rome's Gay Village was born.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this section we aim at stimulating an interaction between the conceptualisation on mega-events and the findings related to Rome's World Pride, in an effort to assess how the World Pride actually acted as a catalyst for all the factors that in the 1990s had been adding up towards the build-up of a stronger communitarian sense and structure among the Roman LGBTQ population. In his work on conventions as mega-events, Hiller (1995) specifies that, in order to encourage attendance, convention organisers might plan to make up some 'packages' for the event, by assembling a set of advantages, services and opportunities that are collateral to the attendance of the convention, so as to render the multiple efforts of the trip more appealing and worth making. Even if packaging usually includes very practical items, I think that this concept can be read more loosely to indicate everything that confers to an event the inviting aura of something not to be missed out. And it is through the lens of packaging that we can read both the global naming of the event and, more importantly, the development of a discourse that revolved around the identification of an opponent: the Catholic Church.

As shown in the Findings, Grazia's speech at the Millennium March was articulated precisely on the idea that religions are forces of division and hatred: Grazia's invitation to come to Rome so as to be an 'army of peace' could be interpreted as a way to stimulate a moral imperative to participate in the World Pride, which automatically renders it an event not to miss out if you are queer. The branding of Rome's Pride as a global event appears to have aimed at encouraging the American LGBTQ population, in particular, to participate. Rome's World Pride was officially selected to be the EuroPride of the year 2000; it was only once the bid had been won that the event was branded as globally embracing. Grazia's speech at the Millennium March addressed a mostly American crowd, in the capital of the country that had witnessed the Stonewall riots and the election and assassination of Harvey Milk: in the late XX century the United States could already count on a significant LGBTQ history, which had rendered the community fairly powerful. We can also add Lorenzo's organisation of a White Party, a type of club night that aimed pretty blatantly at appealing a prototypical American gay clientele.

So packaging Rome's EuroPride as a World Pride through the stimulation of an open confrontation with the Church appears to be a move that would secure visibility, global attendance and political momentum. The new global naming looked heavily westwards, to the United States, where the community was already strong, both as a political entity and as a target of consumers. The coming together of a sound political agenda and a flourishing commercial scene would have inscribed Italy's LGBTQ population within a modern trajectory of

social emancipation, which appeared to be very Neoliberal in kind. However, the organisation of the World Pride cannot be detached from the general social background in which it developed. We have identified such background as the ensemble of factors that pointed at the articulation of thicker forms of communitarian networking in the Roman LGBTQ context. At the same time, certain forms of normalisation, which stemmed from the post-AIDS era and the raise to prominence of more ‘respectable’ LGBTQ figures, like Grazia, also pointed at the development of trends that would soon prove to be key in the integration of the LGBTQ issues in the political agendas all across the globe. This could all be associated with Hiller’s notion of *backward linkages*, and in general as the *pre-event* moment. Let us now try to understand the extent to which the World Pride succeeded in bringing forward the socio-political trajectory that the Roman LGBTQ population had been constructing throughout the nineties.

The World Pride was followed by a significant backlash with the huge fiscal problems that emerged in 2001. As Hiller (1998) points out, economic failure does not necessarily equate that the event was unsuccessful: like in the case of the New Orleans’ World Fair, in the long run the economic disaster assumed a secondary importance in comparison to the wealth in new and essential infrastructure that the city had acquired because of the event. So the fiscal difficulties per se, though undoubtedly not desirable, did not necessarily doom the World Pride to failure. What turned out to be more problematic were the consequences that the fiscal problems produced, which resulted in the quick deterioration of the promising political structure and momentum that the Circolo Mario Mieli had been building up all throughout the 1990s. The fiscal problems quickly produced a myriad of reciprocal accusations that inevitably led to the deterioration of the Pride committee, to the ostracism of Grazia, and to the return to separate paths for Circolo Mario Mieli and Arcigay. It also revealed a lack of vision among the activists, for whom this moment of tension did not turn into a bonding possibility, but rather in a moment of dispersion. Echoing Hiller’s work on conventions, we could go as far as saying that the Pride organisers themselves quickly turned the World Pride in an ‘intrusion’, rather than an opportunity to upgrade their political experience and change their urban scenario. Quite tellingly Lorenzo defines the World Pride as a success that was not determined by the community: such a strong statement acknowledges the significance of the event, while at the same time not recognising much credit to its organisers, and questioning their agency.

The massive participation in the parade deserves proper attention as a positive outcome; the presence of many non-queer people, especially, appeared to back up the claim that civil society was by then ready to endorse the struggle for sexual and gender liberation, thus critically challenging the stance of the Catholic Church, which was seen as a discriminating force. The World Pride appeared to be successful in making the LGBTQ claims more and more similar to a universal cry for equality and freedom, rather than the demands of a very

defined group that was perceived as alienated from the rest of society. Significantly, as we have seen, one of the first outcomes of this dramatic cultural change was the opening up of new economic possibilities: as Lorenzo explained, just a few years after the World Pride, important companies were creating advertising campaigns for their products that targeted specifically the Italian LGBTQ community, and were using Gay Village as a platform to reach this audience.

Gay Village certainly needs to be addressed as a remarkable outcome of the World Pride, as it was born precisely with the rationale of retaining the positive results of the mega-event, so as to build up a vigorous political and urban discourse around the LGBTQ population. Gay Village is the heir of the Pride Park, based on the notion that queer visibility had to become more permanent in urban space, through the set up of a space where cultural aspects related to queerness could be thoroughly articulated and made visible to a wider public. Hence Gay Village appears to be something in between a *parallel* and a *forward* linkage: on the one hand, it was not a necessarily expected outcome of the mega-event, but on the other it is a most emblematic and evident form of learning experience and legacy. As expressed in the Findings, the insertion of a semi-permanent queer-connoted artefact in Rome's urban space constituted an element of modernity.

To sum up, the outcomes of the World Pride can be considered generally mixed: on the one hand the visibility that the organisers intended to acquire was achieved and it was significant: the turnout to the event showed an important change in the public opinion's perception, which turned supportive of the struggle of the LGBTQ community; this also sparked interesting economic possibilities. These social and economic changes lay the foundations for a typical Neoliberal trajectory of LGBTQ emancipation, at the end of the XX century, when cities all around the world started to turn to sources of diversification of their image in order to revive their economic bases. In contrast, the political leadership of the World Pride, and in general of the Roman activism, deteriorated very quickly, thus proving to be unprepared to hold the strings of the legacy of this big event: the financial problems that arose after the World Pride revealed the unfitness of its leadership that was generally incapable to prevent the World Pride from becoming an isolated episode. Therefore, the World Pride ultimately did not result in the enhancing of the communitarian dynamics that had been building up in Rome in the 1990s, but rather in the demise of a political leadership that should and could have fostered the consolidation of a sound communitarian discourse, structure and organisation for the LGBTQ population, in an era that was witnessing the rise and political success of forms of neo-communitarianism with a profound urban base (Rossi & Vanolo, 2012).

As we have seen, even though the World Pride had a considerable success as an event per se, in terms of long-term legacy it was possibly not as successful; this

echoes Hiller's models of conventions as mega-events, and stimulates a reflection on the World Pride in relation to its obvious competitor: the Catholic Jubilee. The Holy Year, too can smoothly be thought of as a global convention with many mega-event characteristics, certainly more than the World Pride, for example in terms of urban adjustments. At the same time, the Jubilee was a very peculiar phenomenon, for it lasted an entire year: its main events were spread out throughout the months, but during the whole of the year 2000 the city of Rome maintained a mega-event hype. The specific characteristic of the Catholic Jubilee, however, is that it always takes place in Rome, for Rome possesses a Holy City aura; until the Holy See remains in Rome, the Catholic Jubilee is unlikely to be hosted somewhere else. There is no bidding process to acquire the hosting of a Catholic Jubilee: it automatically happens in the capital of Italy, and it is part of the discourse that constructs Rome as a holy place. This creates a very specific peculiarity for which, even though the Jubilee is an extraordinary event, it is taken for granted that, being the global centre of Catholicism, the city of Rome must be "naturally" prepared to host it: the fitness of Rome as a Jubilee host city is hardly problematized, because this is one of the main factors that makes it a global city.

John Paul II dominated Rome's Great Jubilee of the year 2000, with a public image that was media-friendly, world embracing and international by definition. The call for a Jubilee in the year 2000 was the apex of a pontificate that took the Pope all over the world, signalling the return to a stronger centralist power structure in the Church, revolving around the figure of its spiritual and temporal leader. By hosting the mega-event of the Jubilee the Pope was using a modern political tool to reassert his power. It is obvious that the Holy Year would affect the city of Rome more deeply than the World Pride, because of its size and volume, and the power of the Catholic Church; the World Pride was going to be an intrusion in the context of another mega-event. Recalling Hiller's (1995) work on conventions, we can attempt to evaluate to what extent the World Pride was perceived and treated as an intrusion also in the city of Rome in general. In order to do that, we need to look at how Rome's political leadership reacted to the clash between these two mega conventions. As we have seen, Francesco Rutelli's position in regards to the World Pride indicates a gradual retreat of support for the event, which culminated in the denial of both the economic contribution (which was later restored) and the city's seal for the event. Rutelli himself tried to minimise the importance of the seal, by conferring a merely symbolic significance to it (McNeill, 2003; Mudu, 2002). Nevertheless, symbolism can be quite powerful, and the absence of Rome's official seal from the Pride documents and posters conveyed the message that the city's administration was not granting its full endorsement to the World Pride.

Another aspect of the parade that is worthy of a closer look is the itinerary itself. The official narrative celebrates how the World Pride occupied Rome's urban space and arrived at the very centre of the city, and it rightly does so.

However, some considerations ought to be made. It has already been remarked that the itinerary was relatively short and closely guarded by the police, which to some extent produced a feeling of containment. However, it is possibly even more significant that, when arriving in proximity to the Coliseum, the parade had to make a U-turn and head back to Circo Massimo, thus not following a linear trajectory, and amplifying the feeling that the march had been circumscribed within a delimited area. Even though the parade unfolded entirely within the Aurelian Walls, hence inside the historic centre, the route passed through what is possibly the most isolated part of the inner city.

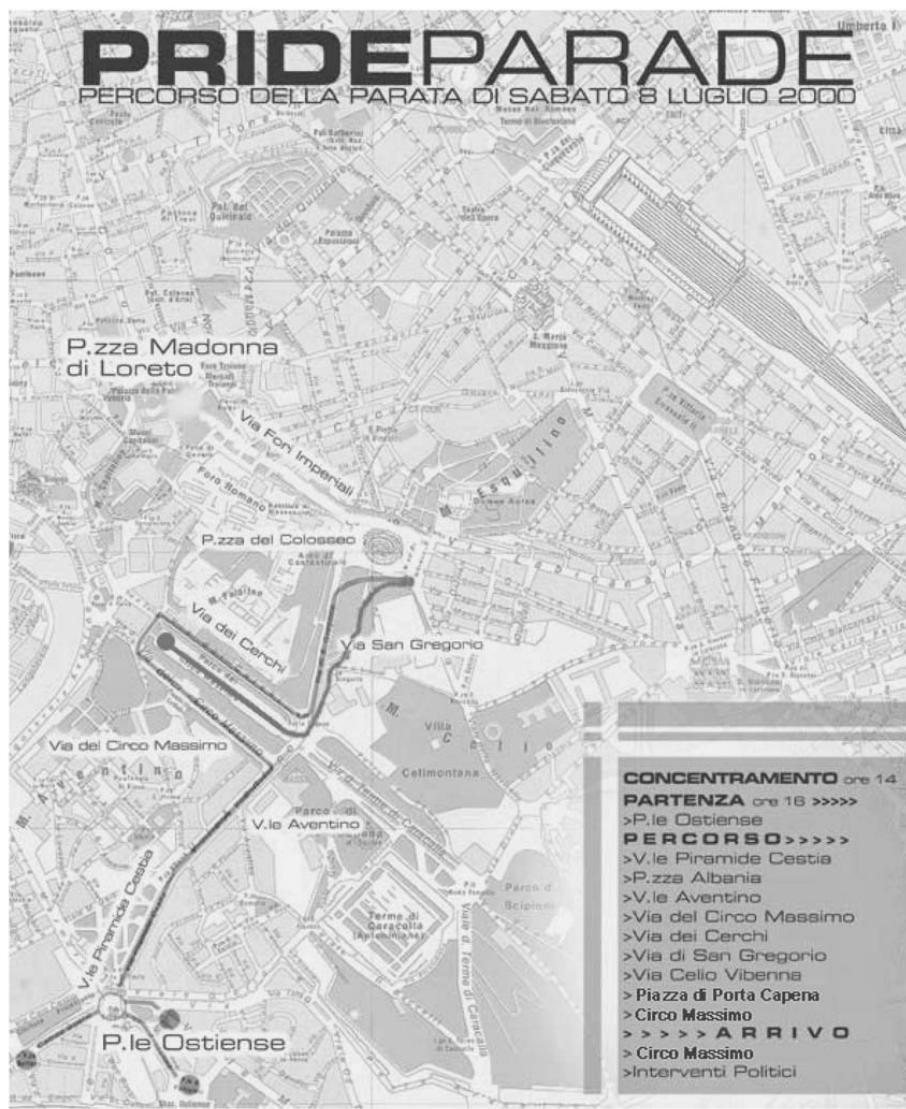


FIGURE 1 – Map of the route of Rome's 2000 World Pride Parade (picture taken from Mudu, 2002, p. 194).

The first part of the itinerary unfolded along a large avenue (Viale della Piramide Cestia, Piazza Albania, Viale Aventino), connecting Piazzale Ostiense all the way down to Circo Massimo, which is fairly busy and vibrant; however, the avenue is located in a very residential area, in a sort of small valley between two uphill neighbourhoods, from which it inevitably feels fairly detached. The second part of the route unfolded in the middle of the archaeological area: it circumnavigated Circo Massimo, then passed down the Palatino hill up to the Coliseum proximities; there it made a turn, climbed the Celio hill and finally invaded Circo Massimo. If we compare it to the current usual Pride route, which unfolds along some of the most vibrant and renowned avenues of the city centre, it enters the esplanade of the Coliseum and then into the Fori Imperiali, it catches the eye how most of the 2000 route went through areas that are pretty uninhabited or not destined to commercial activities. By no means I wish to diminish the significance of the itinerary, but it must be acknowledged that it was possibly more symbolic, rather than interactive with the city, hence reinforcing the interpretation that the World Pride was seen as a parade of “intruders” that had to be physically contained in an isolated section of the city. The denial to occupy the Coliseum esplanade furthers the perception of a clear attempt not to favour or foster any direct and effective association of the eternal city with the parade, conveying a notion of intrusion, in which the World Pride was seen as an event *in* the city of Rome, but not *of* the city of Rome. Finally, Rutelli’s timely embracing of the Catholic faith became charged with an inevitable symbolism (McNeill, 2002).

Lastly, I would like to also mention the remarks of Giuliano Amato, Italy’s Prime Minister at that time: in the midst of the controversies over the World Pride, Amato affirmed that the parade and its related events could not be cancelled because, in his own words, ‘unfortunately there is the Constitution’ (Mudu, 2002). Regardless of its most profound meanings, this statement reveals the intention to weaken the political potential of the World Pride, by trying to reduce it to a mere guarantee of the right of demonstration, which nonetheless was not to be intended as a form of endorsement by Rome’s and Italy’s political elite. Therefore, the World Pride was to take place ‘merely’ because it represented the implementation of a democratic right; at the same time it was made explicit and clear that the event would by no means succeed in changing the main narrative and image of Rome as the Holy City of Catholicism, and of Italy as a catholic country.

It is fair to conclude that the city of Rome approached the World Pride through what Hiller defined as an intrusion/reaction model, which resulted in the implementation of measures aimed at containing the event and its political meaning and outcomes, hence not interpreting it as an opportunity to more fully integrate it in the image and narrative of the city of Rome, in an effort to diversify it and render it more appealing to and inclusive of different social groups. The half-hearted support and retreat of endorsement of the public administration was coupled by the weakening of the leadership of the World

Pride after the event, which ultimately made it difficult to discuss, reflect and act upon the legacy of the event even from below, from the activist groups themselves, thus not fully exploiting the potential for change gathered by the World Pride.

The case of Rome's World Pride questions the extent to which a convention can effectively turn into a mega-event and be a successful one if the host city's leadership and elite is not proactively endorsing and supporting it. This is all the more complicated when it comes to handling and potentiating the legacy that said event can produce, especially if the socio-political significance of the event is such that it could potentially affect the traditional discourse and imagery related to its host city. More broadly, Rome's World Pride informs the conceptualisation and debate on alternative modernities and globalities (Clough Marinaro & Thomassen, 2014; McNeill, 2003), by providing a fitting case study that tackles what happens when a city with a thick 'alternatively global' discourse, like Rome, encounters what is considered to be an element of globalising modernity, like the path of social emancipation of the LGBTQ community. The alternative globalities conceptualisation has the merit to attempt to break down the very notion of a globalising modernity, which is partial and biased, so as to acknowledge the prominence of other cities that are just as global, but according to different standards. It provides an insightful perspective when it comes to reflect upon how globalising trends of modernity, with their mainstream neoliberal Anglo-Eurocentric vision, enter, affect and shape urban contexts that are global for different reasons. This is certainly a fruitful framework to approach the understanding of Rome, the capital of a developed Western country, which however retains a thick global religious discourse that usually does not qualify as 'modern'.

Finally, and perhaps even more significantly, the case of Rome's World Pride tackles the issues that arise when a city imbued with a profound 'alternatively modern' discourse resist, or at least does not endorse, the introduction of an element of modernity represented by a struggle for justice and equality; and more importantly, if it does so precisely in the name of its alternatively modern discourse. Without going in depth on the strong mainstreaming and neoliberal tones that have characterised the incorporation of the LGBTQ path of social emancipation in the Western dominant notion for modernity, nonetheless it cannot be overlooked that in the year 2000 a massive event like the World Pride did represent an invaluable breakthrough for the LGBTQ people all around the world, and all the more so in Italy; therefore, we can hardly define it exclusively as a grand manifestation of greedy *gaycapitalism*. The World Pride carried in itself the potential for a legacy of freedom, which was particularly significant, if not revolutionary, especially in the Italian context and in the urban space of its capital. Therefore, while it is certainly true that there exist different types of modernity, and modernity itself needs to be deconstructed as a concept in order to become more inclusive and just, Rome's World Pride offers a possibility to reflect upon what happens when the strong "alternatively modern" discourse of

a city produces implications that end up limiting the people's quest for freedom.

Almost twenty years later, Circolo Mario Mieli is currently campaigning to promote the bid of Rome as host city for the 2025 World Pride. As the Catholic Jubilee usually occurs every twenty-five years, the simultaneous celebrations of these two events would be likely to replicate the dynamics that unfolded at the turn of the millennium. Bidding once again for the same type of event offers ample room for interpretation, and inevitably poses questions on the extent to which the legacy of the 2000 World Pride was retained in the long run, both within Rome's urban space, and in the Italian political context. The failed opening of Gay Village in the summer of 2019, the difficulties of the Gay Street, especially in terms of obtaining full and permanent pedestrianisation, and the difficult political climate characterising today's Italy are all factors supporting the idea that a new strong queer momentum must be gathered. While the perspective of a new World Pride in 2025 might be exciting, it also raises certain complexities that need to be taken into consideration.

First of all, while in 2000 Rome appeared as a very appealing host city for the first World Pride in history, this might not necessarily be the case in 2025. From a genuinely commercial perspective, in the year 2000 a few cities around the Western world could already count on a flourishing gay scene, yet they were still extremely sporadic cases; most importantly, LGBTQ-inclusive legislation was only moving its first baby steps, and only in very few countries. Twenty-five years later, there are cities around the world in which gay branding and gay-commercial targeting have massively escalated: every city with globalising aspirations must develop a thorough gay-friendly programme. Accordingly, LGBTQ-inclusive legislation in some Western countries has definitely advanced, if one thinks that in 2025 Spain will be celebrating the *twentieth anniversary* of the law on marriage equality. In certain metropolitan and national contexts, what Lisa Duggan (2003) had sketched out to be the neoliberal way to gay liberation has already come a very long way, based on consumption and on legal recognition in heteropatriarchal institutions, like the possibility to marry a same-sex partner and to have a non-closeted career in the army.

It is safe to say that in some cities, like Madrid and Sydney, a World Pride happens pretty much every single year, not just in terms of attendance (Rome's 2019 Pride estimated a very significant attendance of around 700000 participants), but primarily because they have been turned into and consolidated as hallmark events of those metropolitan areas, which organise monthly programmes of spectacular activities around their annual Pride Parades. It follows that requirements for the 2025 World Pride will inevitably be highest and demanding, and the bidding process is likely to resemble much more that of the Olympics or the Expos. Rome and Italy lag way behind in every single one of the aspects I have pointed out. Moreover, I strongly doubt that a city could win the bid for the 2025 World Pride without the full support of its public administration, and possibly also of the nation-state, at least in the

Western world. And this is also another aspect to take into account: in 2025, a Roman bid for the World Pride would not stand many chances (and legitimately so) against potential bidding cities from the Global South presenting a powerful social agenda, as already discussed by Hiller (2000b).

The role and weight of the Vatican, clearly, will have to be considered. Issues on the use of public space and on the discourse and imagery presenting the city of Rome to the world are likely to appear again. While Circolo Mario Mieli is already promoting Rome's World Pride bid, the Catholic Church has not officially called the 2025 Jubilee yet. Unless in the coming years the Vatican modifies its official conservative stances on sexual and gender identities, the Holy See will inevitably oppose another World Pride, while reviving a Holy City discourse, especially because Francis is as popular a Pope as John Paul II and, should he still be the Pope in 2025, he would be extremely influential in affecting public opinion. In this potential context, thus far there is no guarantee that the official position of the city of Rome would be supportive of another World Pride. This brings me to a final point: should Rome host the 2025 World Pride, the legacy of this event, especially in its social and political demands, would have to be soundly planned out and effectively implemented. The political programme attached to the World Pride would have to be carefully articulated, and it would have to be radical and fearless, especially in light of the current resurgence of populist and fascist threats. In light of this, Pride itself as a social practice would have to be thoroughly reflected upon; the strong commercialisation of this type of events simply must not suffocate the radical political significance that Pride must assume, especially in our current political context. Should Rome host the World Pride in 2025, the issue of its political legacy would simply be crucial.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Gay Villages, gay consumption and the centrality of the body in the production of knowledge: some theoretical frameworks.**

#### **GAY VILLAGES AND GAY CONSUMPTION**

While the political premises at the aftermath of the World Pride were certainly not the most promising, as already anticipated, a most significant outcome of this queer mega-event was Gay Village. Gay Village can be considered a direct legacy of the World Pride because it originated from the coming together of Grazia's activism at Circolo Mario Mieli, and Lorenzo's entrepreneurialism in Rome's gay clubbing scene. Both Grazia and Lorenzo felt that the unprecedented visibility that the Italian LGBTQ population had gathered with the World Pride could open grander possibilities in terms of both political claims and pink profits. Gay Village represents the first clear example of a LGBTQ artefact, with an unmistakeable commercial nature, which is inserted in Rome's public space. As the name suggests, it was inspired by the Village model, which at the turn of the millennium started to be successfully applied in more and more cities, as the emblematic tool to foster and encourage gay-branded consumption. Chapter Three offers an overview of the literature on the Village model and the related consumption practices, so as to highlight some conceptual tools that will be guiding the analysis of Rome's Gay Village.

I think it is important to start off this conversation by clarifying that gay socialisation and homoerotic desire had been exploited for (or attached to) capital accumulation long before the Village model became successful and widespread worldwide. In this regard, a reference to Michael Brown's (2000) paramount work on the closet is on point: Brown's book aims at giving a physical spatiality to the mechanism of the closet, by looking at its functioning at the individual, urban, state-national, and global levels. The case study that Michael Brown presents to discuss the *urban* closet deals with forms of capital accumulation that are attached to homoerotic desire: the case study on Christchurch, New Zealand focuses on the flourishing economy of parlours for gay sex, which are clustered in the historic centre of the city, yet invisible to those who are not in the know. Brown argues that, in order to survive, the

circuit of homoerotic venues relies heavily on this invisibility, because the homosexual stigma requires discretion and anonymity among both businessmen and clients: were the venues publicly visible, the numbers of clients would drop, and the demise of this economic investment would be most likely. Evidently, the owners of the parlours have no interest in claiming forms of visibility in the urban space; accordingly, they also specified that with their businesses they held no interest in carrying out forms of identitarian and political gay activism. The territorial clustering of the parlours, then, did not turn into forms of communitarianism or urban visibility. Twenty years later, Michael Brown's work remains profoundly significant because it constantly challenges the readers to deconstruct how heterosexuality is socially *and* physically normalised in space. Therefore, a discussion on the Village model needs to kick off with an appreciation that, by rendering visible the economic flows that revolve around the LGBTQ community, these urban artefacts operate a social manoeuvre that visibly breaks the normalised heterosexual and cisgender hegemony. The Village model represents the attempt to give pink profit a political meaning, and to render consumption a social practice of emancipation.

Nowadays, there is agreement within the academia that the concept of Village refers to an urban area, with a defined LGBTQ connotation, which is usually recognised by the public administration and inscribed within its long-term strategies of branding and citymarketing. The term *Village* was coined after New York City's Greenwich Village, South of 14<sup>th</sup> Street, where Downtown meets Midtown Manhattan. Precisely fifty years ago, on the summer night of June 28<sup>th</sup> 1969, during yet another police raid at the premises of the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar between Christopher Street and Sheridan Square, the queers attending the venue decided that they had had enough: Sylvia Rivera threw her legendary hill shoe against the police, guerrilla and street turmoil ensued in the following days, because the queers reclaimed their right to exist, and to freely occupy the space of Greenwich Village, New York City's *gaybourhood*. The Stonewall Riots are universally regarded, or at least narrated as the symbolic origins of the contemporary LGBTQ movement. As depicted in my short reference, these riots were urban by definition, as they moved primarily from claims over a specific territory, which had assumed an unmistakeable and unofficially acknowledged gay connotation. Greenwich Village met all the requirements that M. P. Levine (1979) identified for his notion of *Gay Ghetto*, a social and urban construct that was modelled after the racial ghettos of the American metropolises, and which interpreted the queer subjects as segregated sexual minorities.

As mentioned at the beginning of the thesis, Amin Ghaziani (2015) refers to this historical moment as the Coming Out Era, and he identifies in the *gaybourhood* its emblematic feature. Over the second half of the XX century the connotations of the *gaybourhood* significantly changed: while its main tenet always remained the same – it is an urban area that is carved out as a space that guarantees a larger degree of freedom to the non-heterosexual, thus recognising the heteronormativity of the broader urban space – it is possible to identify a

trajectory that progressively abandoned the notion of *ghetto* and embraced the one of *village*: while the ghetto is charged with an imagery of (self)seclusion, the village evokes a *locus amoenus*. This socio-linguistic (and socio-cultural) transition has been thoroughly interpreted in light of gentrification studies, which have promptly identified the LGBTQ population, and in particular the gay men cohort, as a very appealing target for profit in various urban markets, from residential to commercial (Castells, 1983; Lauria & Knopp, 1985; Knopp, 1990). A discussion on ‘gayntrification’ falls outside of the scope of this thesis; for the purposes of the present work, it is important to acknowledge that the current Village model is certainly inspired by the gaybourhood and LGBTQ neighbouring dynamics, even when it does not develop out of a residential area with a significant LGBTQ population. The Village model, in fact, is an urban artefact that aims primarily at stimulating gay-branded revenues.

The social and political victories that the LGBTQ community has been able to achieve in many urban and national contexts over the past decades have promoted a significant positive change in public opinion and mentality, which in turn has had an impact on some local administrations that have started to actively support the creation of gay villages or even to plan it from scratch, like in the case of Manchester’s Canal Street (Binnie & Skeggs, 2006), especially since the early 2000s, when someone ‘gurued’ to them that gays were among the most important factors for economic success. With his theory of the creative class, Richard Florida (2002; 2005) provides a universally applicable recipe for outstanding economic performance; this is to be founded on the ‘3 Ts’: talent, tolerance and technology. While talent and technology are pretty much self-explanatory and point directly at the need to set up a knowledge-based economy, tolerance indicates that cities must become welcoming of difference. Tolerance is quintessentially exemplified by an open attitude towards the LGBTQ community, as sexual orientation is regarded as the ultimate taboo challenging contemporary society. With the help of colleague Gary Gates, Florida constructs a specific Gay Index, showing how the *friendliest* cities are also the ones performing better in terms of growth and economic development; the Gay Index is coupled with a Bohemian Index, holding pretty much the same characteristics. A friendly attitude and an alternative scene contribute to the ‘buzz’ of a city, its vitality and liveability, which is ultimately what attracts the creative class.

Florida’s theorising presents evident fallacies and has been widely criticised, with Jamie Peck (2005) at the forefront. The success that it has obtained, however, is indicative of what cities around the world are currently confronting. With the crisis of the Fordist-Keynesian socio-economic model, public administrations, and cities in particular, are urged to switch to entrepreneurial strategies in order to attract investment and tourism. The gay village must be interpreted in the light of this compelling economic necessity: it fuels the pink economy, thus opening up new channels of capital accumulation; more importantly though, the village is the reification of gay consumption and it puts

out the image of a tolerant and progressive city, which this way earns the right to compete in the international arena for the attraction of the creative and cosmopolitan class (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2013; 2017).

The paradigm of the village points to a sort of Neoliberal emancipation through consumption, which presents many critical aspects, like the thorough processes of *homonormalisation* (Duggan, 2003). The concept of homonormalisation refers to the discourse and set of practices that single out sexuality as the only divergent characteristic of the non-heterosexual individual, so as to play it down while heightening and strengthening the resemblance to the heterosexual counterpart (Duggan, 2003; Rinaldi, 2015). What might at first sound appealing, is in reality a very tricky game that inevitably sets up different degrees of acceptability for the non-heterosexual individual (Nast, 2002a; 2002b). Sexual identities and manifestations that are considered too divergent from the norm are discredited as ‘exaggerations’, while influential rhetorical discourses that portray the gay man as a ‘good citizen’ (Rossi & Vanolo, 2012) or promote a ‘straight-acting’ and ‘straight-looking’ attitude (Sibalis, 2004) become socially hegemonic. The homonormalisation paradigm that often unfolds in the village is tightly connected to a social construction of non-conforming sexual identities that is heavily shaped around gay men and the imagery that they convey. As different authors have pointed out (Binnie, 1995; Valentine, 1995), the very concept of pink economy revolves almost exclusively around the male homosexual, who is more inclined towards territorialisation and towards frequenting a targeted commercial scene for socialisation and partner-hunting. The literature on other cohorts of the community, first and foremost lesbians, shows how their socialisation relies mainly on alternative patterns (Valentine, 1995).

The gender barrier poses many obstacles to the fruition and full enjoyment of the village by non-male attendants. Paradoxically, the literature has shown how straight women have started to frequently attend the village during their night-outs, for the latter provides a safe environment where they do not have to fear harassment. This has implications, because as both Kitchin (2002) and Binnie and Skeggs (2006) point out in their analyses of Manchester’s village, it could progressively attract an increasing heterosexual (male) population, less likely to accept the dynamics of the gay village. Work by Petra Doan (2007) has been drawing scholarly attention on the experience of the transgender population in urban space. Doan focuses primarily on the complex interactions of transsexual people within areas that are identified as LGBTQ; she finds that ‘although queer-identified spaces offer a certain degree of protection for gender variant people, such spaces are still highly gendered and produce high levels of harassment and violence towards this population’ (Doan, 2007, p. 57). This highlights how within the LGBTQ community there exists a hierarchical discourse, in which sexual orientation is accorded predominance over issues of gender identity. On the other hand, authors like Hemmings (2002) have started to highlight the long-neglected space of bisexuality. Research on the topic has

revealed the unique position of this sexual identity in space: bisexuals are likely to be exposed to a twofold form of discrimination, both in the general heteronormative space, and also within LGBTQ contexts, where they are often looked at with scepticism, suspicion, or mockery.

Just like gender, also class and economic status are paramount issues in the context of the village. In fact, the idea of the pink economy, which is male by definition, stems out of a rooted stereotype that associate gay men with high incomes. As we have seen throughout the text, homosexual men often enjoy a privileged economic situation; however, factors like the recent economic crisis and a more widespread tendency to come out, have deeply affected the gay male population (let alone the female and transsexual ones), which resembles less and less such ideal prototype. Therefore, since the village is a main attraction in the city, it becomes pricy, thus less and less affordable for people who are not economically well established (Barrett & Pollack, 2005). Other traditional social stigmas are also at play in the context of the village, like race, but also age, disability and illness (primarily AIDS and HIV). The latter ones are very often neglected within the LGBTQ community, for they pose a very strong challenge to the eroticised body, which is at the centre of the male homosexual identity. With all these social barriers at play, and with a strong homonormalisation discourse, the village is very picky in the non-normative gender and sexual identities that it welcomes, and challenges very little the heteronormative space. Space itself becomes subject to very strong regulation, in a process that has been named *purification* (Bell & Binnie, 2004). Once a designated gay area enters the entertainment machine of its city, strict norms and regulations concerning hygiene and decorum start being carefully reinforced, thus often challenging the very distinctive feature of the gay village: sexuality.

The gay village celebrates a sexual freedom that is not necessarily benign towards public displays of overt eroticism. The purification of space tends to neutralise some historically traditional features of the homosexual culture, like outside cruising; as we have seen, strands of the LGBTQ community that embrace assimilationist approaches tend to distance themselves from cruising, as well as from non-standard sexual practices (*Ivi*, p. 1810). The sexual policing on the public space of the village does not mean that sex is not present; sex is commodified and entrenched within the saunas or the darkrooms and playrooms of the clubs. Sex is not seen, but rather perceived thanks also to a vividly arousing publicity of such venues, which heightens the appeal of the village. The commodification of sex and its retrenchment in private venues reproduce the social barriers that have already been highlighted: first and foremost, there are strict barriers of gender, for women and transsexuals are usually not allowed in such premises, and there hardly exist similar businesses that cater to them; there are barriers of class and income, because entering saunas and clubs is rarely free. All the other barriers, related to age, disability, illness, race may come into play because the sexual imagery surrounding the

sauna or the darkroom may provoke a sense of uneasiness and unfitness, which ultimately produces an excluding social pressure (Sibalis, 2004).

This paragraph has deconstructed the artefact of the Village as a liberating space for all queer subjects. It has highlighted how the promotion of gay-branded consumption in clustered areas of a city is connected to policies that aim, on the one hand, at stimulating the consumption of a supposedly high-spending target, and on the other at reinforcing the appeal of a city by using gay-friendliness as proof of open-mindedness, progressiveness, coolness. Going beyond ‘all that (quite literally) glitters’, the paragraph has unveiled the political and socio-economic technologies that carefully shape the prototype of the desirable queer subject; class and income, sexism and gender identity, race, illness as well as the way we look and the way we act are all at play. In the meantime, public space is purified from homoerotic activities due to notions of hygiene, decorum and cleanliness, and sex is retrenched and commoditised in private venues in which lovers become customers looking for lovers. The literature on the Villages reveals how a LGBTQ target of consumers is a social construction that carries in itself many problematic aspects, and inevitably privileges high-income white cisgender gay men, who are certainly not representative of all the queer subjects (Nast, 2002a; 2002b).

The Village model seems to show proof that we are shaping cities that are more and more *sexual*, and less and less *erotic* (Bell, 1995). The legendary eroticism that the urban lifestyle traditionally conveyed rested on the possibility of an encounter with and experience of an unknown Other. The city (centre) was the spatial context where social control would loosen up, in opposition to the strictly regulated life in the suburbs, or residential areas in general. The neoliberal sexual city seems to be channelling the potentialities of this eroticism according to different discourses: the Villages show cities that are most interested in the urban representations of difference, rather than in enhancing the agency of the queer subjects to put forward different, more sexually liberated ways to experience, narrate and imagine urban space. The strong regulation of sex and its disappearance from public space leave unchallenged notions of decorum that are intrinsically heteropatriarchal. While the ghetto was an attempt *from below* to carve out portions of public space in utter defiance of heteronormativity, the Village is officially recognised *from above*, but still remains a circumscribed area in an otherwise heterosexually normalised urban space. The Villages often work to consolidate and widen the discrepancy between the accepted representation of the LGBTQ community and the actual positionalities of the queer subjects themselves.

One might legitimately wonder of what use is ‘yet another’ case study on a Gay Village. As already remarked previously along the text, the general aim of this thesis is to challenge the predominance of case studies and models on the relationship between urban space and queer subjects that originate in a hegemonic socio-cultural and geo-political area, and are then exported all

around the world, with a claim of universal applicability. Case studies from urban contexts that do not fall into the notions of ‘West’ or ‘Global North’ have already highlighted how the adoption of the Village model can be interpreted as a form of cultural colonialism, creating havens of Western neoliberal freedom (often for tourist purposes), which are often disconnected from, and not fully enjoyed by the local society. However, as Kath Browne *et al.* wrote in a call for papers for the session ‘Sexual(ities that) progress?’ at the 2017 meeting of the American Association of Geographers:

Geographical imaginations of ‘progress’ often rely on the construction of a homogeneous and antediluvian Global South – an imagination that erases both the ‘achievements’ of activists therein and the continued injustice, violence and oppression in what are imagined as the heartlands of progress in the metropolitan Global North<sup>4</sup>.

A case study on Rome’s Gay Village presents a sound opportunity to understand how a consolidated urban model of gay-branded consumption was developed in the Italian context, which is fully integrated in both the notions of West and Global North but, as already anticipated, has traditionally struggled with forms of overt, and not ephemeral queer visibility in public space, as well as with a communitarian understanding of the queer subjects.

Secondly, I think it is time that scholarly attention goes back to look at what goes on in spaces of gay-branded consumption. Case studies on Villages around the world usually came out when these phenomena were either starting to develop or reaching their climax, as they represented a significant novelty within their urban contexts. We know little about what happens in these artefacts when they become old, unfashionable, or passé. I got intrigued in Rome’s Gay Village precisely because, as soon as I settled in the eternal city, whenever in a conversation I would hint at this summer festival, everyone, straight or queer, would reply that Gay Village ‘is not for gays any longer’; yet, in 2017 it was still extremely successful. Therefore, I was curious to investigate the social dynamics of this gay-branded space that, at its sixteenth edition, seemed to have pretty much disillusioned the population it claimed to target.

Accordingly, research on urban artefacts of gay-branded consumption seems to have become out-dated within academia, too. Several reasons can account for this: firstly there is a problem of timing. The main literature on the topic flourished between the second half of the nineties and the first decade of the new millennium, and it responded to the need to make sense of the social dynamics of the Village model, and its successful replication in more and more urban contexts. At that time, the explosion of the creativity paradigms, which fully integrated gay-friendliness among the key factors for urban growth, inevitably stimulated many scholars to critically engage with these artefacts.

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<sup>4</sup> I received the call for papers by an email of [CRIT-GEOG-FORUM@JISCMAIL.AC.UK](mailto:CRIT-GEOG-FORUM@JISCMAIL.AC.UK), on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016.

Secondly, the development of different kinds of spaces, labelled post-gay (Brown, 2006) or queer-friendly (Gorman-Murray & Waitt, 2009), which were not heavily gay-branded, and whose dynamics were new, more nuanced and articulated, inevitably drew scholarly attention away from the ‘classic’ Villages. Thirdly, the notion of gay seems to have become quite problematic within academia. As I am giving the final touches to my thesis, an interesting conference at the University of Brighton (UK) is precisely discussing ‘Gayness in Queer Times<sup>5</sup>.

Inspired by the works of Michael Brown (2011) and Matthew Sothern (2004), I think that nowadays, at least within the academic circles, the notion of gay is often used not just to indicate the cisgender male homosexual, but most importantly, *to remark his privileged social position*, in contrast to other more vulnerable queer subjectivities. The notion of gay often feels charged with precise middle-class, white, able-normed, homonormative nuances that pretty much put it in a binary opposition with the intersectional queer subjectivities. I am not trying to imply that all of the above is not true, because very often it is; rather, I am suggesting that scholarly work has grown more and more disinterested in gay-branded spaces not just because they have become outdated artefacts, but also because this label – the ‘gay’ label – has come to assume certain connotations for which today it is not deemed fitting to grasp the intersectional complexities that are currently (and finally!) the priorities of the queer academic agenda. As research kept on unveiling the profoundly normative dynamics that are at play in gay-branded spaces of consumption, a political distancing from this type of artefacts might have produced also an intellectual disengagement from them.

As a proud gay man, I deem it unacceptable to just surrender the notion of gay to the wills of heteronormativity, homonormalisation and capital accumulation. I think that there is a need to reclaim this notion and to go back to a full appreciation of its social ‘otherness’: for many gay men, even in the most progressive countries, coming out of the closet is still a very problematic process; gay men continue to be frequently beaten up, harassed, molested in private as well as public spaces, no matter how white, middle-class, consumerist or ‘mainstream’ they are. By the same token, for as much as they have become out-dated, the Villages and all the other gay-branded spaces for consumption still exist, and often remain fundamental tools through which cities construct their LGBTQ agendas. I think that academia needs to keep on monitoring, engaging with, critically reflecting on gay-branded spaces of consumption *precisely because* they might put forward representations of and discourses around the LGBTQ community that while becoming predominant, we progressively cease to identify with. Let us also not forget that these mainstream

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, check out the webpage:  
[http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/re/cappe/calendar/ctsg-and-cappe-conference-gayness-in-queer-times?\\_ga=2.15843446.1309577795.1561015032-1904420295.1560890686](http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/re/cappe/calendar/ctsg-and-cappe-conference-gayness-in-queer-times?_ga=2.15843446.1309577795.1561015032-1904420295.1560890686)

discourses are also the ones that most easily reach those sectors of the society that are less equipped to carry on a thorough reflection on sexual and gender identities and positionalities. In short, we simply cannot give up on gay.

And this is why I think that conjugating the analysis of a gay-branded artefact, like Rome's Gay Village, with Robyn Longhurst's emphasis on corporeality can be an exciting scholarly move. By appreciating the body, the corporeal experience as legitimate sites for the production of knowledge, Robyn Longhurst provides inspiring conceptual tools to move beyond a city of representations, and deconstruct the physical and spatial dynamics that constantly neglect and discriminate the queer body, even in gay-branded spaces.

## ROBYN LONGHURST'S WORK ON CORPOREALITY

This general idea about the necessity, or better, the usefulness of looking at the physicality of a space and of reflecting upon the dialogue or clash between discourse and materiality was extremely significant when I came across the work of Robyn Longhurst on the centrality of corporeality in geographic thinking. With her work on pregnant women, Longhurst (1999) attempts to put the body at the centre of the scholarly focus, and more importantly as a key factor in the production of space. The focus on corporeality advanced by Longhurst stems out of the observation that bodies do not (always) have the fixed boundaries that are socially assigned to them: bodies possess fluidity, viscosity and a material openness because they leak, they seep, they take in and expel other "matter". The case of pregnant women is particularly telling because women who are carrying a pregnancy or have a new-born experience more decidedly the fluctuations of their bodily materiality, when their breasts are milking, when they suffer morning sickness and nausea, or simply because they have to pee more often; their bodies are less easily controllable, because their matter, their physicality very often changes, challenges or breaks the skin boundaries in which social control contains a body: this corporeality requires space. In light of this, Longhurst appreciates how the pregnant body is often treated as a body 'with a condition', and deconstructs the common practice of 'giving advice' to future mothers as a mechanism of social surveillance over a body that is considered to be simultaneously risky and at risk.

Giving advice represents a way to keep the pregnant body within its clear-cut boundaries, by avoiding and/or regulating as much as possible leaks, seeps, and exchanges of matter with the outside. This social practice is often likely to convey and reiterate an exquisitely gendered idea of what is expected of a woman: Robyn Longhurst highlights how giving advice to a pregnant woman automatically sets up a cognitive system that identifies the advice itself as the best interest of the future child; therefore, if the pregnant woman does not follow the advice, she automatically becomes enemy of her future child. In this dynamic the pregnant woman becomes a subaltern subject in the relationship with the child, because ultimately providing a progeny is what is expected of her. A very interesting section of Longhurst's work deals with the common practice of touching a pregnant belly. By growing a belly, the pregnant woman augments her matter, her physical presence in space; at the same time though, her belly becomes a social object, and people, even strangers, may easily feel entitled to touch it and invade the physical space of the pregnant woman. The social significance of the pregnant belly conveys the idea that motherhood is what is expected of women who, by carrying a pregnancy, are correctly developing their social function.

In this way, Robyn Longhurst (2001; 2005) shows how a focus on the materiality of the body can inform feminist geographies. She addresses the traditional, Cartesian notion of a space that is constructed through a rationality that celebrates the superiority of the mind over the body. The dichotomy between mind and body, though narrated as neutral and universal, conveys social and spatial notions that are gendered, raced, sexed and carrying all other forms of social stigmas. Men have historically retained power over the production of knowledge, therefore the mind has traditionally been constructed as the masculine term of the dichotomy; by contrast, women have been associated with corporeality because of their imposed mothering and caring roles and their forced detachment from intellectual work, a social condition that constructed them as ‘not fully rational’ selves. Robyn Longhurst treasures the long-standing feminist tradition that has criticised this dichotomy, in the effort to reclaim a production of knowledge that would not be entirely male-dominated. At stake there is always the presumption of neutrality: feminist thinking has already unveiled how, ‘in the absence of any particular body being specified, a white, masculine, self-contained body is presumed’ (Longhurst, 2001, p. 16). Neutrality is always shaped so as to privilege the powerful; the construction of public space follows precisely this rationale: it claims a neutrality that is universally welcoming, when in fact it is shaped on sexist, heteronormative, racial and many other socially discriminating privileges.

This leads Longhurst to a thorough reflection on positionality, the acknowledgement of the individual, contextual and social characteristics that make up the specific standpoint from which a researcher develops her production of knowledge. Positionality is a most powerful tool for challenging the claims of universal neutrality of the scholarly work; it defies the idea of an omniscient researcher, by understanding the production of knowledge as a relational process that the scholar develops with her object of study. Appreciating positionality has turned out to be an invaluable tool for grasping how the subjects of a study interact with race, gender identity, sexual orientation, class and all the other social features that a researcher may embody. The relationship between body and embodiment is central in Robyn Longhurst’s theorisation. The notion of *embodiment* constitutes a consolidated conceptual tool in the social sciences nowadays, particularly in those disciplines that centre on a discussion on space and spatiality, a dimension that produces and reproduces heteronormative, sexist, racist, able-normative and other social privileges and stigmas. Working on embodiments represents the attempt to rekindle the relationship between mind and body, by placing social categories into relational contexts that reveal how they are created, embraced or contested by the individuals.

Robyn Longhurst (2001; 2005) acknowledges the significance of embodiment and develops a critical approach to this notion that does not intend to overcome it, but rather to widen it up. Longhurst points out that while, by definition, the notion of embodiment consolidated the significance of the body in the human

experience and its intellectual understanding, this conceptual tool does not always succeed in fully integrating the corporeal physicality and materiality into its theoretical understanding. The notion of embodiment tends to see the physical bodies as solid and defined masses of matter, with clear-cut boundaries that distinguish them from one another; even more significantly, embodiment tends to treat bodies as a *tabula rasa* that is shaped and codified by social constructions (gender identity, race, sexual orientation, dis-ability and the like). The notion of embodiment is, in fact, intimately connected to approaches of social constructionism. Robyn Longhurst calls for a widening of this notion through a fuller appreciation of the corporeality of the body: if embodiment is not intimately connected to the physicality of the bodies, it risks replicating the rationalist dichotomy of ‘mind versus body’, and all the traditional power structures that it conveys.

If embodiment does not appreciate how non-normative non-male bodies are constantly contained and controlled, it will never succeed in modifying the ways in which space is produced, and it will never be able to liberate those bodies that are most negatively affected by the rational space. Longhurst highlights how feminist and queer geographers have often avoided addressing the materiality of the body in order to avoid the possibility of misunderstanding their focus on corporeality with forms of biological supremacy, which could back up essentialist stances. In reality Longhurst calls for an integration of this materiality within a social and intellectual discourse; working on bodies does not dismiss embodiment, but rather it aims at making sure that this notion fully includes their corporeality: bodies are codified and shaped by gender, class, race, sexuality, ability and the like; yet they also leak, seep, eat and expel, and this physicality, too is paramount to understand them as political spaces. There is a need to break a certain prudery that dismisses intellectual and scholarly work on the body in the name of notions of tidiness and decorum that, once again, attempt to stigmatise corporeality as vulgar, and not worthy of academic attention. This is, yet again, a re-establishment of the supremacy of the mind, with everything that it entails. As Robyn Longhurst affirms:

The close(t) geographies of the body challenge some of the dominant constructions of knowledge in geography. Specificity seeps into generality, a politics of fluidity seeps into a politics of solidity, and a lived messy materiality seeps into cerebral knowledge. Perhaps thinking, writing and talking about bodily fluids, abjection, orifices, and the surfaces/depths of specific bodies can offer a way of prompting different understandings of power, knowledge and social relationships between people and places. (Longhurst, 2001, p.135).

I want to conclude the articulation of this theoretical framework with some personal comments. The necessity of opening up new approaches that could enrich a social constructionist notion of embodiment was thoroughly discussed during the INTIMATE Summer School organized in Coimbra in May 2018. The Summer School centred on the notions of *monster* and *monstrosity* and welcomed different approaches to the topic, from feminism, to queer and Crip

studies on disability and the able-normed body. In some of the informal conversations happening during the breaks and social activities, more than once we discussed whether we could possibly have reached the theoretical limits of the notion of embodiment; more than being critical towards working on embodiments, the question we posed was: ‘What more can we say about it?’. Some ground-breaking lectures during the Summer School proved how there is still a lot to be said, precisely if we put the body at the centre. The lecture by AG Arfini was incredible as she showed us how her body is both her political space and her means of knowledge production: by assuming hormones without any medical guidance, she is changing her body in ways that reject a medicalised neoliberal discourse on transgenderism, thus defying all systems of social surveillance that could fall over her identity. On a different note, the lecture by scholar Joacine Katar Moreira, a black woman with a speech impediment, challenged pre-established social notions of who is entitled to speak the knowledge, and who is not. I remember how, in the peer discussions we would have after the keynotes, quite a few times we reflected upon pain, the physical hurting of the body: while we all agreed that the notions of disability and illness are products of specific discourses that define what is an able and healthy body, we did wonder how we can make social and theoretical sense of a body that, because of a illness or of a disability, hurts, it produces pain. These ideas all resonated with me when I was reflecting upon my experience at Gay Village.

To this experience I also want to add the production of knowledge that in the past years in Rome I saw, witnessed and experienced within the networks of Ni Una Menos, and all the other queer transfeminist, or supportive groups and collectives. I do not intend to refer to these social platforms in order to start a discussion on queer transfeminism: this is not the scope of my work, and there are people, in both academia and activism, who are better equipped and more entitled to do it than me. I simply wish to remark that these are the social platforms where, in the past years, I have witnessed a continuous effort to never negate the significance of the body, by reuniting under the same sisterly struggle all the subjectivities that are traditionally neglected. Every year the Ni Una Menos movement takes millions of women and queer subjectivities to the streets and squares of many cities around the world, in order to denounce male violence. The Women’s Strike on March 8<sup>th</sup> is yet another ‘socially corporeal’ practice because it calls women to remove themselves from their places in the productive and reproductive system. All transfeminist queer movements share a strong, genuine urban dimension, because they refuse to neglect their physical presence in public space, and the right to appropriate it freely and fearlessly. Two self-organised feminist spaces in Rome, Casa Internazionale delle Donne and Lucha y Siesta, are currently facing the very realistic risk of being evicted from the buildings that they have occupied and transformed in safe spaces for all women and queer subjectivities; this proves how a supposedly rational top-down planning over the city is ready to erase those places that were born to cater to the most vulnerable subjectivities.

One of the most interesting features that I noticed while frequenting many of the transfeminist queer spaces around Rome are the so-called ‘talking walls’: big posters hanging from the walls that spell out the codes of conduct that attendees are required to abide by, in order to make sure that everyone who walks in feels safe, free and comfortable. This constitutes an actual, practical attempt to queer space, by tackling its heterosexist neutrality and defying all forms of social hierarchies. Assessing whether these practices are effective or not does not fall within the scope of this work; however, I deemed it necessary to acknowledge the production of knowledge that in the past years has emerged from activist practices, in the attempt to develop political discourses that are able to hold together (urban) space, social embodiments and physical bodies. The relationship between academia and activism can sometimes be tricky, and much reciprocal diffidence may run between the two parts; just like activism can sometimes be sceptical of the social impact of scholarly work, academia can at times fail to recognize the role of activism in terms of knowledge production. In my personal experience, a theoretical framework focused on the centrality of the body could simply not end without a reference to the production of knowledge that queer transfeminist activism has achieved in this regard. Many of the few things that I have learned about the body have come from witnessing political practices.

## CHAPTER 4

### Village People: an ethnographic study on a LGBTQ urban artefact.

#### INTRODUCTION

Macho macho man  
I gotta be a macho  
I gotta be a macho man  
I gotta be a mucho mucho,  
macho macho man.  
I gotta be a macho.  
*(Macho Man. Village People, 1977)*

Gay Village is a summertime event, lasting approximately three months (June to September), which takes place in Rome. Starting in 2002, the event has just closed its seventeenth edition. Every summer Gay Village manages to attract an audience of about 400000 people, thanks to its impressive programme of events, shows and club nights. The event was created in light of the success of Rome's World Pride in the year 2000, which led the organisers to imagine a more stable and (semi)-permanent LGBTQ presence in the urban space. Since its birth Gay Village has been itinerant, having been hosted, so far, in four different locations; from 2008 to 2017, year in which I developed my fieldwork, the festival continuously took place in Parco del Ninfeo, a public park in the EUR neighbourhood, in the Southern section of the city of Rome, within the Grande Raccordo Anulare (G.R.A.) highway ring. The park is located in the North-Western section of the neighbourhood, close to the underground B line (EUR Magliana station, six minutes away on foot), and delimited by Viale Cristoforo Colombo, a crucial traffic corridor in Rome's metropolitan area, on its Eastern border. EUR SpA is the shareholding company that manages all the monumental, artistic and environmental patrimony of the EUR neighbourhood; the company is owned by Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze (90%) and by Rome's municipality (10%). During the summer EUR SpA rents out the Northern section of Parco del Ninfeo to seasonal club and entertainment venues: hence the area becomes vibrantly populated at night.

After seventeen editions and an ever-increasing success, Gay Village has now

established itself as a main event in the *Estate Romana*, the 42-year-old municipal initiative that fosters the organisation of leisure, entertainment and cultural events around Rome's metropolitan area from June to September. Nonetheless, Gay Village has grown to become an event so big that the funding accorded by the Municipality is minimal compared to its costs; Gay Village benefits mainly from the system of fiscal ease that Estate Romana plans out for its selected activities. Since its very birth in 2002, Gay Village has been sponsored and developed by DiGay Project, a LGBTQ activist association, whose founder and honorary president is interviewee Grazia, who is the *conditio sine qua non* of Gay Village: she is part of the Main Board of the event, together with interviewees Claudia and Lucilla, and entrepreneur Mauro Basso; they are the original founders of the event. All the aspects of every edition – from the creative process to communication, to the actual construction of the place – are organised by the Main Board and by the people that work for them.

The case study presented in this chapter focuses on the *sixteenth* edition of Gay Village, during the summer of 2017; it was called *Fantàsia*. Each and every year, in fact, Gay Village picks up and develops a theme, ultimately becoming a sort of 'concept event'. *Fantàsia* is a clear reference to the novel by Michael Ende (1979) and homonymous 1984 West German film *The NeverEnding Story* (*Die unendliche Geschichte*); the theme of the 2017 Gay Village edition was not the story itself, rather it was articulated using the story's imagery. A team of five people developed the theme; they were often referred to as *giovani creativi* (young creative people), for they all have experience and expertise in the fields of art and entertainment. The sixteenth edition of Gay Village marked a change in its creative direction: the *giovani creativi* in fact replaced former director Vladimir Luxuria, who nowadays is probably the most famous transgender person in Italy; she has had political appointments (she is a former Parliament deputy) and is now building up a sound career as a TV and media personality. Gay Village Fantàsia opened on Thursday, June 8<sup>th</sup> and closed on Saturday, September 9<sup>th</sup>; it was open all weeks in between, on three nights: Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, from 7pm to 4am. Two extra dates were set up, respectively, on Wednesday, June 28<sup>th</sup> (Pride Day) and on Monday, August 14<sup>th</sup> (Foam Party on *Ferragosto* Italian national holiday). This chapter presents and discusses the data and information that I gathered during my participant observation *in situ*.

Data was collected during an ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted using mainly participant observation (Cardano, 2011), with some informal interviews and the analysis of some documentation related to Gay Village, and particularly to the Fantàsia edition. Fieldwork started in mid-May and ended in Mid-August; I also intended to attend the club nights during the two September weekends (the closing ones), but I was ultimately not able to do so. From mid-May till June 8<sup>th</sup> I conducted a participant observation on the construction site of the village, which had been officially opened on May 6<sup>th</sup>. During this first timespan I also attended the casting of the dance crew (May 16<sup>th</sup>), the first municipal open

session for the examination of all the projects submitted for Estate Romana (May 24<sup>th</sup>), a presentation party thrown by one of Gay Village's sponsors (May 24<sup>th</sup>), and the official press conference, which took place within the venue itself (June 6<sup>th</sup>). When Gay Village officially opened, I participated in nineteen club nights: four on Thursdays (including Opening night), seven on Fridays, and eight on Saturdays. I was accorded permission of entrance by the organisers, who provided me with two VIP Cards that allowed me access to the premises for all the regular nights (no extra dates, no drinks included, no access to *privé* areas). After a few observations that I started around aperitivo/dinner time, arriving on site before 8pm, due to the undeniable scarcity of people (even though entrance was free till 9pm), for the remainder of the season I would usually arrive around 9.30pm, in time for the beginning of the *preserale* programme. Over the course of the season, I was able to access the *privé* areas on three nights. With only three exceptions, I was not accompanied for the club nights. My participant observation was structured in two different ways: during the observation on the construction site, I was 'uncovered', and revealed my identity and purposes to the staff; this was necessary in order to gain access to the premises. Observation on the construction site was inspired by 'shadowing' techniques, for I would follow the staff members around and, when possible, pose them questions on the activities they were carrying out. On the other hand, during the club nights I acted as if I were a regular client, as part of the crowd; I would wander around the village and engage with whatever was going on, while taking notes on my mobile phone. I never revealed my identity to other customers, nor to other staff members whom I had not been introduced to during the period at the construction site.

## **ROME'S GAY VILLAGE: FINDINGS**

### **THE CREATIVE AND MATERIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GAY VILLAGE**

As already mentioned, from 2008 to 2017 Gay Village took place in Parco del Ninfeo. While visiting the park also outside the site of the village, I immediately noticed its strong sexual connotation, proven by the dozens of used condoms, empty packages and used tissues that I would constantly come across all around the fenced area where Gay Village was being constructed. The stationing of a prostitute on the sidewalk next to the park inevitably points at the idea that the park is often used as a site for (heterosexual men's) paid sex. In order to verify whether the sexual resignification of Parco del Ninfeo also has a gay connotation, I briefly searched the web and did find references to homosexual cruising. Though I was not able to make observations during the night, a couple of daytime walks around the park did show the presence of homosexual cruising activities. The set up of Gay Village, then, carves out a fenced space from a park with significant sexual activity; the question is whether or not it is integrated in this sexualised resignification. Right next to the village, still within Parco del Ninfeo, there is a theme park called *Scuola del traffico* ('The School of Street Traffic'): during spring and summertime children and school kids attend it in order to learn about street codes (signals, rules) in a playful way. The close proximity between Gay Village and Scuola del traffico, which are separated only by a tiny narrow path, in my opinion produces a conformity between these two open-air venues that appears to be oppositional to the sexy atmosphere of the park, because of the childhood factor. Scuola del Traffico houses a few dogs in its premises; their kennels are situated right on the corner where the narrow path, facing Gay Village, begins. The tiny path, squeezed between the fences of the two venues, could very easily become attractive for people wishing to perform illegal activities (sex in public space, drug use, etc...); the presence of the dogs, however, renders it significantly more uninviting.



FIGURE 2 - Empty packages of condoms and tissues left on the ground at Parco del Ninfeo (picture taken by the author on May, 10<sup>th</sup> 2017).

In addition, the beginning of the summer entertainment season corresponds to a thorough policing of all the area from the metro station to Viale Cristoforo Colombo: on every night that Gay Village was open, a police van would be parked on the right side of the village entrance, and others would be located along Via delle Tre Fontane and Viale di Val Fiorita, the street corridor delimiting the North end of the park. The nocturnal presence of the police determined the disappearance of the female sex workers, who would however return during daytime. To this I also associate the arrival, on one night, of a Red Cross van, stationing right next to the police at the entrance of Gay Village: volunteers would offer club-goers the possibility of getting a free, immediate-response hepatitis test. This medical and sanitary element, in accordance with the other ones, seems to confirm the idea that, during the summer, the Northern section of Parco del Ninfeo undergoes a process of normalisation, which seems to aim particularly at undermining the sexualised resignification of the area.

The setting of the park was fully enmeshed in the creation of the world of Fantàsia, the land where everybody can be oneself, and is free to express one's own nature. Accordingly, '#Loveyournature' was the hashtag that accompanied the month before the opening, keeping together both a reference to the open-air green space, and to individual freedom. Nature was the key element of this year's Gay Village venue, which for the first time was entirely constructed as a scenography. The walls surrounding the village area were all covered with large

posters reproducing the same esplanade in the park where Gay village was located; a white ‘Gay Village’ writing in the centre of the posters hardly stood out from the pictures. Within the village itself, posters and ornaments were all reproducing leaves and ivy plants; the pavement was all covered with artificial green grass carpeting, and big purple inflatable plastic mushrooms were located in different spots of the village, symbolising that the place was a natural, yet magic world. The concept behind it was that Parco del Ninfeo was itself Fantàsia, so all the scenography of Gay Village aimed at connecting the club site with the natural space all around it. The outer side of the entrance walls was covered with posters picturing a destroyed, dark and dismal world, which people would leave behind once entering Fantàsia, a re-emerged dreamland where everybody is free to be who they are.

The choice of the 2017 theme marked a difference from the past editions: as Grazia and the other creative professionals explained, up to the previous year the Gay Village themes had always tried to connect to a specific current issue, especially if related to the LGBTQ community: for example, in 2016 the theme was ‘College’, a reference to the so-called ‘gender ideology’ and the related psychosis on it entering the school programmes. In the words of the organisers, in 2017 there was a willingness to move away from overt references to current issues, so as to focus more on the development of a creative vision. Both Grazia and Simone Tulli (one of the five *giovani creativi*) specifically stated that Gay Village wanted to avoid direct references to Rome’s political situation, even though the village was intended as a liberated space within the *Urbe*’s metropolitan area. Simone explained that, in creating the 2017 concept and venue, he was inspired by some music festivals around the world: he mentioned *Tomorrowland* in Belgium and *Ultra Music Festival* in Miami, USA. These two festivals are worldwide famous and do not have a LGBTQ connotation. The containers that would later house the bars at Gay Village all had colours that, when put together, formed a rainbow flag: they were all repainted in green, in tune with Fantàsia’s natural theme. There was a shared perception, among the organisers, that the time had come for Gay Village to go beyond its LGBTQ label, promoting the idea that it was time to abandon all (sexual and gender) categories and embrace full freedom.

Grazia acquired even more centrality during the 2017 Gay Village edition, because details concerning her personal life reached public and media attention. During the previous winter, in fact, it was revealed that she is currently in a long-term relationship with renowned actress Meg, who was participating in *L’Isola dei famosi*, the Italian version of the ‘Celebrity Survivors’ reality show format. Meg, who had previously been exclusively in heterosexual relationships, came out during one of the most famous programmes of mainstream television. The couple became overnight famous nationwide, just a few months before the opening of Gay Village. It is hard to determine whether this boosted publicity for an event that already had a consolidated fame; what is certain is that, since then, Meg has become fully incorporated in the imagery of

Gay Village. The couple was constantly present during the club nights, both in formal appearances (coming up on stage to interact with the guests and the crowd), and in their casual hanging out around the open-air venue; this certainly conferred to the village a flavour that could be associated to a mild form of celebrity-spotting (Ricci, 2011). As a friend of mine commented when she accompanied me to one of the club nights: ‘Meg is probably doing what any girlfriend would do: hang out at the club where her partner works’.

The ‘power couple’ factor is important for it underlines two significant aspects concerning the organisation of Gay Village: on the one hand, the family dynamics, and on the other the village’s tight connections with mainstream culture. As for the former, it almost goes without saying that the people who work at Gay Village tend to consider it much more than just a regular job. Simone, who often gets jobs in different parts of the world, explained how, whenever he gets a call from Gay Village, he leaves any other prior work commitment and goes back to Rome; he defines himself as ‘Gay Village’s straight son’. An informal chat with Valentina, co-head of the bars and beverage committee, provided me with some significant insight in this regard. Valentina shared that the village literally becomes the staff members’ daily life during the summer months: most of the people who work at Gay Village are, in the meantime, continuing their other regular jobs; they do not do it for the money, but just because they care about it. Some people become involved in the organisation of Gay Village because of their relationships with the actual organisers: for example, this is the case of Mario, Mauro Basso’s partner, who is not officially part of the staff, but would very often come to the construction site to help out. This easily produces ‘us vs. them’ dynamics, which usually came out in the interactions between the staff members and the other professionals who accessed the construction site but with different functions, like municipal architects and sponsors. This happened even more so with the staff members who were hired just for the season (bartenders, caring personnel...) and who did not show a particular interest in engaging with the Gay Village environment outside their work shifts. The familiar atmosphere that the staff members perceive, describe and actively reproduce makes them think of and talk about Gay Village as their very own home.

*‘Il Gay Village è casa mia!’* (Gay Village is my home) is a comment that was often pronounced by some of the guests who animated the shows throughout the season. When I speak about ‘guests’ (*ospiti*), I am specifically referring to all the artists and personalities that were invited to perform, present books or have interviews during the *preserale*, that is, the part of the night that preceded the clubbing. Officially starting around 09.30pm (but actually often around 10pm), preserale always took place on the Amarganta stage, the bigger one. While many of the guests were people involved in the LGBTQ community, what was extremely remarkable was the high number of guests working in the media industries with a fair to significant level of popularity: showmen and showwomen, singers, actors and actresses, writers, TV personalities. Affirming

that Gay Village is one's home can easily sound like a socio-political endorsement, which nowadays can work quite positively on anybody's public image. It is worth mentioning the case of one extremely famous (heterosexual) showwoman, whose interview included a significant section dedicated to her long-standing fight against homophobia and in support of LGBTQ rights; she came up on stage in a rainbow-sequined short dress and concluded her interview shouting: 'We will get to marriage equality as well: I will make it!'. In my opinion the significance of this aspect is twofold: on the one hand, it appears to insert Gay Village very well in the circuits of the entertainment industry: it means that Gay Village is an event that can offer significant visibility to showmen and women, a type of visibility that they are eager to obtain; on the other hand, it denotes the remarkable mainstreaming of the event, which presents an impressive seasonal programme featuring an abundance of very popular people working in the mainstream entertainment industries. The mainstreaming of the event is such that even initiatives that are more defining of an LGBTQ context echo some of the most famous TV formats: a most prominent example is 'Drag Factor', a drag queen contest whose name and structure re-interpreted 'The X Factor' talent show.

This mainstreaming produced attraction for a specific type of public, which was usually composed of the people who attended Gay Village for its club nights, but also of audience members who simply seized the opportunity to see some of their favourite TV personalities for free (if they entered by 9pm) in a wonderful green summer location, and then leave. These could often be traditional families or couples who would not attend the venue for its LGBTQ connotation, but exclusively for its entertainment offer. They would sit on the chairs that were disposed before the Amarganta stage, often after having eaten something at the food kiosks, thus creating an atmosphere that somehow resembled a summertime countryside fair. Interestingly enough, during the preserale it was often possible to spot young men or women, in full, highly sexualised clubbing attire, wandering aimlessly around the village as if they were feeling out of place.

In light of this structure, a prototypical Gay Village club night could be described as articulated in three moments: a quiet opening (from 7 to 9:30 pm approximately), preserale, and clubbing after midnight. The people populating the preserale and the clubbing night, respectively, often seemed to be very different from one another, or at least they seemed to be engaging in different activities, practices and forms of behaviour; this socio-spatial dynamic almost created two different places, during the same night, within the same location. Once preserale was over, the Gay Village staff would quickly remove the chairs, and in the semi-darkness of the dance floor people would gradually start gathering while chatting and having their drinks. After a few minutes, an 'Intro' video narrating the story of Fantàsia would play in the ledwalls of both stages: the club night begins.

## THE GEOGRAPHIES OF THE GAY VILLAGE CLUBNIGHTS

It is usually around midnight when clubbing begins. In the minutes that separate the preserale from the dancing night, the floor experiences a change of population: the people that were interested in the show leave the floor to go home or to hang out in the *Giardino delle Delizie* ('the Garden of Delights'), the area where the food kiosks and some of the bars are located, while the people who have come for the clubbing gradually start populating the floor. The club is composed of two dance floors, which are named, respectively, Horok and Amarganta, after two locations mentioned in *The NeverEnding Story*. Amarganta plays predominantly pop/commercial tunes, while Horok has a more defined electro-house flavour. Sometimes during this interval the Amarganta ledwall projects some advertisements: among them, there is always the official campaign of Regione Lazio. Then, both the Horok and the Amarganta ledwalls become illuminated: the Intro plays out and, once it is over, the deejays start playing. Deejays change during the different evenings: some of them are regulars and alternate, while others act as special gigs. The two floors are equally large and they are separated by a central bar, which houses a directing cabin on its top roof. Amarganta's large stage welcomes the performances of the dance crew and of the drag queens, while Horok's is much tinier and, on its rear, features a big wall covered with ivy ornaments and a ledwall showing a wide-open eye, symbolising a sort of awakening. During all the nights that I spent at Gay Village, a very predominant trend was for the audience to first gather in Amarganta, probably attracted by the preserale: on many nights the deejays playing in Horok would start their gigs to an (almost) empty floor, which would often take a while before filling in. Nevertheless, none of the floors would start to congregate a significant amount of people in the first twenty to thirty minutes: club culture in Italy hardly ever starts earlier than that. The club crowd would begin to flood in only around midnight, when Gay Village had already been open for about five hours. This detail always struck me, for people did not seem to be driven by the possibility of a free entrance earlier than 9pm, even though the club nights could cost up to 20€ on Saturdays, with only one drink included.



FIGURE 3 – Dance crew performing on the Amarganta floor (picture taken by the author on June 15<sup>th</sup> 2017).



FIGURE 4 – The Horok floor a few hours before opening night (picture taken by the author on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

I thought extensively about how to introduce the findings related to the clubbing part of the nights and I came to the conclusion that the best way to discuss them was by following the one aspect that captured my attention from the very beginning, and consequently shaped my entire observation: the heteronormed male population. A few notes on how the observation came to take this turn: if the findings regarding the creation of the 2017 Gay Village edition stemmed out of an overt observation, carried out within a relatively small group of key informants that could readily give me explanations on what I was looking at, observation during the club nights could not rest on the same kind of setting: the space of the club hardly facilitates verbal communication, especially among strangers. In light of this context, my ethnography had to necessarily become more experiential, which rendered my positionality inevitably crucial. Summing up on some of the social categories that usually codify one's positionality – I am a white, self-defined gay, able-normed, average healthy, middle class, well educated cisgender man in his late twenties – there were also a couple of context-bound specific features that I identified as playing out in my fieldwork.

First and foremost, I was alone most of the time in a place where people gather to socialise and have fun: this allowed me to wander around quite freely, but also required a lot of effort in the creation and maintenance of my own space of comfort. Secondly, I adore dancing, I am quite capable to do it and I particularly enjoy dancing to commercial pop music. This means that, every time I was not observing something specific, I would be pretty automatically driven towards the Amarganta floor. The music genre and the search for comfort significantly drove my positioning and moving around Gay Village. Pointing out these personal elements is important because it reveals the specific angle from which I got to experience the village; at the same time, I believe that these two factors constituted two shared commonalities among the people who attended Gay Village, which ultimately revealed its deeply heteronormative geographies.

An important clarification ought to be made. While carrying out a participant observation with very limited room for verbal interaction with the population I was observing, I did often reflect upon the possible arbitrariness of my differentiation and identification of queer and heteronormed people (especially cisgender men). Aside from overtly non-heterosexual practices (like a same-sex erotic exchange, which does not necessarily identify a specific orientation, but anyway shows an openness to non-straight possibilities), and with the acknowledgement that my personal ‘gaydar’ had to be problematized in its academic methodological effectiveness, I could not label people sexually simply according to how they looked or how I perceived them, so as not to run the risk of my argument being based merely on stereotypes. Certainly there were some features that appeared as ‘belonging’ to a supposed population, in terms of practices of socialisation, attire and body presentation, and levels and forms of sexualisation; however, the point was not to distinguish between gay and

straight (men). Rather, the point was to single out a population that was overtly reproducing heteronormative and sexist practices in the space, thus threatening the comfort and sense of safety of the others; whether this population was predominantly gay or straight, it was neither possible to determine, nor ultimately relevant to the scope of the research: Fantàsia, in fact, was not supposed to be a gay-controlled space, but rather a queer-liberated one.

Studies on male socialisation identify aggressiveness as one of its remarkable featuring aspects (Skeggs, 1999; Taylor & Jamieson, 1997); this does not indicate an essentialist vision of the man as innately aggressive, but rather it underlines the naturalising process of certain forms of behaviour that, through reiteration, construct masculinity as socially dominant through coercive power. In their socialisation, men may tend to reproduce this aggressiveness in a playful way, especially among their peers and circles of friends; however, what is playful for some might not be so for others. The group of peers is a recurring feature that I found among the heteronormed men attending the village, who would often arrive in groups of more than five people; such practice was not so common among other types of population. This has two important implications: firstly, it becomes more likely for non-heteronormed people to get outnumbered; secondly, and more importantly, big groups occupy more space, and produce more significant effects in the geographies of the venue they are attending. I found spatial aggressiveness to be a characterising feature among the heteronormed groups of men at Gay Village: by ‘spatial aggressiveness’ I mainly refer to forms of self-imposition in the space, which provoked the moving away of other people: the most common example was the act of grabbing and dragging each other around the dance floor. Spatial aggressiveness was coupled by other forms of violent behaviour, from physical ones – for example, I witnessed a fight – to verbal ones, which was mainly related to the use of vulgarity and swearing against somebody else.

Forms of aggressive behaviour emerged in the interaction of heteronormed men with both women and LGBTQ individuals. Expressions of sexual interests towards women could often happen in an intrusive way, mainly by making innuendoes to or by giving insisting looks at some girl’s body parts. I did also witness some episodes of women trying to get away from annoying guys, and once also passing for lesbians as a quick way out. Forms of discomfort at the expenses of LGBTQ individuals usually revolved around mockery, especially through caricatures simulating erotic same-sex exchanges and the feminine way in which some guys would be dancing. Transgender and non-binary people would usually get stared at with ironic attitudes, which in some cases even turned into forms of inappropriate behaviour. A couple of times, when bumping into two girls making out, some guys would shout: ‘This is heaven!’ or other similar comments. Quite interestingly, young heteronormed guys would often end up taking off their shirts and tops while clubbing, which was extremely peculiar because every time this bodily show off drew unwanted attention (that is, male attention), the latter would be immediately sanctioned and repressed –

careless of the fact that they were at Gay Village.

What is possibly the most interesting aspect of the consistent presence of heteronormed men at Gay Village is dancing and its geographies. Dancing in a club is a practice that is codified by many social norms (Malbon, 1999), so much that only rarely turns out to be a liberating experience – or it becomes so through the consumption of alcohol or other substances. At Gay Village Fantàsia there was a neat difference between the two dance floors playing, respectively, commercial pop music (Amarganta) and electro-house (Horok). Dancing is usually not considered to be an activity ‘for (heteronormed) men’ (Skeggs, 1999); yet, the music played on the Horok floor seemed to enjoy a sort of widespread positive recognition among heteronormed men attending the village; consequently, this provided a sort of social legitimisation for their dancing. The dance style that seemed to be very popular among heteronormed men (but also women) is called Melbourne Shuffle<sup>6</sup>: it combines together elements of urban dance styles (like break dance) with revisited elements of more classic genres, like swing and Charleston. In Italy a version of the shuffle has recently achieved popularity thanks to its appearance in the advertising of a phone company. In Horok, heteronormed men would dance the shuffle, engaging with the music and the movements, hence not in a caricature-like way; they would often also try to show off their dance expertise, which at times was actually impressive. This was much less the case in the Amarganta floor, where the cheesy soundtrack usually restored dancing as an inadequate social practice ‘for (heteronormed) men’, and provoked an immediate return to forms of Goliardic male socialisation that involved pushing and pulling, mocking, and caricature-like types of dancing: in other words, potential aggressiveness again. Maintaining the differentiation between the two floors, throughout the Gay Village season I saw no homoerotic exchanges ever happening in the Horok dance floor; we could arguably go as far as affirming that sexual diversity was present very little in there. Horok appeared to be just like a ‘regular’ (heteronormative) club, and yet it constantly seemed to serve as the ‘cool’ floor. In the words of Simone Tulli, its stage was created by following a precise conceptual design: it was narrow and low, so as to accentuate the sense of proximity between the crowd and the deejays; it hosted the aerial acrobatic dances, which were clearly more eye-catching than the regular dance crew routines; it had a lesser presence of vocalists and drag queens, which toned down the gay element. Most importantly, all the most famous guest deejays performed on the Horok stage, the ‘cool dance floor’ at Gay Village, which heteronormed men claimed as theirs.

Observation on other geographies around Gay Village seemed to confirm the difficulty in establishing different, non-heteronormative spatial dynamics within this LGBTQ-connoted venue. While attending the club nights at Gay Village I was extremely surprised to notice how very few expressions of homoerotism

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<sup>6</sup> Thank you to my dear friend Vincenzo, who revealed to me the name of this type of dance.

and same-sex affection I could see around the premises: I would rarely see more than five episodes per night. There was a significant discrepancy between the area around Giardino delle Delizie, and the dance floor itself: the former would seldom witness homoerotic and same-sex affectionate exchanges, which would concentrate predominantly between Amarganta and Horok. More precisely, the majority of the homoerotic expressions would usually manifest in the second part of the clubbing night, that is, after the show of the dance crew and the entrance of vocalist Kristine Von Trois. In my opinion, this is easily understandable in light of a set of factors: firstly, the entrance of the dance crew usually accompanied a shift in the genre of music played, going from mainly commercial, to a mixture of both charts and EDM/house: this inevitably toned down the sing along and dance to the ‘pop anthems’, thus allowing the crowd more opportunities to look around, and hook up. Secondly, the sexy dance crew clearly augmented arousal, together with the vocalist’s performance, which was often sexually teasing and filled with innuendoes. Thirdly, the beginning of the show would bring the people tight closer together, in an effort to get as near the stage as possible to watch: this finally created a proper club crowd, which seemed to act as a unitary collective body. These elements fostered and amplified a pre-linguistic, highly sensorial bodily communication, which in this context became immediately charged in sensuality (Cattan & Vanolo, 2014); therefore, the vast majority of the homoerotic expressions that I saw around Gay Village were ultimately connected to its clubbing dynamics. Far from being a negative feature, this shows, however, that same-sex public displays of affection at Gay Village were predominantly connected to the sensorial experience of the club crowd, rather than on a patter of spatial dynamics that rendered the venue a liberated queer space. All around the premises there were a few spots that were empty and very poorly illuminated: I would have hypothesised that, as the club night climaxed, these spots would progressively be resignified by homoerotic practices; this was rarely the case, and people would usually head to those spots to chill, talk, and smoke weed.

Within the space of Gay Village, then, the vast majority of the homoerotic expressions was concentrated on the Amarganta floor, particularly during the second half of the club night. Male and female same-sex couples seemed to be equally present, contrary to what the literature on commercial gay venues might suggest (Binnie, 1995; Sibalis, 2004). The vast majority of the homoerotic exchanges seemed to be happening in two specific spots: the two corners of the Amarganta floor (between the stage and the entrances to the privé areas), and the very first rows of the dancing crowd, right in front of the stage. The first rows of the commercial/pop music stage were charged with a more neatly defined LGBTQ connotation, due to their proximity to the performing crew and their sexy presentation, which was queer in kind. As for the corners, they appeared to become homoeroticised for two reasons: firstly, they were situated right in front of the entrances to the privé areas, which were more significantly gay-connoted spaces. Privé areas were tinier than the main floors, hence more easily controlled by the Gay Village staff that was assigned to

them. Privé areas were generally attended by a more gay or friendly population: the dance crew and the drag queens, for example, would hang out in the privé areas while not performing, chilling in full make up and costumes, hence queering the visual impact of these spots. It follows that the people that would get in and out of the privé areas were usually friendlier, a factor that might have mitigated the heteronormative perception of the corners of the Amarganta floor. At the same time, security guards controlled the entrances to the privé areas, making sure that only the customers who had paid could gain access to them. The security guards – all heteronormed hunky men, dressed in total black – might usually inspire discomfort to non-heteronormed individuals engaging in erotic practices; in this context they became indicators of safety. It is hard to assess whether this type of geographies followed a clear rationale: the idea that same-sex couples would intentionally move to the corners so as to find room out of the crowd and engage in erotic practices seems to be at odds with the fact that it was often the crowd itself the main facilitator of forms of homoerotism. What is most interesting about these geographies is the fact that the space of Gay Village ultimately drew a geographical representation where core and margins seemed to faithfully reflect the social heteronormative order.

Another population that corroborated this geographic representation of core and marginality on the Amarganta floor was the older segments of the club crowd: people over thirty-five years old, and especially groups of older women. They, too, appeared to be occupying specific zones in Amarganta: namely, the rear of the floor and its entering side, that is, the one located next to the stairs connecting the dance-floor to the chill out area (*Giardino delle Delizie*). More precisely, small groups of older folks, usually composed of men and women, who were possibly heterosexual and married, would often hang out around the entrance to the dance floor, while the groups of older women would concentrate at the back. These two populations shared some common traits in their experiences of the club nights. In terms of dancing, they rarely seemed to perform it as a liberating act: they would often either pretend to be doing it, or shy away from doing it, or do it self-mockingly. Their body language could often show discomfort, or better, the perception that the place did not cater mainly to them. By observing their attire and attitude, then, their presence at Gay Village appeared to be very poorly sexualised. What dominated the presence of these populations in the village was possibly a strong ageist and gendered dynamic: older people, both single and married, men and women, did not perceive the space of the club as their own, therefore they would tend to locate at the margins of the dance floor, thus performing an out-of-place-ness that became visible through their body attire and dancing. The core of the crowd was not perceived as particularly hospitable, because it was young, and it reproduced a model where youth is granted the monopoly on sexual expression.

There seems, then, to be a difference between the geographies of homoerotism and the ones of over 35 people and groups of older women. The former appeared to be marginal, but they would usually manifest either in front of the

Amarganta stage or next to the entrances to the privé areas: though their space was marginal, they would still be connected to the club crowd and, through their homoerotic expressions, non-heteronormed people would still claim the space of the dance floor as theirs. The latter, instead, remained in the rear and on the entering side, where the crowd tended to loosen up, thus representing a separation from a context that they possibly did not perceive as their own. In addition, I saw quite a few people on wheelchairs during the nights at Gay Village: the club crowd would allow them to move exclusively in the back and on the sides of the dance floors, thus conferring an able-ist connotation to them, too.

As already mentioned, dancing in a (mainstream) club is a deeply codified social experience, which often proves to be far from liberating. We already presented the different dynamics in Horok and Amarganta. Horok appeared to be abiding by a defined heteronormative dynamic: it was a space where it was easy to find remarkable dancing expressions, which however seemed to respond to dominant social patterns. At the same time, dancing in Amarganta was very different: the heteronormed male population would usually turn to a mocking style of dance, which might potentially turn out to disturb other people's comfort. My personal experience might give some insights in this regard. As I already mentioned when discussing my positionality, a personal enjoyment of commercial pop music would usually drive me towards the Amarganta floor; yet again, I was often not able to dance my night away and, more importantly, I rarely felt comfortable doing so. First of all, I was alone. Dancing alone is hardly part of clubbing culture, which is usually integrated in larger socialisation dynamics: people would go to a club with their friends or couples. In a mainstream club, people usually dance with somebody, for somebody, or at somebody else. Together with other factors, this clearly informed my desire to dance, to the point that often, if I really wanted to dance to a tune, I would grab my phone and dance while pretending to be texting: this made me feel more comfortable, because it created the impression that I was (virtually) with someone else. Needless to say, the times when I had more fun dancing were the ones when I was accompanied by friends who shared my same enjoyment of this music genre.

Another interesting aspect of dancing to pop music is that showing some dance expertise is often negatively sanctioned. In a context where dancing is mainly based on (self)mocking and mimicking, a body that expresses pure enjoyment, expertise and hence a sense of freedom while dancing, gets more easily singled out and possibly exposed, especially if (s)he is alone, or worse, if (s)he overdoes it: this, again, produces discomfort. In the context of a gay club this becomes all the more evident because, for example, non-heteronormed men could tend to use commercial pop music to feminise their dance moves (Peterson, 2011), maybe following the 'icon factor': if *Single Ladies* comes up, I would immediately perform the worldwide famous routine.

The social limitations in the practice of dancing are also coupled by the many physical constraints that the body is likely to receive (Longhurst, 2001): people are usually packed in a place where movement is restricted, the individual becomes very sensitive to the movements of the crowd as a whole, while (s)he is often holding a drink in one hand and a smoke in the other, or alternatively (s)he is dribbling so as to avoid getting burnt by a cigarette (it happened to me twice, and it was not pleasant). Groups usually dance in circles and amass their purses, bags and jackets at the centre, making it difficult for others to pass through; alternatively, people have to hold their belongings or, if all they have is in their pockets, those same belongings hold grip of their thighs. Finally, all the traditional stigmas (gender, class, race, age, ability, sexual orientation...) play out as well: the context is supposed to be fun and playful, and alcohol (and other substances) consumption heightens this atmosphere; therefore, the most privileged ones might feel even more legitimated to joke at the expenses of the others because ‘they are just having fun’.

What the case study wishes to point out is how, in the space of Gay Village, there are significant heteronormative dynamics at play, which ultimately push to the margins non-heteronormed populations, while leaving at the core of the dance floor a crowd that, whether it is LGBTQ or straight, ultimately does not challenge effectively the heteronormative status quo, even within the sensual context of a gay-connote club crowd. The ethnographic research that I conducted was certainly much informed and influenced by my personal experience, which can provide some useful insights, but at times could appear biased or filtered. In order to back up my analysis of the findings, I want to conclude by mentioning what I deemed a very significant source of information: Facebook comments and reviews. Being a commercial business, Gay Village has a Facebook page that includes a specific section where clients can review their own experiences. I was able to have a look at around one hundred Facebook reviews on the village: I started gathering these comments before the opening of the 2017 edition, so the first ones were in reference to the previous edition, Gay Village College; I then continued to follow the page throughout the Fantàsia season. Most of the people commenting on the page were either non-heteronormed men, or young women of whatever sexual orientation. It was incredibly surprising to notice how the predominant undeniable majority of the reviews expressed negative to extremely disappointed opinions about Gay Village. The most common comment about the venue was that it had nothing gay about itself, except for its very own name, because it was primarily frequented by a crowd of *tamarro* ('chav') straight guys (usually referred to with Roman dialect expressions like *coatti*, *burini* or *borgatari*), who were looking to annoy, when not overtly harass, anybody else. Reviewers also frequently reported many cases of misconduct, like the starting of fights or even thefts, hence producing an emotional space that did not emanate a sense of safety. Accordingly, reviewers also complained either about the lack of a selection process at the entrance, or about the absurd entrance selection that let all sorts of ill-intentioned people in, accusing Gay Village of caring exclusively

about cashing in and making the night reach sold out. Alongside highlighting the flaws of the event, many reviewers established comparisons with either similar events in different parts of the world or, more frequently, with Gay Village's first years, reminiscing about how it used to be less sophisticated, but certainly more authentic, more fun and rightly called 'gay'. The comments on this year's edition were not much different; what was interesting, however, is that the review option of the Facebook page suddenly disappeared in the middle of July, and returned only after the closing party on September 9<sup>th</sup>.

### GENDER, SEXUALITY AND THE GAY VILLAGE FEMALE LEADERSHIP

A striking aspect of the team organising Gay Village is the presence of a majority of women at its leadership; some of them were also the organisers of the 2000 World Pride. Such remarkable female presence in the structure of a mainstream gay business constitutes a sharp difference from the established general trend, for which the LGBTQ commercial scene tends to be gay male-dominated, often at the expenses of non-cisgender, non-male subjectivities who, for different reasons, may even not feel at ease in those same venues that are expected to cater to them, too (Binnie, 1995; Doan, 2007; Valentine, 1995). Participant observation at Gay Village showed a fairly equal presence of people ascribing to the two main gender identities of the binary social system, both among the club crowd and the staff; the lesbian presence in the venue was evident and not residual. I was very much intrigued by the female component at the lead of Gay Village, so I attempted to investigate it more thoroughly in order to grasp what differences stemmed out of this extraordinary majority<sup>7</sup>.

Sex immediately came to the fore as an aspect that significantly shaped the creation of Gay Village, as we know it. The topic of sex emerged quite promptly with Grazia, whose interview started off with plenty of references to her personal activist trajectory, dating back to her first experiences at Rome's Buon Pastore feminist space, particularly within groups of separatist lesbians. This experience came to be a shock to her, precisely because the group discussions would often revolve around issues of the body and of female desire and pleasure; she described that context as 'heavy and extreme', so much that very soon she quit participating in the political activities, and started to hang out primarily at the feminist bar where, in her own words, 'lighter' women (that is, less politically involved) usually gathered. Grazia frankly admitted not to have felt at ease in a context where the female bodily experience was central to a

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<sup>7</sup> As I was developing this paragraph, I became preoccupied that my social positionality as a gay cisgender man might become too strong a bias when engaging with the narratives and views on sexuality and gender identity of lesbian women. I want to thank my friend Maddalena Marchetto, queer cisgender woman, sociologist and queer activist, who read this paragraph and provided me with very relevant feedback.

discourse that was profoundly political and genuinely feminist.

By the same token, when she later joined Circolo Mario Mieli, Grazia remained equally shocked by the extremely hedonistic sexual habits that were common among gay men. Grazia appreciated the subversive character of homosexual outside cruising: transvestism in particular – the practice of cross-dressing and seeking sexual partners in feminine attire – constituted an important aspect of the Italian homoerotic dynamics, which Grazia acknowledged as an act of utter defiance of the sexist patriarchal system, very much in line with feminism. Yet, she described such a discovery as ‘a slap in the face’ and unmistakably affirmed that she did not like it. Accordingly, Grazia expressed her distaste for the heavily erotic atmosphere of the Muccassassina clubnights, which presented a lot of contents where innuendo easily turned into blatant pornography, targeting almost exclusively the male homosexual crowd. Even though the parties were awesome, Grazia found this heavily male sexual dimension profoundly unsettling and uninviting for women, who were dramatically outnumbered by their male counterparts in the clubnights. Grazia affirmed that, since then, she has made sure that the activities she organised in LGBTQ contexts would always be inclusive of all gender and sexual identities. Accordingly, Grazia presented Gay Village as a place where everybody could feel comfortable and at ease, precisely because it is a context in which the atmosphere of male sexual prevarication is toned down.

The distancing from an oversexualised male homosexual experience appears to be at the core of Gay Village and it is presented, by its organisers, as an upgrading transition towards the development of more social and communitarian LGBTQ dynamics. Toning down the sexual element is interpreted as a *conditio sine qua non* in the articulation of a more solid discourse on public space and non-normative sexual and gender identities. Grazia and Lorenzo share a rhetoric that depicts Gay Village as a liberating experience, which is associated with an imagery of *daylight* that is centred upon the coming together of people, who feel free to express themselves out of the extremely individualised, alienating experience of cruising, whose predominantly *nocturnal* setting is accentuated in its symbolism of shame, fear, hiding and leading a double, closeted life. The dichotomy of ‘daylight versus night-time’ is coupled by the dichotomy of *indoors* versus *outdoors*: the former refers to the gay clubbing scene, its private venues and its highly sexualised dimension; the latter is associated with Gay Village as the liberating experience of expressing one’s non-normative gender or sexual identity in an open-air public space.

The use of these dichotomies is meant to construct Gay Village as something ‘other than’ (Longhurst, 2001) the sex-centred image that traditionally had been at the core of the social discourse around the queer subjectivity, in an attempt to bridge the gap between queer and non-queer individuals, and depict the former as ‘normal’. Grazia pointed out that the construction of the queer

subjectivity through a predominantly sexual discourse (with a gendered notion that privileged the male homosexual experience) often produced as a consequence the perception that, in a gay-connoted space, people could uninhibitedly indulge in any sexual practice they fancied: during the first editions, the non-LGBTQ population attending Gay Village was mainly composed of politically engaged people, who would go in support of the cause, but more significantly also of individuals with morbid sexual appetites craving to be fulfilled. Grazia was outraged at the sight of heterosexual couples of swingers wandering around the premises and looking to spice things up, as well as straight people engaging in full sexual practices and masturbation in the middle of the dance floor. These types of behaviour were conferred legitimation by the social construction of the homosexual through a discourse that heavily relied on the sexual and the perverse, hence putting forward the conviction that, in a gay context, every (sexual) thing was allowed. This type of discourse and imagery was precisely what the Gay Village organisers aimed at destroying. In the first editions of Gay Village some sexual hints would still connote the activities that were organised: for example, Claudia recalls the set up of a gym that she defined ‘gay style’, because the showers were all outdoors, they were not closed, so there was the voyeuristic undertone of watching the (supposed, and rigorously male and masculine) hunks soaping their bodies. This type of approach to the organisation of the Gay Village activities progressively disappeared over the course of the editions.

Therefore, a process of desexualisation was put in place in the conceptualisation of Gay Village, based on a distancing from the erotically perverse public image that had traditionally characterised the social construction of the homosexual and queer in general. Gay Village was projected as a place where everyone was to feel at ease, *as opposed to* other less inviting, more sexualised queer contexts. What emerges from the interviews is the articulation of a discourse that did not challenge much the morbid taboo of (same-sex) sex, ultimately maintaining its stigma; the sexual sphere had to be thoroughly neutralised if Gay Village were to become a comforting space where queer culture could manifest. Quite interestingly however, in this regard Claudia offers a different take both on her beginnings as a home deejay at Muccassassina in the nineties, and on her experience at Gay Village:

One time we came up with ‘Naked does not pay’. Now that I come to think of it, maybe the real transgression was what we had back then. That doesn’t exist any longer, because nowadays there is nothing to transgress against. Back then we really were immersed in freedom, which sometimes would become transgression: ‘Naked does not pay’. You cannot go naked around Rome, and yet we’d do it. These things are no longer done. Nobody dares any longer. I don’t know why, but I think that the real transgression was lost at some point. Maybe because now we can do everything, but can we really? No, we can’t. Back then it was a rebellion. I need to study this phenomenon.

I took the liberty to encourage Claudia to enrol in a Social Sciences program.

Claudia is also the only interviewee who establishes a more organic sense of continuity between Gay Village and the traditional cruising culture, whilst Lucilla, Lorenzo and Grazia talk about the two items mainly in oppositional terms. Claudia mentioned both Monte Caprino and the Capocotta beach dunes as famous cruising sites that had acquired a certain recognition even beyond the homosexual networks; still, they were outdoor spots within an extremely heterosexist public space, hence they could always turn out to be dangerous and risky. Claudia is the only interviewee that introduces the idea of *protection* in the conceptualisation and making of Gay Village; like Grazia, Claudia makes many references to some very tragic episodes of homophobic violence and murder that had happened all around Italy in the nineties. Therefore, aside from the political reasons sustaining its creation, Gay Village had to be a place where the queer person could feel safe. When cruising outdoors, some guys were able to defend themselves, while others could more easily become the targets of violent attacks. In order to pursue homoerotic practices in public space, therefore, the queer individual is supposed to possess certain characteristics of strength, of courage, of audacity that make him fit and prepared for the most dangerous circumstances; in our society, these characteristics are usually associated with masculinity, leading to the conclusion that in order to cruise for sex in public space, a gay person had to be ‘man enough’ to face the potential harmful consequences that these practices may entail. According to this view, public space is the realm of masculinity, while Gay Village serves as its private, ‘feminised’ counterpart, the place that protects everyone that does not conform to, or is threatened by the normative masculinity. In this light, the women at the leadership of Gay Village seem to acquire almost a ‘maternal’ connotation because, while they were prompt in establishing a relationship between Gay Village and the gay cruising culture (either in terms of change or continuity), they very poorly connected the event with previous experiences of lesbian socialisation. In general, they do not seem to have used this opportunity to create a more stable and structured space for the non-male subjectivities of the LGBTQ community.

During the 2017 Gay Village edition, the only episode that was predominantly dedicated to women was the weekend of Venus Rising, a festival that centred upon female artists, which was organised by Lucilla. Venus Rising was born independently from and long before Gay Village, as a women-only club night, taking place once a month in different clubs around the city. It was extremely successful and, as it was the most significant of the very few women-only options in Rome, it soon became an important attraction for lesbians. Lucilla has been a primary reference in the Roman clubbing scene for decades, and she prides herself to have been a pioneer in the development of the first women-only parties, both in terms of clientele and in terms of staff and crew. When Gay Village started to be planned out, she was called and involved precisely because of her experience with women-targeting commercial entertainment; in a context with a strong female leadership, like Gay Village, it is striking that there is only one circumscribed moment that is predominantly dedicated to women. As

Lucilla pointed out, the coming together of this female ensemble was not intended, even though the Gay Village leadership shows continuity with the World Pride one. When asked about the female presence in the organisation of Gay Village, Grazia affirmed that it is visible in

How it is organised, in its aesthetics, in the artistic contents. There's a maniacal attention towards perfection, and little attention to the dark place of the encounter. This is certainly a female aspect.

In the quote, Grazia points at aesthetics, precision and perfectionism as indicators of femininity; these are then contrasted with the 'dark place of the encounter', an item that does not seem to feature among what is considered to be feminine, and makes an evident reference to a deeply sexualised notion of masculinity, which is associated with an undesirable 'darkness'. Not surprisingly, Grazia articulates her views on masculinity in opposition to an ideal femininity that carries a positive connotation. In this dichotomy of female versus male, she defines the latter as *ugly*, and refers to the constant *male* drive to seek satisfaction for carnal needs and desires. Grazia shapes her view on masculinity and on the cisgender male sexuality along a notion of brutality that underlines the men's insatiable indulgence of their animal instincts: while masculinity is associated with the corporeal, and hence the sexual, by opposition femininity is something more elevated, and consequently less sexual; the two terms of the dichotomy inevitably appear in a hierarchical relationship in which the feminine is exalted as superior, precisely because it is interpreted as the gender identity that attempts to transcend the corporeal. The normative dichotomy between what is considered masculine and feminine, respectively, does not appear to be much challenged; rather, it is reiterated. Masculinity, then, is perceived as something to part away from, rather than to deconstruct proactively.

The juxtaposition between an 'ugly' masculinity and some aesthetic standards, which consequently assume a feminine connotation, introduces an undertone of cultural elitism when delineating the type of masculinity and, more specifically, of cisgender male homosexuality that is deemed preferable and acceptable. In both Grazia's and Lucilla's interviews, the articulation of what is the ideal masculinity stems out of a distaste and aberration for typically male-connote behaviours that are associated with the corporeal, and regarded as vulgar and animal-like. Grazia exemplifies her stance with a reference to the gay and bisexual subgroup of the *bears*, men showing physical features of chubbiness and hairiness who, by analogy, are associated with the majestic mammals. Grazia acknowledges that bear men do not possess the characteristics that define today's dominant notion of masculinity, hence they represent an alternative to the male standard; however, she also condemns their allegedly uncontrolled, insatiable drive to satisfy their carnal cravings of any kind. By the same token, even more interestingly Lucilla makes reference to a Roman women-only club night that was popular in the eighties, where the vast majority of the crowd was composed of *camioniste* (truck-drivers), the Italian informal

term that identifies butch lesbians. Lucilla promptly distances herself from that typology of female homosexuality, by discrediting it as an imitation of the lowest manifestations of masculinity; according to her account the *camioniste* were very keen on engaging in an exaggerated act-out of a cisgender male physicality, through practices such as the constant crutch-grabbing, which Lucilla finds repulsive.

In contrast to the undesirable forms that they pick out, both Grazia and Lucilla spell out their ideal of masculinity by introducing a fundamental cultural filter that shapes the desirable man around notions of elegance, style and sophistication. Grazia juxtaposes the bear gay subgroup to *Call me by your name*, the book turned into a successful coming-of-age film about a multitalented young artist of a rich and worldly Jewish family who, during a summer spent in Northern Italy, makes the discovery of love, sexuality and eroticism through the encounter with a young scholar. In the context of the wonderful film, male homosexuality and homoerotism are presented within an extremely elevated socio-cultural (and economic!) setting, hence they become ideal and desirable. Similarly, Lucilla dismisses the truck-driver lesbian prototype by asserting that she is a lady, she does not need to mimic a man. She states: 'If I have to imitate a man, it would be my father: a gentleman'. There appears again this notion of a cultural and behavioural superiority that is required for a man to become acceptable. Within this specific framework, Grazia ultimately summarises her view on gender and sexuality by proclaiming her preference for a 'genderless homosexuality' that must be 'aesthetically neutral'; she praises the identitarian and experiential fluidity that nowadays has gathered momentum, with which she identifies very much.

According to both Grazia and Lucilla, I incarnate fittingly their ideal homosexual cisgender man. During the interviews, Grazia described me as 'delicate', and Lucilla as 'chic, intellectual'. Grazia stated that she could very easily relate to me, as we belong in the same kind of world, which is well read, 'interesting and interested'; Lucilla candidly affirmed that she could potentially fall in love with me, in a wider conversation on the need to move beyond gay, lesbian and all other sexual labels and categories, in order to embrace a more universal notion of love (so do not get too excited by this revelation...). Even though I do not think that my choice of attire significantly affected their perceptions of me, I shall point out that in both these two interviews I was dressed a little less casual than usual (for no specific reason other than my desire to do so). Everything they said about me was genuinely kind and appreciative. Yet the compliments they gave me made me fairly uncomfortable and upset. Their (positive) comments about me were always presented as opposed to what is typically associated with the social construction of masculinity and of cisgender male homosexuality; what they said about me indicated that I fell much closer to the feminine, rather than the masculine.

Grazia suspected that I was likely to experience some struggle and discomfort when trying to fit in a gay commercial scene, and I would possibly get along better with women. On a similar note, Lucilla perceived me as a sensitive person, very aware of and sympathetic with what is going on around me; precisely for this reason, she sensed that I could often feel misunderstood as I am not fond of being labelled. Lucilla declared that, just like her lesbianism does not make her a ‘she-male’, I am not a woman: I am chic and intellectual, two features of my personality that, however, do not seem to correspond to the socially standardised notion of masculinity, hence rendering me ‘feminine’.

I attempted to reflect upon the unease that Grazia’s and Lucilla’s comments provoked me, going beyond the mere fact that it is usually quite puzzling when people you have just met come up with very bold statements about who you are. Leaving aside their complimentary intentions, I can identify myself with many of the things that they said about me, especially in relation to a normative notion of masculinity. I do think it is important to acknowledge that having my ‘manhood’ questioned was by all means unsettling. Both activist and scholarly work has by now unveiled the complexities of gender identity as a social category; therefore, a less-than-tactful and less-than-informed commenting on somebody else’s gender does not appear to be the best social practice. Still, in general I am not too keen on asserting my masculinity, nor do I necessarily identify as male all the time; so I was curious to delve a little more into the causes of my discomfort and, inspired by Robyn Longhurst’s work on corporeality, I have come to the conclusion that, more than having something to do with gender, my discomfort has a great deal to do with sex.

Both Grazia’s and Lucilla’s comments were articulated in opposition to the generalised notions of both masculinity and male homosexuality; as we have seen early on, these notions are primarily connected with the corporeal, and are heavily sexualised. Therefore, by insisting on how distant (and better, in their opinion) I was from the regular (gay) man, they were automatically constructing me as a less sexual self. And this is problematic, not just for me (as I urge to be recognised as a fully sexual self) but more to the point because it unveils a vision of gender and sexuality that does not break the male/female dichotomy in its sexist and heteronormative social construction, which associates the male with the corporeal and the female with the non-corporeal. The female and feminine is exalted over the male and masculine precisely because it parts away from its physicality – a stance that ultimately reiterates and reinforces all the heaviest social stigmas that traditionally levy upon the relationship that women establish with their own sexual needs and desires. This was best exemplified when Lucilla asked me what my Zodiac sign was; upon learning that it is Libra, she defined it as the sign of the ‘aesthetes’ who, however, are often likely to hold themselves back; in light of this, she suggested that, when asked, I could add a (made up) Scorpio ascendant, on a count that, apparently, Scorpions are ‘the best in the bedroom’. This way, she was indirectly expressing a preoccupation that perhaps I did not ‘get lucky’ very often: I

promised her that I would try out her tip during my next clubnight at Gay Village.

This focus on the female organisers of Gay Village and on their own takes upon issues of gender and sexuality seems to show the overall maintaining of traditional social dichotomies, in particular the binary juxtaposition of male versus female, which is precisely Robyn Longhurst's preoccupation (2001; 2005). What emerges from the interviews is the articulation of a discourse around gender that is centred on the rejection of traditional notions of masculinity, along with male homosexuality, through the exaltation of the feminine as the positive term of said dichotomy. While this can be a good starting point for a critical approach to predominant masculinity, problems arise in the ways the interviewees construct their notions of both the 'negative' masculine and the 'positive' feminine: in fact, the former is heavily associated with the corporeal, and the latter with a more unworldly sphere. Consequently, sex becomes decidedly associated with manhood, and it is generally depicted in the negative terms of the animal-like urge to brutally satisfy each and every carnal craving. By the same token, the construction of a positive masculinity that they put forward falls very close to, and appears to resemble the unworldly and elevated femininity; this is justified by an appeal to a notion of aesthetics, that aspires to elegance and cultural sophistication, and calls for gender neutrality, via a significant neglect of the bodily experience – precisely the opposite of what Longhurst puts forward as a liberating social and intellectual practice.

While I shall stress that the interviewees are lesbian cisgender women, who could possibly be less keen on thoroughly deconstructing and investigating male (homo)sexuality, a certain uneasiness in articulating a discourse around sex did emerge from their narratives. As already highlighted, Grazia expressed discomfort with the topic both when it was conjugated along the hypersexualised hedonistic nature of the male homosexual practices (cruising and clubbing), and surprisingly also when the discussion occurred within feminist circles that formulated female desires and pleasure as paramount factors for women's emancipation. Grazia attributed her discomfort to her provincial moralistic upbringing, which she described as 'backward', ultimately defining herself with the pejorative of 'countrywoman'. Consequently, throughout her interview, Grazia articulated a dichotomy that constructed *sex* and *comfort* as opposing and contrasting terms: according to this view, Gay Village is a welcoming place where everyone feels at ease *because* the sexual element, which usually characterises the gay commercial scene, is dramatically toned down. Similarly, when Lucilla expressed that she could potentially fall in love with me, she immediately clarified that the two of us would not have sex because she does not know 'how to play with it (the male genitalia)'; she operated a sort of discursive castration, which conferred an unworldly and spiritual tone to her claims for a universal and label-less notion of love. Therefore, the dichotomy of sex versus comfort follows along the lines of

unquestioned gender binarism, which inevitably reinforces the associations between the masculine and the corporeal, and the feminine and the unworldly, respectively; Gay Village is narrated as the place where the predominant *male* highly sexual dimension is constrained, a policy that Grazia connects with her feminist beginnings.

Grazia's feminist claims, though legitimate and praiseworthy, could become problematic in light of her gender perspective that promptly denounces the social predominance of traditional masculinity, even in LGBTQ contexts, but does not fully engage in thoroughly challenging the social construction of the two main gender identities. The gender dichotomy is maintained, and it is reworked in order to exalt the feminine and downgrade the masculine. Unfortunately this approach readily shows its limitations: while the heavily sexual and corporeal experience of the male social construction is deprecated, at the same time it is also normalised and socially institutionalised (the 'boys will be boys' attitude); consequently, in this dichotomy, the construction of the feminine as the positive term still entails a distancing from a bodily experience, and reinforces the traditional gender normativity, which both strictly regulates the female enjoyment of the corporeal pleasures, and deems as 'not men enough' all the male subjectivities that, on the contrary, appear not to be constantly indulging in the pleasures of the flesh ('they behave as women'). Therefore, while maintaining the gender dichotomy certainly allows to easily identify the negative consequences of the social construction of masculinity as the predominant (and oppressing) gender, at the same time it also reinforces a normative and clear-cut vision of the two opposite gender identities, and consequently reinforces masculinity.

As Robyn Longhurst (2001; 2005) points out, bodies occupy space and, conversely, space is conceived and constructed in order to favour those bodies that are deemed most entitled to enjoy it freely. Space absorbs, reproduces and actively constructs all the naturalised social stigmas (sexism, heteronormativity, racism, ableism...), unless it is questioned and reworked with a different discourse that aims at thoroughly breaking said stigmas. If a strong liberating discourse is not put in practice, space inevitably falls back into the reproduction of the social privileges and stigmas that are naturalised: the extremely heteronormative and sexist dynamics that emerged during the participant observation at the Gay Village clubnights seem to prove this point. Secondly, the reinforcement of male predominance becomes clear with issues of public recognition and the acknowledgement of worth and success. Both Lucilla and Grazia, but also Lorenzo gave interesting examples in this regard. Lucilla was prompt in clarifying that the women's majority in the Gay Village decisional group was by no means intended. She told me that she has spent a significant part of both her professional and social life surrounded by men, with whom she confessed to get along better than women; people describe her as an 'icon' of Rome's clubbing scene, a status and reputation that she has acquired because of her honesty and skills, and that has earned her peer respect even by the most

sexist men, in such a male dominated context. By the same token, both Grazia and Lorenzo referred to the expressions of respect and recognition that the success of Gay Village had received from social sectors whose political stances fell very distant from those of the LGBTQ population: Lorenzo mentioned some ecclesiastic cohorts and very conservative groups, while Grazia made an outright reference to the ‘fascists’, and to right-wing Mayor Gianni Alemanno, who was always very helpful in the organisation of the Gay Village editions under his mandate.

As the vast majority of the professions are male dominated (even when numerically they are not), we cannot assume an ingenuous attitude and disregard that getting the proper recognition for professional success is extremely significant for a person whose subjectivity is female, non-conformingly male, and/or carrying other social stigmas, like race or disability. What is more striking about the interviewees’ comments is that they seem to accept the validation that they receive by people (sexist men) and groups (fascists) who are not just unfriendly, but blatantly careless or harmful towards women and queer subjectivities, and who are not keen in changing their attitudes after appreciating the success of Gay Village. The idea that resonates is that, when doing business at a high level, there always comes a point in which social discourses do not hold any longer, and one simply has to play by the rules and act ‘like a man’, which often entails overlooking even the most discriminating and offensive stances.

On a final note, I wish to make reference to an excerpt from Lucilla’s interview in which she talks about male homosexual sex:

There was a time when all gay guys claimed to be tops<sup>8</sup>, and I would wonder: ‘I mean, there necessarily must be someone who bottoms’. Then, top or bottom is an invention, because the real top is the one who takes the cock<sup>9</sup>. As the cock needs to get hard, I need to be such a top that I am able to get you hard. Fassbinder teaches us that. Who’s gayer? The man that gives it or the man that takes it? The man that gives it! Those who act like manly hunks, they don’t put it in! It is absurd: some notions are just taken for granted. It is absurd!”

Lucilla operates the same switch that we saw at play when discussing the interviewees’ reiteration of gender binarism: she flips the traditional connotation of the two sex roles, in an effort to destroy the despicable stigma of bottom shaming, by attributing the manlier connotation to the bottom. However, she still maintains a dichotomy that juxtaposes a *manly* term to a *gay* term, consequently implying that he who is manlier is less gay, and he who is gayer is less manly. Gender identity and sexual orientation get confused and intertwined, and they are inserted in the same dichotomy, which ultimately

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<sup>8</sup> In the slang of men who have sex with men, a *top* is a sexual partner who performs an act of anal or oral penetration; a *bottom* is a partner who receives it.

<sup>9</sup> It is the interviewee herself who uses this “strong language”.

affirms that to be gay means to be less of a man. Leaving aside how bizarre these considerations around same-sex male sex sound, their homophobic undertone is hard to neglect. When the predominant masculinity is not challenged in a thorough deconstruction of the rigid gender dichotomy, it inevitably manifests in, affects and stigmatises the sphere of sexuality as well, especially in its non-normative orientations and practices.

In conclusion, what emerges is that the female leadership of the Gay Village organisation channels an extremely mild gender discourse into the shaping of Gay Village as an event and as a liberating space. On the one hand, allegiance to a feminist tradition appears both complicated and not fully articulated, and it seems to fail to go beyond a binary vision of gender that deprecates the masculine as body-bound, and exalts the feminine as ultra corporeal and elevated. The interviews show a difficulty to engage in a profound deconstruction of established social dichotomies, starting with male versus female, and consequently also corporeal versus unworldly, and straight (normal) versus gay. And this stands in sharp contrast with the interviewees' constant cry for the abandonment of all gender and sexual categories: throughout our chat, Lucilla repeatedly remarked that she has no problem in identifying as gay; however,

I wouldn't even want people to call me gay any longer: I am Lucilla, I am a lady who loves. Now I am in love with a woman, but up until eight months ago my love was my dog, because I did not want to be romantically involved with anyone any longer. And it's not 'man or woman': love is love. Until we won't have understood this, we will keep on letting them [the heteronormed majority] use us for the stereotypes that they construct about us; we will never move forward. Gay Village does not hold any meaning any longer if it does not become what I had dreamt it would become: a place where everyone comes to show a vision of who one is.

This universal notion of love resonates with Grazia's aspiration to 'genderless neutrality', which again calls for the overcoming of all labels and categories. Without going in depth on the tricky notion of 'neutrality', these very liberating takes on both gender and sexuality, however, are not supported by a solid attempt to deconstruct precisely the traditional social dichotomies that create and crystallise the ever-so-deprecated labels, categories and stereotypes, which always turn out harmful for the more vulnerable social groups. What emerges out of the interviews is that the difficulty in challenging the oppressing social dichotomies seems to be intimately connected to a certain sexophobia, which in this context must not be intended as an uncomfortable approach to the private sphere of erotic practices, but rather as a reluctance to tackle and break the social taboo of sex. What we witness is a discursive practice that constantly puts a distance separating Gay Village and its organisers from any form of sexual connotation. While toning down the sexual element serves the purpose of deconstructing the social stigma that depicts the homosexual as a morbid sex pervert, at the same time it also inserts the philosophy of Gay Village into a trajectory of homonormativity. The image of the homosexual is polished and

normalised with a thorough desexualisation, and the presence of Gay Village within Rome's urban space is narrated as a change from, when not even in overt opposition to the genuinely homoerotic practices of outdoors cruising. Gay Village is not meant to be an erotic space also because it is constructed as a 'feminised' space: there is a significant component of (lesbian) women at the leadership of the organisation, who do not seem to challenge much a normative notion of femininity that is not too keen on appropriating the female bodily experience; the sexual sphere is often interpreted as the territory of male brutal prevarication, and rather than being socially reclaimed, it tends to be neglected.

The commercial nature of the enterprise, then, makes it even more difficult to develop and present a thick critical discourse on gender and sexuality: in the male-dominated business world, the Gay Village organisers have to 'play by the rules', interact with and try to earn validation from peers whose socio-political views can even be far from inclusive. By the same token, while the Gay Village leadership did incorporate some key personalities of Rome's women-only entertainment (like Lucilla) from the very beginning, this type of commercial offer is given a very limited time-space compared to the entire duration of the event, on the count that it could possibly prove itself not to be the most lucrative move. In the end, Gay Village is a private company that needs to close every edition with a positive financial balance: social discourse often becomes vulnerable when economic interests kick in. In light of these outcomes, it certainly does not seem surprising that participant observation at Gay Village revealed the frequent unfolding of male-dominated heterosexist dynamics in the fruition of a space that is gay-connoted, yet not invested with a fully articulated queer discourse. The space of Gay Village constantly runs the risk of not guaranteeing safety and comfort to women and queer subjectivities, despite the organisers' claims that it is the place where everyone is welcome and feels at ease. Echoing Robyn Longhurst, this happens because in the construction of the space of Gay Village, the female and queer bodies are constantly neglected.

In light of everything that I pointed out along this text, I think that what best sums up the relationship that holds together Gay Village, its female leadership and the articulation of a discourse on gender is the end of my interview with Meg, Grazia's girlfriend and a popular Italian actress; when I asked her how she defines herself now that she has come out and feels part of the LGBTQ community, she blissfully smiled, opened her eyes wide, and emphatically said: "Femmina".

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

When Grazia met Lorenzo, in the aftermath of the political fragmentation that unfolded once the World Pride was over, Rome witnessed its first steps towards a more defined neoliberal gay agenda (Chasin, 2000; Duggan, 2003), which was very much in line with what was happening in other metropolitan contexts of the Western world, and which looked at the US tradition that significantly had influenced the 2000 celebrations. The Gay Village organisers opted for the physical creation of a more permanent, visible, gay-branded space within the *public space* of the city, with a desexualised connotation that, in its goals, aimed at moving away from a perception of the homosexual as sexually deviant, in a process of normalisation. One of the first times I met with the *giovani creativi*, they clearly expressed that the mission of Gay Village was to present the LGBTQ community to the heterosexual majority. In her interview, Lucilla explained how, in her initial intentions, she imagined Gay Village to be the *shop window* of the Roman, and Italian, LGBTQ community. This evocative metaphor conveys references to concepts that came up when discussing the World Pride: in particular the performance of identity as *staged authenticity* (Roche, 1998), and the visibility of a traditionally closeted identity, like homosexuality, which would inevitably have to be adjusted to the perceptions of the heterosexual majority. Gay Village represented the legacy of the World Pride because it crystallised and rendered more permanent some important dynamics that unfold during Pride Parades, while also offering to the eternal city a path towards forms of neoliberal gay branding.

In 2017, Gay Village's sixteenth edition, the situation seemed a little different from its beginnings. Over the course of the years Gay Village quickly became a landmark event in Rome's Estate Romana. *Vox populi* came to recognise it as the most significant initiative organised in the capital of Italy during the summertime. One must not overlook that, regardless of the extreme fragmentation of the Estate Romana as a programme of initiatives, Gay Village was fully integrated within this Roman entertainment machine. However, Lucilla pointed out she did not really care for Gay Village to become the hottest ticket of the Estate Romana; in its original goals, Gay Village was supposed to create something that went far beyond what Rome had to offer, which the organisers regarded as extremely provincial. Lucilla, Lorenzo, Grazia made references to Barcelona's Circuit Festival and Sydney's Mardi Gras, local festivals with a defined LGBTQ connotation, which had grown to become hallmark events for their own cities, while also finding their legitimate spot in the LGBTQ global calendar of entertainment offer. According to the interviewees, by the tenth edition it had become clear that Gay Village was failing to embark upon the trajectory of firmly establishing Rome within the

LGBTQ global map and calendar. This timing finds a correspondence with Lorenzo's abandonment of the direction of the festival.

Lorenzo was the original head of the entrepreneurial cohort of Gay Village; in his interview, he expressed how, in his final years at the festival, he had progressively grown distant from the philosophy that had taken over the organisation of the editions. Though he voluntarily left Gay Village for reasons that were not directly associated with it, he admitted that that decision was for him very hard to digest, because he had come to think of Gay Village as a son he could not recognise any longer. He revealed to dislike it and, once out, to never have returned to Gay Village as a client afterwards. Similarly Lucilla, who left Gay Village in 2018 to join another gay-branded business, shared some of the reflections expressed by Lorenzo, while also pointing at the fact that, over the years, some entrepreneurs investing in Gay Village had simply taken advantage of the scrumptious revenues and completely lost track of its concept and philosophy.

In Lucilla's view, Gay Village never became the 'shop window' of the Roman and Italian LGBTQ community that she had once meant to set up. In 2017, when I conducted my participant observation, Muccassassina was the only other LGBTQ commercial business that participated in Gay Village. In 2017 Gay Village did not look like a place of communitarian coexistence, but simply as yet another gay-branded commercial venue. Lucilla was particularly unhappy with the very provincial tone that Gay Village had come to assume: rather than aiming upwards and becoming a globally recognised event, she felt that the festival opened up downwards, in a process of *massification*. Lucilla expressed utter distaste both for the quality of the programme of activities, and for the people that had come to frequent the venue, who were less and less "*bella gente*" and more and more *tamarri*. In the conclusions I am going to make some more references to this specific social group; in this context I want to delve a little more into the reasons why the tamarri seemed to find Gay Village particularly appealing.

I was certainly very much inspired by material culture approaches (Miller, 1998) in my effort to make sense of how and why a gay-branded venue could become so popular among a cohort of people who is possibly less likely to make many queer encounters and experiences throughout their otherwise heteronormative life trajectories. On the one hand, the entertainment offer during the *preserale* could count on the participation of many TV personalities, especially from Silvio Berlusconi's Mediaset formats, and in particular from talent, gossip and reality shows. This type of programming is likely to attract a clientele with specific consumption tastes and practices, when it comes to entertainment and leisure. Similarly, participant observation revealed how Gay Village was traditionally renowned as a clubbing venue for *house music*, which appeared to be very popular among the same population that was attracted by the entertainment programme.

In the Findings I already reported the distinct separation between the Amarganta floor, playing commercial music and displaying all sorts of gay imagery (a bigger stage animated by drag queens, Go-go boys, the dance crew and a vocalist filling the floor with sexual innuendo), and the Horok Floor, devoted to house music, where all the gay paraphernalia was dramatically toned down. By observing Gay Village during its construction phase, I was also able to grasp how the organisers regarded Horok as the cooler stage, and put a lot of thought and effort into designing it. On the Horok Floor there was barely any sign of queer connotation, especially among its club crowd, who always looked extremely cis-heteronormed. While the Gay Village founders followed the models of gay-connoted festivals around the world, the *giovani creativi* revealed to be mainly inspired by international festivals of clubbing music with no specific queer connotation.

On a final note, one must consider how, in its last editions, the Gay Village imagery was represented by two personalities who quintessentially incarnated this happy marriage between gay and mainstream pop cultures: Vladimir Luxuria, and then interviewee actress Meg, who was Grazia's girlfriend (now civil partner). I personally believe that it was potentially amazing how Gay Village had come to attract a population that otherwise might have very few occasions and possibilities to familiarise themselves with non-heteronormed and non-cisgender identities and subjectivities. Nevertheless, my ethnographic experience of the clubnights revealed significant levels of heteronormative cis-male spatial aggressiveness, which confirmed both women and queer subjects as vulnerable within the space of Gay Village. The previous Chapter showed how this type of venues might reinforce the subaltern social condition of certain queer subjectivities, mainly through processes of homonormalisation. However, as expressed in the Findings, while my social characteristics would construct me as a privileged queer subject – the ‘ideal’ prototype customer of this kind of venues – I often felt significant discomfort and lack of safety during the clubnights (Nast, 2002a; 2002b; Sothern, 2004).

What the ethnographic work seems to show is a blatant imposition of the heteronormed cis-male population over the Gay Village socio-spatial dynamics. Countless Facebook comments, posted by women and queer users, reported similar feelings of lack of safety, discomfort, even danger. Hence, Gay Village appeared to provide a commercial offer that appealed to a certain kind of population, while not reinforcing the gay connotation of the venue with adequate measures aimed at securing a comfortable and safe space for the queer subjects. As anticipated in the Findings, in my opinion reasons for this are to be attributed to the weak political discourse at the foundations of the Gay Village experience. Grazia is undoubtedly a key figure in the history of Italian activism and has also held political appointments in the municipality of Rome. Nowadays, however, her political involvement in LGBTQ activism has very much decreased: the association she founded, DiGay Project, carries out very

few and sporadic cultural and political initiatives, aside from supporting Gay Village. DìGay Project was born as (and still pretty much remains) the manifestation of Grazia's break away from Circolo Mario Mieli. In the absence of a strong political actor supporting Gay Village, I decided to turn to its organisers' personal views on sexual and gender identities in order to grasp what discourse was shaping the festival, and why it was not so effective.

As already detailed, a very interesting feature of Gay Village, in its final editions, was that many people at its leadership were (cisgender) women, something that seemed to contrast established views in the classic literature<sup>10</sup>, which identified (lesbian) women as a much weaker presence in gay-branded places of consumption, due to less spending power and different socialising practices (often to get away from highly male-dominated venues). All the interviewees declared that this fortunate coincidence, however, was never exploited as an opportunity to create a venue that could cater more specifically to a lesbian, and generally female clientele, so much that throughout the summer of 2017, only one weekend was dedicated to an event with a more defined female connotation. Similarly, the interviews revealed that issues of safety and freedom, which are crucial in the way women interact with a space that is naturalised as sexist (Valentine, 1995), were never discussed, under the firm belief that Gay Village was a place that 'welcomed everybody'.

The analysis of the organisers' visions on gender and sexuality unveiled the confirmation of traditional social dichotomies, which depict masculinity as a highly sexualised and body-bound predatory gender, while femininity is exalted in its incorporeal aspirations, as aesthetically pleasing and culturally fulfilling. This dichotomy appears to be the exact opposite of the Cartesian Mind versus Body distinction, which Robyn Longhurst challenges in her work on corporeality. The gendered Cartesian dichotomy associates the Mind, the place of intellect and innovation, with masculinity, while the Body, in its reproductive and maternal functions, is female and hierarchically subordinated to the Mind. However, this opposition is only apparent; it simply needs to be unpacked. Robyn Longhurst makes a beautiful reference to the work of Vicki Kirby:

Kirby (1992) points out that contesting the phallocentrism inherent in binary thinking does not mean simply reasserting that side of the binary that has previously been devalued. She explains: "a binary division, contrary to its apparent meaning, is the double articulation of one term, not two" (Kirby, 1992, p. 13). It is not enough, therefore, to simply focus attention on the body. The division itself, *between* mind and body, must be disrupted. (Longhurst, 2005, p.339).

The quote insists that a binary division between mind and body, which establishes the superiority of the former over the latter, ultimately ends up neglecting the body. Moreover, what Kirby's quotation makes the readers reflect

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<sup>10</sup> However, this view has already been expanded; see Podmore 2013.

upon is that, if the mind is associated with masculinity and the body with femininity, when the mind is conferred a hierarchical superiority, this inevitably entails that the normative male body will be privileged over all of the other bodies and corporealities. Rational space favours the male body. This was evidently at play when I tried to make sense of the discomfort and lack of safety that I felt at Gay Village. Flamboyant types of dancing, forms of *camp* attitudes, homoerotic exchanges: everything was subjected to the presence of a heteronormed cis-male crowd that did not seem to abide by the gay connotation of the club, and way too often succeeded in establishing his spatial hegemony in the venue (Rinaldi, 2015).

As depicted in the Findings, the philosophy shaping Gay Village was particularly keen in abandoning the social stereotype and stigma of the hyper-sexualised homosexual: accordingly, the venues were not equipped with any space or facility dedicated to sex and eroticism, like darkrooms, playrooms, labyrinths. Moreover, homoerotic PDA appeared to be extremely rare at Gay Village, and it would usually concentrate in those spots that were regarded as safest: the entrances to the privé areas, usually next to a security guard, and the front rows of the Amarganta dance floor, which was ‘gayer’ both in its connotation and population. The few homoerotic exchanges would happen pretty exclusively on the dance floor, and not on the rest of the space of Gay Village, which had a family-friendly, ‘countryside fair’ atmosphere. Homoerotic expressions seemed to be connected to the sensorial experience of the club crowd, rather than to the gay connotation of the space as a whole: accordingly, the few hidden, dark spots out of the dance floor were very rarely erotically connoted, and were used for other types of socially sanctioned activities, like doing drugs.

By interpreting these data in light of Robyn Longhurst’s approach, it is possible to conclude that Gay Village did not provide a social and physical space that enhanced a liberated and liberating bodily experience for the queer subjects, thus inevitably falling back into traditional heteronormative dynamics. As expressed in the Findings, the privé areas seemed to be the only space retaining a more solid queer connotation, something that inevitably inserts an economic filter to the enjoyment of a more relaxed, *friendlier* space. The design of the venues for the 2017 edition represented quite vividly a pyramidal system in which access to the enjoyment of a more liberated space was subjected to an economic filter. The privé areas, in fact, were designed and built up as a long open-air corridor *above* the two dance floors: this formed a huge balcony from which privé customers could enjoy a more comfortable clubnight experience, while looking *down* at the rest of the crowd.



FIGURE 5 – The balcony of the privé area (picture taken by the author on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

As for the confirmation of a strict male versus female hierarchical dichotomy, the most striking representation would have to be the differentiation between *security* and *care*: I am referring quite literally to the sharp division and differences between the personnel hired for security and the staff appointed to ‘care functions’. The first group was composed entirely of tall, chunky, awe-inspiring men (all white, as memory serves), who were all dressed in black, grim attire, wearing headphones that were all interconnected so as to form a system of thorough surveillance of the club. ‘Security’ was written in white capital letters on the back of their shirts. I distinctly remember how, on opening night, all the security people looked exactly the same because, on top of the features I just listed, all the people on duty that night were also bald, thus giving the impression that they were all the same one person. Moving away for a moment from rigorous scientific argumentation, one might evocatively affirm that the security guards, in their orderly homogeneity, did represent a way-too-literal manifestation of the white, heteronormed cisgender man, the Rational Man watching over a space full of queers, and reasserting control through the reassuring notion of ‘security’.

On the contrary, the care personnel was in charge of helping customers in need, guiding them throughout the venue and providing information. They wore a phosphorescent yellow waistcoat, with ‘Care’ written in blue capital letters on the back. The care personnel was composed of people with diverse gender

identities, and it was characterised by a much broader sexual and gender fluidity among its members. The corporeality of the care personnel was generally less imposing than the security guards, and they were not provided with headphones to communicate with one another; they appeared to be more dispersed across the venue. While working, some of them would also wear sexy clubbing attire underneath their waistcoats, thus signalling that, once off duty, they would likely remain to enjoy the clubnight. Needless to say, the ‘security versus care’ dichotomy was extremely gendered, and while the former was masculinised, the second one was feminised. It also clearly appears how the security personnel was accorded a hierarchical superior status, as they were better equipped to control the space than the care staff; the requirement of physical mightiness was awe-inspiring and served as a Foucauldian admonishment that, when needed, physical strength might be employed to reassert order.

I want to add two further details to the gendered dichotomy of security versus care. Firstly, when Gay Village was under construction, I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with the staff; I got to know Valentina, who in 2017 had just been promoted to co-manager of the crucial beverage committee, which was in charge of bars and drinks. Valentina had always wanted to become a bartender, and over the years had managed to make quite a sound upward career within the Gay Village organisation. Though she has a sweetest smile and a most welcoming attitude, at Gay Village she started off as part of the security personnel because of her mighty corporeality. In light of the dichotomy that I sketched out, Valentina’s bodily characteristic was a decisive factor that rendered her eligible for a ‘manly’ job, while also toning down her femininity.

Secondly, during my clubnights at Gay Village I noticed that cleaning and taking care of the restrooms were chores carried out by a small business composed of people with a Latin American background, who were all men. At the same time, among the all-male security personnel, many guards had Slavic or Eastern European origins. These examples reflect dynamics of *racialisation* of unskilled professions that are very much at play in today’s Italy. Without going in depth on this issue, which falls out of the scope of this thesis, the literature has highlighted how, when arriving in a Western country through patterns of low-income mobility, the masculinities of non-Western men are racialised and constantly reworked, by becoming either feminised or hyper-masculinised according to social constructions, but also to job and economic necessities (Broughton, 2008). These two examples show how race, too, profoundly comes into play in defining sexual and gendered dichotomies.

The ‘security versus care’ dichotomy is a material manifestation of the gendered binary expressed by the organisers in their views on sexual and gender identity. Maintaining a gendered division between care and security job descriptions is intimately connected to the very poor problematisation of gender as a social construction, and of the social roles that are assigned to the two predominant

gender identities. This inevitably affects sexuality, too, and it hampers the enjoyment of a gay-connoted space for the queer subjects. Other types of queer spaces, with a more defined political connotation, thoroughly reflect upon and deconstruct notions of safety, security, care and comfort in ways that constantly attempt to break the gender binary and tone down the heteronormed cis-male gaze. The talking walls that I have already mentioned do constitute a tangible and continuous effort of producing queer, transfeminist liberated spaces. Gay Village was a gay-branded business that claimed to welcome everyone, but where the political discourse on gender and sexuality was weak and quickly lost grip of the space in its materiality, thus letting heterosexist dynamics re-emerge.

This is also connected with the economic purpose of the establishment, which needs to make sure that the lucrative revenues are never compromised, and always increased. On the one hand, the success of Gay Village made its organisers become significant players in Rome's high-level entertainment circles. The organisers would often interact with entrepreneurs whose views could be extremely conservative or discriminatory, yet they would rarely question them, as they were eager for peer professional validation. On the other hand, there was an economic necessity to attract as many customers as possible, even at the expenses of the population that Gay Village claimed to cater primarily to. The already weak political discourse succumbed to economic interest; consequently, rather than queering the social dynamics of the venue, the space of Gay Village was ultimately controlled by traditional mechanisms of surveillance, in the hands of heteronormed cisgender men that tolerated heteronormativity while inspiring awe, which reminded everyone that inappropriate behaviour could be coercively punished.



## CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has attempted to give a contribution to the geographies of sexualities and to the academic debate on the relationship between urban space and queer subjectivities, by developing two case studies on the capital of Italy: Roma. The argument unfolds out of an appreciation of Rome as an ‘alternatively global’ or ‘alternatively modern’ city, as it holds a global centrality that is not articulated mainly around Neoliberal flows of capital, resources and information, but rather it is shaped by a profound religious discourse with a global reach, due to the presence of the Vatican. Nevertheless, Rome is the capital city of a country that, since the end of the Second World War, has been socially constructed as ‘Western’: the socio-political tradition of liberal democracy and the universalism of rights has led, pretty homogeneously, all countries in the West to include LGBTQ rights in their political agendas in the most recent decades. While Rome’s profoundly religious discourse and imagery necessarily need to dialogue with these social developments, the thesis has attempted to understand whether the urban space of the eternal city has effectively been queered with significant experiences or artefacts. The city of Rome presented a very interesting case for analysis because it hosted the first World Pride in history, in the year 2000: the event was thought, organised and publicised with a global, universal reach precisely in order to consolidate the political momentum that the LGBTQ community was acquiring around the Western World; constructing an urban antagonism with the Catholic Jubilee appeared to be an effective strategy to achieve such goal. For as much as we need to appreciate the profound Catholic discourse that embraces the city of Rome and all its implications, the significance of a world-class event like the 2000 Pride could not go unrecognised, and its consequences for the city of Rome had to be elaborated, and possibly retained and channelled into promising trajectories for LGBTQ emancipation. This thesis has attempted to offer some critical reflections on this regard.

The case study on the 2000 World Pride adopted a theoretical approach that integrated the main themes of the academic debate on Pride Parades with some conceptual tools of the literature on mega-events. The World Pride seems to have developed along a very common mega-event trajectory: it was an overall successful event, whose legacy remained poorly addressed and did not succeed in fully inserting Rome’s urban context into a sound path of social progress in terms of issues of gender and sexual identities. The lack of a strong political leadership undoubtedly emerges as one of the most significant reasons of this unconvincing post-event phase: the absence of a fully committed political back up from the city administration certainly did not work towards the strengthening of a long-term urban agenda targeting LGBTQ issues. As Donald McNeill (2003) had already demonstrated, in the year 2000 Mayor Francesco Rutelli opted for a

progressive retreat of support for the event in light of a bigger strategy aimed at strengthening his power as *primo cittadino*, in light of the Vatican's renewed urban interests that, with the Jubilee, attempted both to reinvigorate the status of Rome as a Holy City, and the power of the Pope.

While the 2000 World Pride unfolded without the official recognition and support of the city of Rome, what the case study highlights is that the political leadership of LGBTQ activists organising the World Pride collapsed in the immediate aftermath of the event, thereby hampering the possibility of creating a sound common strategy addressing the legacy of such world-class event. The case study showed how the World Pride leadership did not succeed in turning the event into a catalysing opportunity to upgrade the process of community building that had already been underway in Rome all throughout the nineties, so as to both consolidate a visible urban presence through the set up of solid, long-term LGBTQ-connoted experiences and artefacts, and to channel a strong socio-political consensus that could affect the national government in matters of sexual citizenship. While expressing their satisfaction and happiness for the huge success of the World Pride as a circumscribed event, many of the interviewees assessed it as a lost opportunity; they also interpreted the insufficient and unsatisfactory Italian political achievements in terms of sexual citizenship as originating precisely from the lost opportunity for cohesion that the World Pride could have been.

Nevertheless, the 2000 World Pride did inspire the development of urban experiences with a sound LGBTQ connotation. In particular, some of the main organisers of the World Pride joined forces with entrepreneurs in the gay clubbing scene, and created Gay Village with the goal of continuing along that path of bigger, high-level projects that the 2000 World Pride had inaugurated. The case study on Gay Village aimed at grasping the developments of this successful festival throughout its two-decade-old history, and the organisation and preparation of one of its editions; furthermore, it drew from the experience of the Gay Village clubnights in order to understand the extent to which it represents a queer liberated space. The case study on Gay Village proposes an encounter between the academic debate on gay consumption and the gay villages as urban artefacts enmeshed in urban branding strategies, and Robyn Longhurst's work on the corporeality of the body as central in the production of knowledge about spaces, identities and subjectivities. Longhurst's theorisation proved key in order to make sense of what the participation observation during the clubnights had highlighted: the significant and imposing presence of a young, heteronormed male crowd and the consequent development of socio-spatial dynamics that ultimately produced discomfort for many women and queer subjectivities, in a LGBTQ-connoted venue. These findings were coupled by an analysis of the views about gender identity and sexual orientation of the women at the leadership of the festival, which were constructed around a 'male versus female' dichotomy, associating the former with a profoundly carnal corporeality, and the latter with a superior and beautiful unworldliness. The

physical and bodily experiences of women and non-homonormed queer subjectivities was pretty much absent in their discourses; therefore, since Gay Village is a commercial entertainment enterprise, it inevitably turns out to cater mainly to the cravings of a male normative crowd, while often failing to be a safe and comfortable space for socially subaltern subjectivities.

The case study on Rome's Gay Village informs the debate on this urban artefact, and on gay consumption in general, because the festival has followed a process of commercial mainstreaming that is profoundly connected and intertwined with pop culture and pop imagery, often in its 'trashy' manifestations: the 2017 edition, the one I observed, presented a programme of activities that featured a significant number of TV personalities from reality and talent shows; in Italy, this kind of programmes are often regarded as the 'trashiest' TV formats. The problem is that this entertainment offer tends to appeal mainly to young people who embrace, or are associated with *tamarro* ('chav') culture and lifestyle, who usually possess low levels of education and are brought up in contexts that heavily reproduce sexist, homo-transphobic, and all other types of discriminatory social models. While on paper it is both amazing and desirable that these young people have a chance of familiarising themselves with a LGBTQ-connote space, the fieldwork has shown that they often disregard where they are, and find no forms of sanction for their harassing actions and behaviours. Therefore, what takes place is not the coming together of both a queer and a heteronormed population in a liberating space that loosens up all social categories, but rather a form of colonisation by a straight crowd, which may reproduce forms of marginalisation, discomfort and lack of safety for the queer subjectivities.

Finally, the commercial nature of the Gay Village project requires its organisers to sell out the events and the clubnights in order to produce profits that can pay off the costs and generate revenues; unfortunately, in this kind of circumstances, a thorough social discourse is likely to be undermined. Rome's Gay Village differs from paradigmatic models on the commercial mainstreaming of the gay scene because, at least nowadays, such process does not seem to be articulated around a notion of 'coolness' of the gay scene. This genuinely Neoliberal pattern is the one that Richard Florida (2002; 2005) integrated into his creativity models for urban growth, which became extremely popular at the turn of the millennium: his Gay Index operationalised *friendliness* as a factor for urban growth and success, in a larger framework that interpreted *tolerance* as a main magnet for the attraction of the human capital of a highly skilled creative class of young professionals and artists with cosmopolitan and open-minded lifestyles and preferences.

This might have been the original idea that led to the development of Rome's Gay Village, as confirmed during the interview with Lorenzo. However, the investigation on Gay Village seems to indicate a subtle, yet extremely decisive difference from the Neoliberal model: the latter materialises *diversity* into specific urban artefacts (like the gay commercial scenes) that straight or queer

customers consume because, or without giving much relevance to the fact that they are gay-connoted; regardless of its final outcomes, this type of consumption requires clients to acknowledge the specificity of the place they are in, and consequently to conform their behaviours, attitudes and open-mindedness. On the other hand, Rome's Gay Village, with the poor discourse on sexual and gender identity of its organisers, the consequent lack of services, activities or spaces with an overt homoerotic connotation, its house music dancefloor with no gay imagery and entertainment (go-go boys, drag queens), and a general mainstreaming trajectory that is significantly influenced by 'trashy' forms of pop culture, seem to invite in a heteronormed crowd that can very well consume Gay Village *in complete disregard* of its LGBTQ connotation.

As already acknowledged, the difference between the paradigmatic Gay Village model and Rome's specific case is subtle because, in the end, none of the two cases ultimately produces genuinely queer liberated spaces, as they all are affected by dynamics that do not thoroughly challenged the cis-heteronormed status quo. Nevertheless, such difference proves decisive at least for two reasons. Firstly, in light of everything we discussed, Rome's Gay Village is likely to witness much higher levels of male heteronormed aggressiveness, resulting in a profound violation of the comfort and safety of women and queer subjectivities. In fact, my participant observation revolved predominantly around the geographies of queer discomfort and marginalisation provoked by a heteronormed male crowd. Secondly, by looking at the case of Gay Village, we could go as far as questioning the extent to which a Neoliberal LGBTQ agenda has been successfully played out in Rome.

In the year 2000, the hosting of the World Pride put the eternal city in a privileged position for the development of a sound and solid LGBTQ platform that, by consolidating the significant communitarian networks that had been thickening during the nineties, could continue along a trajectory of high-level urban projects with a LGBTQ connotation. Such trajectory would also help gather and maintain a political momentum that could positively influence both the local administration and the national government in matters of sexual citizenship. The World Pride was a successful event that dramatically changed, for the better, the course of the Italian path towards LGBTQ social emancipation. The massive appropriation of public space by queer subjectivities and friendly supporters, and the overt confrontation with the Catholic Church opened new incredible possibilities for visibility, recognition, freedom in an era, the very beginning of the new millennium, in which the urban and national agendas tackling LGBTQ issues were only starting to escalate. In the long run, however, this unique opportunity seems to have been only partially exploited; almost twenty years later, many of the interviewees, even those who were either involved or active into the organisation of the World Pride initiatives, express disappointment and disillusionment in the ways the legacy of such mega-event has been retained. The quick disruption of the political cohesion of LGBTQ activists and associations emerges as a main factor that hampered the upgrade

of the Roman queer experience to high-level projects and initiatives that would continue to expand queer visibility and support strong claims for the recognition of rights; such disruption revealed generalised difficulties to turn the World Pride into a learning opportunity. Furthermore, all the interviewees have attributed a significant part of the success of the World Pride to Pope John Paul II's overt opposition, and to the widespread indignation that it caused among civil society: even though this antagonism was intended and provoked by the World Pride organisers, it also seems to point at the possibility that Rome's LGBTQ networks might not have been able, on their own, to gather such a compelling momentum around the World Pride.

The weaknesses of the organising leadership emerged just as clearly in the case of Gay Village, which was created as the official legacy of the World Pride and was supposed to represent the coming together of LGBTQ political activism and forms of pink economy. Almost two decades later, Gay Village is far from being a queer liberated space, and its organisers share views and approaches to gender and sexual identities that very poorly manage to create a space of freedom, or at least of safety and comfort for the queer subjectivities. Moreover, it is worth remarking that, for as much as it is economically successful, Gay Village is still an itinerant and seasonal festival: it has a summertime temporary nature for which it does not root itself more permanently into Rome's public space. Even though many of its organisers work in other gay clubnights around the eternal city from October to May, Gay Village as a LGBTQ urban artefact emerges in Rome's public space only for three months. This means that the organisation of every edition faces the possibility of encountering many problems and differences, from delays in finding an adequate location (as it happened in the 2005 edition) to animosities with neighbourhood associations (during the editions in Testaccio and Parco San Sebastiano) for problems related to noise and overcrowding, which often convey also some homo-sceptical undertone. Fortunately, thus far Gay Village has never encountered any overt opposition from any Mayor, not even right-wing Gianni Alemanno.

The successful, but ephemeral situation of Gay Village can be associated with the other LGBTQ urban context hosted in Rome: the Gay Street. The Gay Street was inaugurated in 2007 by Walter Veltroni, the left-wing Mayor whose political agenda centred on a cultural discourse (Roncarolo, 2012) that, to a certain extent, echoed and resembled the creative paradigms that were triumphing in the first decade of the new millennium. The official nickname of Gay Street refers to the first couple of blocks in Via San Giovanni in Laterano, facing the Coliseum; the nickname officially acknowledged the spatial concentration of a few commercial activities, run by LGBTQ people, which openly cater mainly to a LGBTQ clientele. Differently from Gay Village then, the Gay Street is a permanent urban setting with a visible LGBTQ connotation; still, its limitations are pretty self-evident: the street has a mortifying tiny size, and only one side of the road is actually built, as the other hosts an archaeological site; there are very few LGBTQ-connoted venues, and they are all purely commercial in kind; the

location strengthens the tourist appeal of the street, but in a way it does not help the LGBTQ branding, which is toned down by the grand urban scenography of the Coliseum; finally the creation of the Gay Street did not spark a ‘gaybourhood effect’, because there are not significant gay residential dynamics in the area, but more importantly because the neighbourhood association has been working hard to limit the gay connotation exclusively within the two blocks in Via San Giovanni in Laterano. On top of this, the pedestrianisation of the Gay Street is discontinuous, not permanent. It is hard to be impressed by Rome’s Gay Street, if one is acquainted with the gay scene of other metropolises and capital cities around North-Western Europe and North America.

This reference to the Gay Street supports what emerged throughout the thesis: the 2000 World Pride and its legacy in all of its manifestations were only very partially successful in affecting Rome’s urban space and discourse in ways that could result in the development of spaces, projects and experiences that effectively challenged the naturalised cis-heteronormative social dynamics. Moreover, not even an exquisite Neoliberal agenda, connecting friendliness to models of growth and capital production, seems to be thoroughly underway in the eternal city. And this is certainly more surprising, because it differentiates the Roman case from an established, generalised pattern that is at play in many metropolises and capital cities throughout North-Western Europe, and the West in general. Since the Second World War, Italy has been socially constructed as a Western country, and it has participated in the creation and maintenance of this geopolitical and cultural region, which produces a notion of modernity in which liberal democracy and the universalism of human rights are conjugated with capital accumulation. Accordingly, the European Union heavily affects and directs the social agendas of its country members, among which Italy is one of the founders. Nevertheless, the specificities of Rome’s urban context appear to hamper not just effective forms of queering of the public space, but also the development of a Neoliberal LGBTQ agenda. In this regard, the role of the Catholic Church, its power and manifold implications in politics and in all the other matters concerning the eternal city simply cannot be underestimated. In light of this cumbersome presence, we can certainly read the general reticence of Rome’s public administration and Mayors to carry on a consistent and ever-expanding LGBTQ urban agenda.

What this thesis has attempted to show, however, is that the unsatisfactory development of the legacy of the World Pride cannot be attributed just to the opposition, or lack of support of the strong socio-political actors, like the Vatican and the local administration; the aftermath of the World Pride witnessed the return to a high fragmentation among the LGBTQ activist networks, which often turned into overt animosity. The World Pride did not succeed in catalysing an upgrade of the political agency of the LGBTQ activism, and of stronger forms of communitarian belonging. And, according to what has emerged from this study, this failure cannot be directly attributed only to the Church or to the local government.

Political fragmentation within LGBTQ activism came up in my previous work on the city of Turin, too. In the context of my investigation on the Quadrilatero Romano neighbourhood, I discovered how, for many years, different LGBTQ associations had coexisted a few blocks away from one another exchanging little to no interaction, so much that some activists for long remained unaware of the other queer political presences in the area. While conducting fieldwork in Turin, the activists I interviewed revealed how this lack of cohesion among LGBTQ neighbouring groups was to be attributed to their different political belonging: while some associations had retained the legacy of FUORI!<sup>11</sup> and were affiliated to the libertarian Partito Radicale, other activist circles maintained more defined left-wing stances. The affiliation with the political inspirations and agendas of a specific party or political position had traditionally been accorded a strong social power for catalysing collective belonging, which could hardly be matched by other potential communitarian factors, like a queer identity.

The present work on Rome has not uncovered a tendency to fragmentation, within the LGBTQ activism, which is connected to different political stances; rather, it often appeared to be the result of a high level of litigiousness based on personalistic motives. In many interviews that I conducted, resentment was often expressed against activists that were deemed to be politically unprepared, to have very poor professionalism, and who appeared greedy to dispose of the associations as if they were their personal property, often with the intention of eventually obtaining some political appointments. At first I usually tended not to pay much attention to such comments, by dismissing them as trivial anecdotes. But as they kept piling up, I did begin to wonder whether these forms of political particularism should actually be integrated within a thorough reflection on Italian LGBTQ activism. Some instances of this personalistic tendency to fragmentation have appeared throughout this thesis: as already mentioned, Grazia founded DìGay Project exquisitely because of her break from Circolo Mario Mieli. The failed opening of Gay Village in the summer of 2019 is the result of an escalation of tensions within the main organising board and the staff, which led to progressive abandonment of more and more people who, in turn, became involved in or initiated the organisation of other events, holding pretty much the same characteristics of Gay Village. This thesis is not a contribution to the field of history of the Italian LGBTQ movement, so my reflections are exquisitely tentative suggestions; however, both the case of Turin and the case of Rome seem to show that, due to very different political approaches, Italian LGBTQ activism traditionally was not a unitary force, at least up until the World Pride and the subsequent insertion of a LGBTQ agenda in the local and national politics.

This brings me to a second reflection that looks more in depth at the processes of identity building among the Italian LGBTQ population. In my work on the city of Turin, all of the older interviewees (over 60) were people who identified as

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<sup>11</sup> FUORI! Means ‘Out!’ but is also an acronym that stands for Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano, the first Italian activist group for homosexual liberation.

gay and who had lived a pretty open gay lifestyle; however, in their self-narratives they would constantly play down their sexual orientation, by defining it as just ‘a part’ of their identity, and certainly not the one they wanted to emphasise the most. Accordingly, many of them distanced themselves from the LGBTQ activist groups, which they would usually identify as ‘ghettos’; they would claim to be people who were capable of making friends with everyone, not just the gays. All these interviewees utterly refused to define their residential experiences in the Quadrilatero Romano as forms of ‘gaybourhood dynamics’, even though some patterns of territorial concentration were evidently at play.

I perceived similar undertones also in some of the interviews that I conducted for this thesis, though they were much more subtle as all the interviewees were openly involved in activism or forms of gay entrepreneurialism. However, by going back to the paragraph on the Gay Village female leadership, it is possible to detect some undertones in the interviewees’ narratives, which recall what emerged within the Turinese cohort: for example, Grazia’s aspiration to a universal ‘genderless neutrality’, or Lucilla’s confession that she was tired of being labelled gay, on the count that love is love, and should have no gender. The cry for a universal, pan-comprehensive notion of love, which makes no distinction of gender identity and sexual orientation, appears to have traditionally been a very common practice in the identity narratives of the Italian LGBTQ population; it is an effective tool that makes it easy to dribble away from an explicit identification with a LGBTQ collective social entity. Since we do not live in a perfectly just and equal society, refusal to actively identify as part of a subaltern social group, thus depoliticising one’s identity inevitably reproduces and reinforces heteronormative and sexist social neutralities and normalities. I just want to remark again that these are not closeted identities; they are fairly open queer identities that, for different reasons, do not fully take on the subaltern position in which society still relegates them.

Throughout this thesis, at least a couple of factors emerged that might have been at play in fostering this specific form of LGBTQ identity building. Firstly, as already mentioned in the Introduction, Italy’s history of medicalization and socio-legal penalisation of the homosexual identity seems to have been milder than in other national contexts. The construction of the homosexual as a pervert or a socially dangerous individual was, in its own way, still a process of identity formation, which in other national contexts was eventually reinterpreted and reclaimed by the queer subjects themselves to fight that same oppression. In Italy this seems to have been a much less articulated process. Secondly, familism and the centrality of the traditional family have historically played a crucial role in our societal organisation. I think that Italy might well represent a very specific case that could challenge classic scholarly tenets on the relationship between LGBTQ identities and traditional dynamics of kinship and proximity. The academic debate has already updated and reinterpreted Kath Weston’s (1995) seminal, and still profoundly significant work on the Great Gay Migration from suburban to metropolitan America, which led many LGBTQ people to loosen up

their kinship ties and to form urban ‘families of choice’ (Weston, 1997). I would argue that the Italian case conjugates the relationship between urbanism and family dynamics in much more articulated ways that could profoundly challenge the socio-geographic classic dichotomy that juxtaposes an urban gay lifestyle to suburban traditional heteropatriarchal arrangements.

Finally, the role of the Catholic Church needs to be addressed, even though in this thesis I have argued against the exotic and exaggerated tendency of some non-Italian scholars to interpret one too many aspects of the Italian society as inevitably connected to a loosely defined ‘Catholicism’. It is paramount to distinguish at least between the Vatican as a political force, the Catholic Church as a social actor with its many articulations into the parishes and dioceses, and Catholicism as a faith. Nonetheless, the religious sphere certainly represents an aspect to look profoundly into when attempting to put together a sociology of the traditional processes of identity building of the Italian LGBTQ population. However, as already anticipated, since the turn of the millennium the situation has changed: the World Pride has certainly provided a strong symbolic starting point for a better-articulated process of collective visibility and political demands.

Nonetheless, it is important to reflect upon the extent to which these dynamics of (dis)identification have really faded away. The explosion of dating apps based on systems of geolocalisation has created a flourishing queer virtual space, which might render even more pointless the necessity of making one’s sexuality a public political matter, especially in a social context that has provided some (extremely poor and) basic legal recognition to the community, while also heightening a duplicity for which queer identities are less and less regarded as unusual, but at the same time neofascist resurgence has amplified the perception of risk and danger. In this context, what is the point of making gay political, when you can have a cutie delivered at home, *prêt-à-fucker*? And on top of that, you can also marry the guy! I am sensing that this prepolitical and private notion of non-conforming sexual and gender identities is maybe still surviving, filled with the strong neoliberal tones that Duggan (2003) very clearly unravelled.

Bringing all of these reflections back to the issue at hand, it seems that the social dynamics I highlighted all point at an absence, or better, at a not exhaustive queer presence in Italy’s urban public space. In this regard, Robyn Longhurst’s work is key to unveil a process of queer identity building that might be rich and articulated in the private sphere, while it is not as successful in completing a full embodiment of such identity in the public space. This is a replication of the dichotomy of ‘private versus public’, which still too strongly reiterates how (non-conforming) sexual and gender identities are constructed as a private matters, hence confirming a heteronormed sexist public normality. Following Longhurst’s approach, by maintaining our queer identities private, or simply not politically meaningful, we automatically mortify them as bodily and irrational expressions that do not have legitimacy to be present and visible in the Rational public

space. Moreover, this way we are dismissing the possibility that the body could be a legitimate site for knowledge production and liberation. We are replicating a Cartesian system whose dichotomies place Mind over Body, Rationality over Sexuality, Male over Female, Normal versus Queer.

In my last colloquium at the GSSI, when presenting the advancements of my work, I provocatively concluded my presentation by stating that Italian case studies could challenge the consolidated notion that the city is a space of liberation. Mine was genuinely a provocation, which however aimed at hinting at the many complexities that lay behind the interpretation that urban space is a privileged site for queer emancipation. The literature has thoroughly highlighted how not all queer subjects are put in the same conditions to freely enjoy the exciting possibilities of the city. I think that the Italian examples may add another level of complexity to our understanding of queer urban emancipation, because they highlight how, according to their socio-cultural backgrounds and personal upbringing, queer subjects may interpret and articulate their personal emancipation in different ways, which do not always acquire a collective, communitarian, political connotation. However, if the exploration and consolidation of queer identities develops predominantly in the private sphere, without fully appreciating their subaltern social positions and acting accordingly against oppression, is it still possible to speak about emancipation? Evoking again Kath Weston, perhaps it is not enough to 'get thee to a big city': the moves and actions of a queer subject constantly demand to be filled with a clear political meaning, if they want to turn from forms of private personal fulfilment and freedom, into trajectories of social liberation and justice. Unfortunately the dark spell of neoliberalism has created the illusion that personal freedom is, in itself, a clear manifestation of social liberation. In the words of Lisa Duggan:

There is no vision of a collective, democratic public culture, or of an on-going engagement with contentious cantankerous queer politics. Instead we have been administered a kind of political sedative – we get marriage and the military, then we go home and cook dinner, forever. (Duggan, 2003, p. 62).

Finally, the case of Rome appears in particular to disprove, yet again, the universal applicability of models of urban growth that operationalise gay-friendliness as a factor of success, which do not take into account the specificities of the metropolitan contexts in which they are played out. This unmasks the Anglo-Saxon (especially American) origins of certain urban phenomena, which are later theorised and then generalised onto contexts presenting different social, political and cultural trajectories. Most importantly, Rome's World Pride and Gay Village appear to challenge directly both a uniformed notion of the 'West' as a geopolitical cultural region of Neoliberal modernity and progress, and consequently also the divide between Global North and Global South. The notion of a metropolitan Global North, in which economic growth is accompanied by steady social progress, is inevitably questioned if we look at Rome, a metropolitan area of a developed country, through queer lenses. And this provides an invaluable opportunity to defy,

question, change and rework all the different global geographies through which we attempt to make sense of the world we live in.



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"Così parla la Sapienza di Dio: 'Il Signore mi ha creato come inizio della sua attività, prima di ogni sua opera, all'origine. Dall'eternità sono stata formata, fin dal principio, dagli inizi della terra. [...] Io ero con lui come artefice, ed ero la sua delizia ogni giorno: giocavo davanti a lui in ogni istante, giocavo sul globo terrestre, ponendo le mie delizie tra i figlio dell'uomo'".  
 (Proverbi 8, 22-23; 30-31).

