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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims at understanding the informal access to public housing within the broader context of Neapolitan housing system and investigate the numerous factors underlying the phenomenon. It aims at deepening our understanding about the constraints and the opportunities that shape people's informal practices and strategies to respond to their housing-related needs, as they navigate the fragmented provision context of local housing welfare system. This thesis investigates the resource management practices that inhabitants put in action to their meet material and immaterial residential needs, the alternative, complex pathway of housing, and the constant tension that each of these individual strategies establishes with the structural forces. As such, the overall objective of this thesis is a small contribution through empirical exploration and verification of hypothesis the actors, mechanisms and meanings that shape the informal occupation of public housing.

The formal-informal governance arrangement and, more specifically, the link between housing market rigidity, housing governance, housing stress and informal housing strategies constitute the empirical domain through which this thesis achieves its aim. The public housing complex named 'Rione De Gasperi' (in the De Gasperi neighbourhood), in the eastern part of Naples (southern Italy) is the case study where the theoretical framework is applied for an empirical analysis that informs the theory. The thesis is organized into three academic papers. The first paper profits concepts and analyses found across disciplines that investigate urban informalities in the Global South and navigates through the multifaceted continuum of formality and informality that shape informal 'inheritance' system of public housing flats. It analyses informal access to public housing as an endogenous and functional component of the housing field rather than an anomaly or a marginal way of living. The second paper focuses on the usual squatting practices in a public housing building (for example by breaking into the building). It induces a potential definition for the 'individualistic squatting' in public housing units by using an analytical comparison with 'ordinary' politically-oriented squatting. Individualistic squatting is an expression meaning the act of occupying a building for residential purposes that takes place outside any political framework. This paper aims at detecting the main features that contribute to the emergence of this specific kind of occupation. In order to achieve its aim, the paper is based on profits from the political squatting 'opportunity structure' concepts. The third paper further elaborates on 'housing pathways' methodological approach of investigation and its conceptualisation of residential mobility as an embedded decision-making process, by framing it to the interplay of material and immaterial dimensions that shape the inhabitants' housing pathways to squatting. This paper seeks to investigate the potential contribution of 'housing pathways' framework into observing the search of house along squatters' housing pathways as search of *home*, which does not end when an empty space to squat is found. Finally, a photographic appendix is added in order to disclose the 'human faces' beyond the informal occupation of public flats. This appendix is divided into two contributions. The first part is a photographic portrait project aimed at investigating the way the relationship between

the De Gasperi district's squatters and the residential spaces where they squat shape their sense of home. The second part focuses on a religious moment that plays an important role in defining the inhabitants' sense of belonging to the district. The case study is employed in each paper. The thesis is based on a deep ethnographic work conducted between 2015 and 2018. Collection of primary data consists of both intense observation of external and internal spaces of the neighbourhood and several semi-structured interviews. To this end, during the fieldwork a multi-methods qualitative enquiry was employed. The analytical framework is characterized by an interdisciplinary investigation on: urban and housing informality, housing welfare model, public housing policies, public housing supply regulative system, politically-oriented squatting, housing pathway, and meaning of *home*. The main results of this thesis refer to: a) contribution to the understanding of the complex nexus between formality and informality within public housing provision by investigating how informal 'inheritance' system of public flats takes place in Naples; b) conceptualisation of 'individualistic squatting' construct for the investigation of the main features that favour the emergence of self-interested squatting in public housing buildings; c) suggestion of the housing pathway approach as an additional lens to frame housing-related decision-making process for weaker socio-economic groups, bringing on board a conceptualisation of squatting as a stage of a nonlinear and romantic journey during which households try to satisfy their material and immaterial needs related to the dwelling, and d) application of visual ethnography, through employing photographic enquiry, as method of fieldwork research aimed at building a consensual, collaborative and therefore at least potentially, empathetic relationship between research and subject.



## INTRODUCTION

Informal housing is a global phenomenon involving approximately one-quarter of world's urban population (Un-Habitat, 2015). The expression generally refers to informal strategies that inhabitants and groups of inhabitants utilise to gain access to housing. For a variety of existential, political, economic and legal reasons, people settle on vacant land and squat in empty buildings—both private and public—and live there without any formal entitlement (Dikovic, 2018; p. 10). It is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has assumed different shapes depending on the geographical context within which scholars investigate it. This section provides the analytical overview of the thesis highlighting three perspective through which informal housing will be observed, as follows.

### *Urban informality and squatting*

'Informal settlements' is the expression that usually refers to *ways of informal housing* that urban subalterns use to satisfy their basic housing need (shelter) (AlSayyad, 2004). While academic debate considers this phenomenon an ordinary *idiom of urbanization* in the cities of the Global South, scholars have under considered informal settlements in the Global North (Roy, 2009). However, cases of informal housing settlements can be detected in the cities of the Global North. Among the several forms that informal housing takes in these contexts, we can include the practice of 'squatting', which means 'living in—or otherwise using—a dwelling without the consent of the owner' (Prujit, 2013, p.19). 'Urban squatting' is the expression that scholars use to refer to this kind of informal housing in the Global North highlighting the political framework within which informal strategies to access housing are enacted, that is, a set of counter-cultural collective practices aimed at building alternative ways of life or expressing political claims (López, 2013). However, occupations cannot always be properly considered political practice. Occupying a building often aims to satisfy individualistic and self-interested housing needs. This kind of squatting relates to a specific mechanism of informal housing provision based on the role of family. It can be conceived as one of the manifestations of the role that family plays as the main social institution organizing access to housing for its members (Allen, 2006; Arbaci, 2007). There is a geographical area, the so-called Mediterranean Europe (Spain, Portugal, Greece and Italy), where this manifestation of housing informality, in terms of familistic mechanism of housing provision, is a widespread phenomenon, regardless of its political aspects. In the European cities on the Mediterranean shores, housing informality is considered a structural element of urban growth in general and one of those mechanisms through which housing welfare systems meet housing needs. Thus, housing informality in Mediterranean cities seems to challenge the dichotomy between informality in the Global South and informality in the Global North (Allen et al., 2004).

### *Southern European housing welfare system*

Housing welfare systems can be conceived as the complex of activities and practices that determine how people access housing, whereby state, market and family are the main social institutions in housing provision (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kolberg & Uusitalo, 1992). The particular configuration of relationships between them shapes the housing welfare system of a country (Allen, 2006). The Southern-European welfare model differs from Northern-European systems in terms of housing tenure and access to housing. They are characterized by: a) the predominance of homeownership (strongly promoted through direct and indirect forms of public support) and a very limited private rental system, b) a traditional weakness and marginality of the public housing sector, c) high levels of secondary housing, d) relations between access to housing and family structures, e) the central role of self-promotion and self-provision in supplying housing (Allen et al., 2004). Moreover, the proliferation of the informal housing market (regarding both owner occupation and the private rental sector) is a result of the inadequacy and un-affordability of formal housing market (Arbaci, 2007). As mentioned, within the Southern-European housing welfare model, family is the main channel to access to housing, both formally and informally. The notion of ‘family’ has a distinctive meaning whose understanding is fundamental in thinking about housing in the Mediterranean context. Indeed, the concept of ‘family’ does not overlap with that of ‘household’, where the latter can be better understood as, first and foremost, part of a wider family network. This network of social relationships (extended family) is based on a shifting structure made of personal links, affective bonds and non-economic exchanges, which play a crucial role in providing both social protection and access to resources in the housing sector (Allen, 2006; Allen et al., 2004).

### *Informal occupation of public housing units*

Informal housing assumes peculiar features when it is observed with reference to the public housing sector in Italy. For instance, this research focuses on two kinds of housing informality: the usual squatting practices in a public building and the informal ‘inheritance’ system of public housing flats. The investigation narrows its focus on that part of the phenomenon that takes place outside any political or counter-cultural framework; however, it does not deny the existence of politically-oriented actors interacting with squatters in this specific field. Both academic and political debate have under considered the non-political and self-interested occupation of public units due to its weak public visibility and its lack of broader political significance. However, the phenomenon has huge social relevance, for instance due to its magnitude and meanings that it has within households’ life cycles. The analysis of informal occupation of public housing units can enrich the debate on the housing question and on squatting. On one hand, investigating occupation of public flats questions the broader housing welfare system and its efficiency in satisfying housing needs. On the other hand, it can inform the several and nuanced meanings that the practice acquires within the life cycle of a household.

The present research deals with housing informality as a specific mechanism of housing supply within the familistic welfare systems of Southern-European countries. The analysis moves within the Italian context where scholars have traditionally considered housing informality a structural element of the urban development of the country (Coppola, 2013;

Zanfi, 2013; Cellamare, 2010; Cremaschi, 1990). However, while a long-standing debate has focused on both the illegal/informal self-production of buildings (the so-called *abusivismo*) and politically-oriented squatting, another feature of informal housing has remained hidden: the individualistic occupation of public housing units. It began to draw attention in the main Italian cities—Rome and Milan—in the last decade (Belotti, 2018; Belotti & Annunziata, 2017; Maranghi, 2016; Puccini, 2016; Villani, 2012). Although there are traces of this phenomenon in other large European cities (Grashoff, 2018; Suditu & Vâlceanu, 2013), the occupation of public buildings shows mass-proportion only in Italy where it involved more than 6% of the entire public housing stock in 2013 (Nomisma, 2018).

This research observes the individual occupation of public units within the general formal-informal governance arrangement, where a complex system of mutual influences between formal institutions and informal actors fosters production and reproduction of informality (North, 1990). In order to unpack the several features that shape the informal occupation of public housing units, the work is based on a three-strand theoretical framework. Each theoretical strand will be employed dynamically to analyse peculiar aspects of informal housing in the De Gasperi neighbourhood. Due to the lack of a proper academic debate about non-politically oriented occupation of public housing flats, conceptual insights from three academic fields of research will orientate the understanding of the phenomenon. The first strand profits from concepts and analyses found across disciplines that investigate urban informalities in the Global South. This theoretical strand allows navigation through the multifaceted continuum of formality and informality, constituted by an intricate combination of different bundles of actors, practices and rules (Chiodelli & Tzfadia, 2016; McFarlane, 2012; Roy, 2005). Against this backdrop, the research analyses informal access to public housing as an endogenous and functional component of the housing field rather than an anomaly or a marginal way of living (Roy, 2009). Indeed, such an analytical approach overtakes the dichotomist conceptualisation of urban informality; formal and informal have often been read as separate fields where informality basically refers to any activity that is unregulated by the formal institutions of society (Castells & Portes, 1989; p. 12). In other words, theoretical contributions from the Global South debate on urban informality highlight how formal institutions both foster and shape informality in the housing sector. However, occupying a public building without any formal entitlement is always based on the existence of ‘a squatter agency’ in light of the fact that the occupation is an illegal act that can lead to criminal conviction and also involves a great deal of time and energy. Therefore, the individual motivation is one of the several factors that contribute to make squatting in a public building possible. In order to analyse the set of features that favour the emergence of informal occupation of public housing buildings, the second analytical strand mobilises concepts from the field of Urban Social Movements studies. In particular, the second point of observation is based on profits from the political squatting ‘opportunity structure’ contributions (Di Feliciano, 2017; López, 2013; SqEK, 2013; Prujit, 2003; p. 133). Finally, the work investigates the interplay of material and immaterial dimensions that shape the inhabitants’ pathways to squatting. To this end, the third theoretical strand draws upon the academic literature related to the housing pathways and its conceptualisation of residential mobility as an embedded decision-making process. Housing pathways can be conceived as the set of housing choices and moves that characterise a households’ residential history. Residential mobility involves decisions related to the material features of housing,

such as tenure, costs and physical characteristics. At the same time, the housing pathways framework seeks to include the particular set of more abstract meanings that people relate the use of dwellings as *home*. Such immaterial dimensions shape housing choices as well (Clapham et. al., 2014). In other words, this theoretical strand suggests a complex understanding of housing experience defining it as a nonlinear journey during which households try to satisfy their material and immaterial needs related to dwelling within a given set of contextual circumstances (Coulter, Ham & Findlay, 2016; De Decker & Segers, 2014; Fitzpatrick, Bramley & Johnsen, 2013; Clapham, 2005).

Aimed at orienting readers within the entire thesis, the introduction is organized as follows: research aims and research questions, the thesis roadmap that orients readers in the construction of the work, the methodology employed and finally, the structure of the thesis.

## RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

The aim of this thesis is to enhance our understanding of informal access to public housing within the context of the Neapolitan housing system and to provide helpful insights for an academic debate about the phenomenon on the national level. The formal-informal governance arrangement and, more specifically, the link between housing market rigidity, housing governance, housing stress and informal housing strategies constitute the empirical domain through which this thesis achieves its aim. The public housing complex named ‘Rione De Gasperi’ (in the De Gasperi neighbourhood), in the eastern part of Naples (southern Italy) is the case study where the theoretical framework is applied for an empirical analysis that informs the theory. The main objective of the thesis is divided into three research questions (RQs), and the case study is employed to address all research questions.

RQ1. How do formal institutions foster the informality that contributes to the provision of public housing?

This research question focuses specifically on the complex system of mutual influences between formal institutions and informal actors interacting in the field of public housing provision. This RQ aims to deepen our understanding of the ways in which formal institutions shape the emergence of specific informal mechanisms of access to public housing. In order to address this question, the regulative systems of ‘inheritance’ of public housing flats and inhabitants’ informal use of its rules are analysed.

RQ2. What are the main features of ‘individualistic occupation’ of public housing buildings?

This research question induces a potential definition for the ‘individualistic’ squatting in public housing buildings by using an analytical comparison with ‘ordinary’ politically-oriented squatting. Individualistic squatting is an expression meaning the act of occupying a building for residential purposes that takes place outside any political framework. This practice is not properly aimed at building an alternative life-style or challenging publicly housing shortages, urban speculation and absolute private property rights. Individualistic squatting is a tool through which inhabitants (or groups of inhabitants) satisfy their own housing needs, regardless of the broader political meaning of their acts. This research question aims at detecting the main features that contribute to the emergence of this specific kind of occupation.

RQ3. How does the multifaceted interplay between material and immaterial housing needs shape inhabitants’ pathways towards individualistic squatting?

This research question sheds light on the multidimensional nature of individualistic squatting. Within Southern-European housing models, in light of a strong socio-economic stratification of housing, low-income people suffer high levels of housing deprivation. Informal occupation of public housing units constitutes a mean that marginalised groups

employ to satisfy their need for shelter. However, immaterial and more abstract meanings contribute to shaping low-income inhabitants' pathways to squatting. Search of house becomes search of home, which does not end when an empty space to squat is found. It aims to satisfy needs across a number of different dimensions—psychological (control over an important part of one's own life), emotional (need of social aggregation) and affective (familial warmth). This research question aims at investigate how the interplay between material and immaterial features shapes inhabitants' pathways towards individualistic squatting within a given set of contextual circumstances.

## THESIS ROADMAP

The aim of the thesis has been addressed with three papers. The roadmap of the thesis is presented in Figure 1.

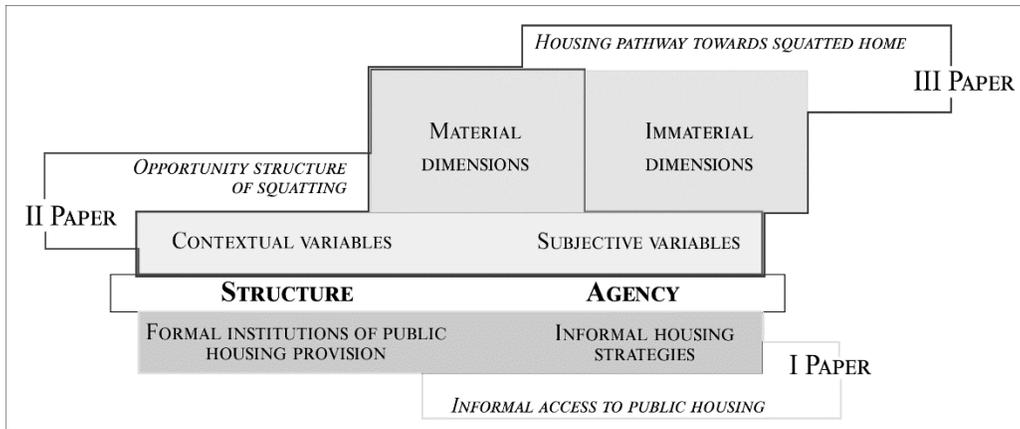


Figure 1 – Thesis roadmap. Source: Author.

## **CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS**

In this section, the primary methodological choices for the case study selection and analysis are introduced.

### **THE CHOICE OF THE PUBLIC HOUSING COMPLEX FOR THE CASE STUDY**

Public housing complexes are interesting for the scope of this research, being particularly challenged by the state retirement in the field of housing policies. Italian housing policies have often been aimed at supporting homeownership rather than public investment in the production and management of public housing stock (Cognetti & Padovani, 2016; Adorni et al., 2017). In the field of public housing, this trend has had a two-fold effect. First, public housing stock has decreased by almost a quarter (ca. 22%) in the last 25 years in the light of both public housing units selling policies and reduction of financial funds for production of new public flats (Federcasa, 2015). Second, a state of abandonment has increasingly characterised public housing complexes that have changed from areas of welfare to areas described as places of marginalisation and poverty. The increasing phenomenon of illegal occupation of public housing flats can be considered a manifestation of this state of abandonment (Poggio & Boreiko, 2018). In 2013, 6.4% of Italian public housing stock was illegally occupied, revealing a great increase with respect to 2004 (ca. 20%) (Federcasa, 2015). Furthermore, in recent years, the phenomenon has gained public attention and been the subject of public debate. National-level interventions in the field of the public housing sector have reinforced a repressive approach to the illegal occupation of public housing flats. For example, in 2014, the previous centre-left party government stated that anyone who illegally occupied a building could not apply for connection to amenities like water and electricity, nor could they obtain official residence (which excludes them from other basic services and social assistance offered by the municipality). Then, in September 2018, the new Italian right-wing populist government issued a decree to facilitate the eviction of illegal occupants.

Thus, public housing complexes can be considered the proscenium where we can critically observe the porosity and the malleability of the various forms that informality takes within the provision of public housing. We can analyse the complexity of housing informality in terms of access, uses and permanency in the public housing stock (Maranghi, 2016). Public housing complexes provide a good laboratory where we can focus our attention on three levels of analysis. At the macro-level, we can investigate the relation between broader housing tenure and informal practices. At the meso-level, we can take into account the configuration of local public housing provision regulative system and its influence over the emergence of informalities. At the micro-level, we can investigate the meanings of housing informality within the inhabitants' housing pathways.

## THE CHOICE OF THE DE GASPERI NEIGHBOURHOOD IN NAPLES

Informal access to public housing flats is a widespread phenomenon in the Italian context. In 2013, around 6% of the national public housing stock was illegally occupied, which was an increase of 20% since 2004 (Nomisma, 2018). Southern cities, in particular, show high levels of illegal occupation of public housing (around 11% of the total stock). Naples, the largest city in southern Italy, provided a fruitful case study for our research aims. In 2013, it was the Italian city with the highest number of illegal buildings, and it ranked fifth for the number of building amnesty (*condono*) requests (Legambiente, 2014). Moreover, according to local authorities' data, around 35% of the public housing stock of the city was illegally occupied in 2017. Despite the extent of the practise, informal access to public housing is under-considered in both political and academic debates.

This research focused specifically on the De Gasperi neighbourhood, which is situated in the eastern part of Naples, in the district of Ponticelli. The following section frames the urban development of the eastern part of Naples in the context of the major urban policy initiatives conducted since World War II.

### *Framing the eastern area of Naples within the recent urban development of the city*

Ponticelli is one of the most populous districts of Naples, with around 52,300 inhabitants as of 2018<sup>1</sup>. Today it —together with the neighbourhoods of Barra and San Giovanni a Teduccio— forms part of District No. 6 of the city. Ponticelli has a long history, which begins in the fourth century. It was one of the several rural villages [*casali*]<sup>2</sup> that surrounded the ancient *Neapolis* (Pagano, 2012; De Seta, 1984). Ponticelli remained an independent agro-town until the first quarter of the twentieth century. Between 1925 and 1927, the administrative expansion of the city of Naples involved the annexation of nearby rural villages, including Ponticelli (see fig. 2). The urban development of Naples can be conceptualised into two distinctive main periods, as follows.

*The massive urban growth (1946-1980).* The urban growth of Naples based on government-led interventions aimed at incorporating the surrounding agro-towns into the urban fabric of the city. Local authorities intensified the process of expansion in the aftermath of World War II<sup>3</sup>, providing for huge public housing interventions in response to housing needs stemming from wartime bombing, which had destroyed around 40,000 rooms (see Paper 1). In particular, local administration designated Ponticelli as one of the main sites for public housing settlements (Donolo, 2015; Dal Piaz, 1985). Local authorities selected the eastern district, especially Ponticelli, for building public housing because of the amount of available land there (Cerami, Cunsolo & Visalli, 1994). The rationale underpinning the public-housing-led urban growth in those years provided for self-sufficient public housing complexes close to the ancient town centre; between 1952 and 1956, two such complexes,

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<sup>1</sup> The city of Naples had around 965,000 inhabitants in 2018, with an average population per neighbourhood of 32,712 inhabitants. See Comune di Napoli (2018).

<sup>2</sup> *Casale* is an Italian word meaning an agglomeration of dwellings whose main economic activity is the agriculture (De Seta, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> City council approved the urban development plan (the so-called *Piano Cosenza*) in 1946.

with a total of around 6,000 rooms, were built in Ponticelli. The De Gasperi neighbourhood was part of these interventions (Pagano, 2012).

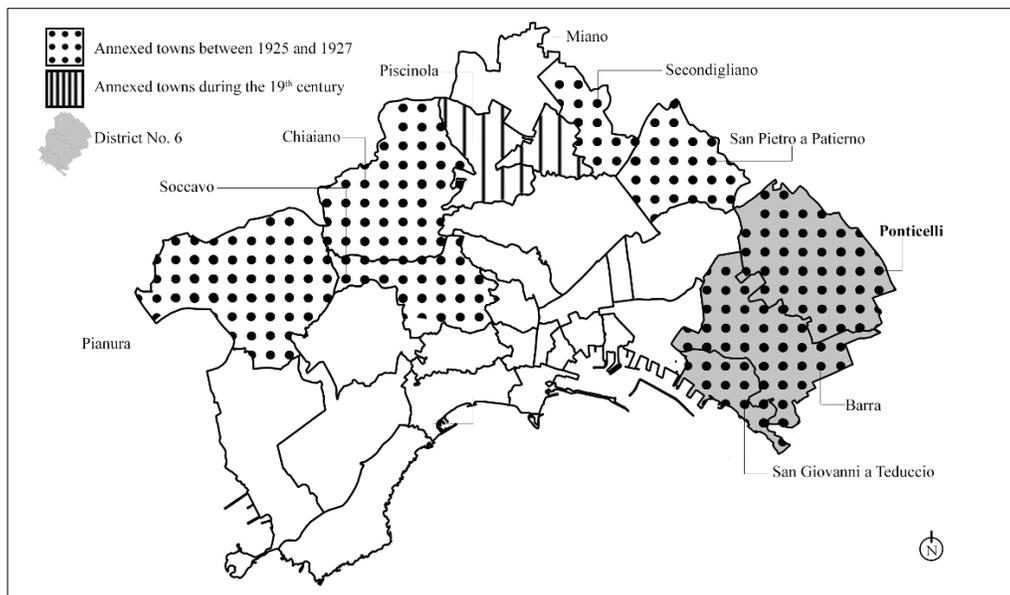


Figure 2 - Administrative boundaries of the city of Naples. Rural towns [*casali*] annexed between 1925 and 1927. Source: Author. Based on De Seta (1984).

In the following decades, local administration applied the same techniques to the development of the city, driving huge building growth<sup>4</sup>. In particular, in 1964, the local administration (led by the centre-right party Democrazia Cristiana) approved a plan [the so-called *Piano di zona di edilizia economica e popolare*]<sup>5</sup> aimed at building new public housing settlements in Naples. Local authorities selected extended rural areas in the in the southeastern part of Ponticelli for building public housing settlements. These would host around 60,000 inhabitants (Cerami, Cunsolo & Visalli, 1994). At the end of 1970s, ancient agro-towns were incorporated within the disarticulating and disqualifying continuum of the Neapolitan periphery through the building of huge public housing complexes.

*The urban requalification (1980-2004)*. In the 1980s, the local administration (led by the Italian Communist Party) approved an innovative urban development plan [the so-called Plan of Peripheries of 1980, *Piano delle periferie*] intended to provide a complex response to the housing needs of the city. In particular, the plan aimed to requalify the existing public housing heritage of the peripheral neighbourhoods —the ancient agro-towns— instead of requiring the building of new public housing settlements (Gianní, 2017; Vittorini, 1986). In

<sup>4</sup> Between 1952 and 1961, the so-called ‘building sack’ characterised urban development: around 300,000 rooms were built in Naples, while public housing was affected by absence of public services, high levels of urban decay and isolation (Cillo, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> The plan applied a national-level law (No.167 of 1962) with regard to public housing sector.

general terms, its main objective was to make the peripheral areas, especially Ponticelli, economic and social hubs (Pagano, 2012). The plan was incorporated into the plan for extraordinary urban reconstruction [the so-called *Piano straordinario di edilizia residenziale*, or PSER], and later applied. In 1980, an earthquake caused 6,810 buildings to be destroyed or made inaccessible, forcing around 147,000 people to abandon their homes (Dal Piaz, 1985). Local authorities designated Ponticelli as site for around 9,000 public housing units, a tertiary sector hub and public services (Camerlingo, 1986). However, the plan only achieved partial results. The local administration again started to focus on peripheral neighbourhoods in the 1990s (Cillo, 2017). Between 1994 and 2004, local authorities (led by a centre-left party) elaborated the new urban development plan, which is now in force. Like the previous plans, this one is aimed at improving the socio-economic role of peripheral areas (Comune di Napoli, 2005). In the second half of the 1990s, local authorities approved a special renewal programme for Ponticelli [the so-called *Programma di recupero urbano*, or PRU, approved in 1997]. The main objectives of the plan were: a) requalifying the several public housing complexes in the neighbourhood; b) reducing the isolation of public housing settlements; and c) creating a tertiary-sector-led economic hub. The regeneration plan had the specific objective of renewing of the De Gasperi neighbourhood as well. Such renewal took the form of demolishing the entire neighbourhood and rebuilding 120 flats (instead of the currently existing 656), together with public services, commercial activities and public gardens (Comune di Napoli, 2015; 2009).

#### *The De Gasperi district*

The De Gasperi district is one of the first public housing complexes built in the city after World War II (Pagano, 2012). The neighbourhood consists of 28 public buildings containing a total of 656 housing units. It was built in the south-eastern part of Ponticelli (see fig. 3) according to the urban priorities established in aftermath of WWII; i.e. self-sufficient public housing complexes close to the centres of the ancient agro-towns. The area is particularly problematic from both a social and an urban point of view; it is characterised by a low educational level, a high level of unemployment, low-quality housing and public spaces and a chronic absence of basic public services. In addition, the De Gasperi neighbourhood has been historically ruled by members of the *Camorra* (a mafia-type criminal organization originating in the Campania region), which, among other activities, manages the occupation and the informal allocation of public housing within the neighbourhood (Cillo, 2017). In the 1990s, local authorities approved a renewal programme for Ponticelli, with a special focus on the De Gasperi district. The high levels of urban decay and hard living conditions of its inhabitants prompted the authorities to push for the demolition of the entire neighbourhood (Comune di Napoli, 2015).

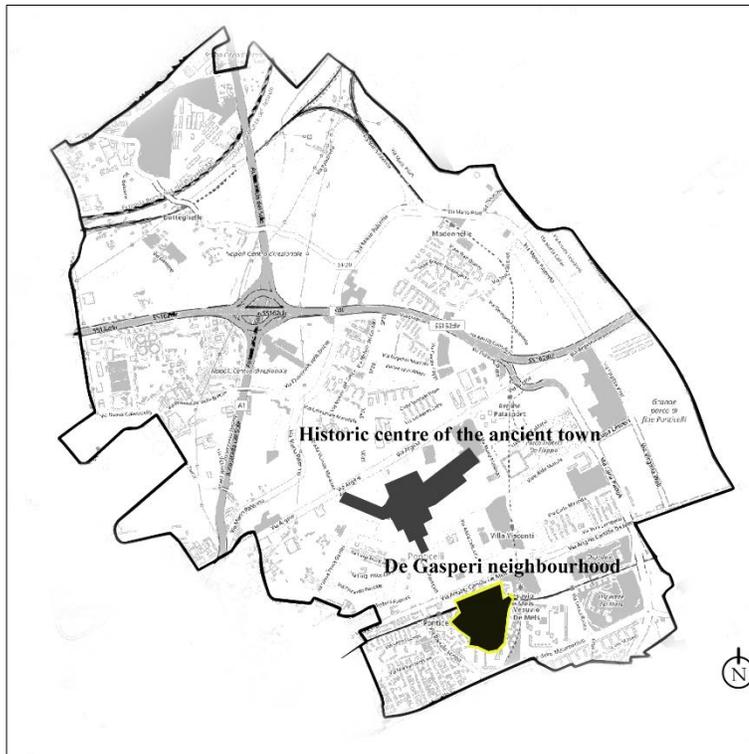


Figure 3 – Boundaries of Ponticelli district, historic centre (ancient agro-town) and the De Gasperi neighbourhood. Source: Author. Based on Comune di Napoli (2005).

Two aspects of the housing in the De Gasperi neighbourhood are of particular relevance to this research. The first feature relates to the remarkable presence of the public flats' early recipients. As mentioned, the neighbourhood was built to give shelter to some of the citizens evacuated from the city centre due to the bombing in World War II. Many of them still live in the same flat that they received in the 1950s, while others have changed units within the neighbourhood. From this perspective, it can be stressed that the established social relationships among inhabitants of the area, strengthened by family ties, constitute an extended family. This network is relevant to the informal provision of public flats (as we will argue in detail later). The second aspect is the high number of squatters. According to a recent council survey, illegal occupants made up 50% of the total inhabitants (Comune di Napoli, 2016). Thus, informal access to public housing is deeply rooted. It is a long-standing phenomenon that has taken advantage of the lack of institutional control systems and shortfalls in local rules for public housing provision, and that has occurred in several forms, including unofficial 'inheritance' of flats and typical squatting practices.

These elements make the De Gasperi neighbourhood an interesting laboratory for deep investigation into housing informality. It allows us to focus on the various shapes that informal strategies to access public housing take. Indeed, Papers 1 and 2 will detail both informal 'inheritance' and the usual squatting practices investigating mechanisms, actors

(both formal and informal) and variables favouring the emergence of this phenomenon. The neighbourhood also enables us to observe the housing pathways through which inhabitants of the area move towards the informal occupation of their current dwellings. Paper 3 investigates squatters' housing histories from this perspective, in order to trace similarities and differences between them.

### A STATEMENT ON METHOD

The present investigation is the result of a deep ethnographic work conducted between 2015 and 2018. Collection of primary data consists of both an intense observation of external and internal spaces of the neighbourhood and several semi-structured and life history interviews. To this end, during the fieldwork a multi-methods qualitative enquiry was employed.

The fieldwork can be structured in three main phases, as follows in Figure 2.

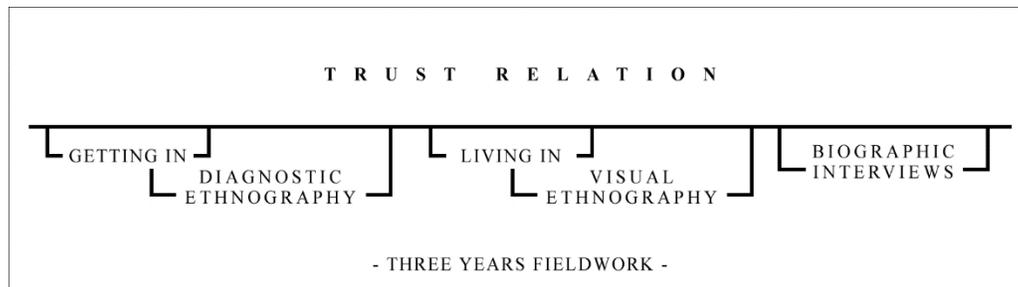


Figure 4 – Fieldwork structure. Source: Author.

Before describing the methods that were employed, a twofold premise is required. First, the crucial element upon which the entire work is based is the effort to build a trust relationship with the inhabitants of the district. Methodologically, the conversations that constitute the core of the stories that we gathered have played the role of both ‘consultation’ and ‘report’. In other words, the inhabitants that were interviewed were encouraged to express their evaluations, comments and judgments (acting as ‘consultants’, even if not experts); furthermore, when it was necessary, they played the role of key informants regarding some specific issues. Second, to be accepted as a researcher (a person whose aim was to deeply investigate a phenomenon) was hugely important in order to access to the data upon which this work is based. However, due to the controversial nature of the phenomenon under investigation and the presence (even if residual) of organized crime, it was a challenging task that required a prolonged period of time. For this reason, a trust-based relation building process continued throughout the fieldwork. It was based mostly based on empathic listening and a deep observation practice. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to assert that a *total* trust

relationship was reached. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that ‘being/becoming part of the field’ does not imply abandonment of a critical vision while traditional ways of knowledge production (based on the separation between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ of the research) are being questioned (Di Felicianantonio, 2017; Kanuha, 2000; Fuller, 1999).

The first phase of the fieldwork was the ‘getting in’ aimed at gathering general information on the De Gasperi neighbourhood and its history. In the beginning stages of fieldwork in the June of 2015 precise research questions had not yet been formulated. Inhabitants’ stories on the neighbourhood were collected in order to retrace its history. Duneier (1999) calls it ‘diagnostic ethnography’<sup>6</sup>. I spent a long period of observation (both simple and participatory) with the inhabitants of the district. Coffee-break, lunch and dinner were crucial moments in the early stages of the fieldwork that allowed us to become familiar with the context. The first notes highlighted the existence of two widespread phenomena: informal selling and buying and illegal occupation of public housing units (flats and non-residential buildings). These phenomena have become the main topics that this research analyses through using the following hypothesis: there are diverging paths that are generated in relation to the specific formal institution and social agents with which they interact. In the case of the De Gasperi neighbourhood, formal institutions both foster and shape the informal selling and buying of public flats. In order to investigate this object of research, 25 semi-structured interviews were carried out with the inhabitants of the district (regular inhabitants as well as squatters, legitimate and illegitimate new incoming inhabitants) that were selected through snowballing sampling (Corbetta, 1999). The interviews focused primarily on the practices of access to public housing and on individual perceptions of the role of local authorities in governing the area. Also, some interviews with representatives of different institutions (City Council of Naples’ Assessor of sport and urban requalification of degraded areas, member of the governing council of Naples’ Tenants and Recipient National Union, some public officials of Public Housing Policy department of the city of Naples) were carried out.

The second phase of fieldwork began in the November of 2017 and included one month of cohabitation with a squatter in the De Gasperi neighbourhood. This phase lasted five months and aimed at investigating the individualistic squatting of public buildings. The hypothesis was drawn through using contributions from Urban Social Movements studies as follows. Several factors make squatting possible. While some elements depend on the characteristics of the context (e.g., housing need and level of repression); others refer to squatter’s agency (e.g., network-building and a DIY attitude). In order to detect the various factors of individualistic squatting in the district, seven life history interviews were conducted with families who live in those spaces of the neighbourhood that were initially designed as non-residential (e.g., the elementary school, the general store, the grocery and the mini market). The focus was primarily the manner in which public buildings have been squatted and the reasons for such illegal acts. Data from these interviews were crossed with that from the first

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<sup>6</sup> Duneier (1999) defines diagnostic ethnography as follows: ‘I begin observation by gaining an appreciation of the “symptoms” that characterize the “patient”. Once I gained a knowledge of these symptoms, I return to the field, aided by new diagnostic tool – such as photographs – and try to “understand” these symptoms (which is some amalgam of “explain” and “interpret” and “render meaningful”)’ (p. 342).

phase of the fieldwork. Interviews represent one of the parts that make up the specific method employed in this phase. This method refers to applied visual ethnography and is based on photographic enquiry—through the practice of portrait creation—aimed at navigating the relationship between the squatters and their homes (Piault, Silverstein & Graham, 2015; Pink, 2015; Hunt, 2014). Interviews follow the first general approach with the inhabitants and predate the stage of portrait shooting. Photographs are not considered the product/object of analysis. Rather, photographs represent ‘the act of doing photography’ that reveals the way in which research is being carried out (Rose, 2008; Ryan, 2003). It illustrates the researcher’s commitment to ‘enter[ing] into dialogue’ with the subject/object of study. A portrait shooting requires an ‘eye-to-eye, consensual, collaborative, cooperative, and therefore at least potentially, empathetic’ (Hunt, 2014, p. 163) relationship between researcher and subject. Thus, given the highly contentious and illegal aspects of the initiative, photographic portrait practice was employed in order to enforce trust relationships with the interviewed (and photographed) inhabitants.

The third phase of fieldwork was conducted between July and September 2018. It was carried out with a biographical approach in order to observe the multidimensional nature of squatters’ housing pathways. This method of investigation took into consideration the inhabitants’ long-term life stories in order to locate residential moves in both the crucial events of housing their history and the broader meanings that shape the concept of home (Somerville, 2013; Tomas & Dittmar, 1995). The aim was to deeply investigate material and immaterial dimensions that influenced residential choices through which inhabitants in the De Gasperi neighbourhood attained their squatted flats. To this end, the investigation was based on gathering information about housing pathways from the moment when they left parents’ houses to the present. These data have been crossed with data that was gathered during previous fieldwork between 2015 and 2018. Ethnographic work consisted of observant participation and semi-structured interviews focusing on both current and previous housing conditions. Data regarding inhabitants’ housing histories was crossed with investigation of the district context. Three life history interviews were conducted individually with households squatting in several spaces, such as public housing flats and nursery school offices. Interviews were based on an outline aimed at investigating housing pathways, variables influencing residential mobility and variables feeding feelings of home.

Two main kinds of interviews have been employed during the fieldwork; i.e. semi-structured interviews in the first stage (for Paper 1) and life history interviews in the other stages (Papers 2 and 3). Semi-structured interviews have been carried out in the first stage since Paper 1 aims to discover and analyse how the informal ‘inheritance’ mechanism functions. In particular, semi-structured interviews seem to be fitting to investigate the main (both formal and informal) actors involved and the role that they play within the mechanism. By contrast, life history interviews have been employed in the last phases of fieldwork since Papers 2 and 3 are the most ethnographic of the thesis aiming at detecting the very intimate features of individualistic squatting; i.e. motivations and meanings of squatting (Paper 2) and abstract and emotive significance of ‘feeling at home’ in a squatted public house (Paper3.) In particular, life history interviews seem to be helpful to detect a piece of the wider socio-economic structure (to which individualistic squatters belong) within the individualistic

experience of interviewed inhabitants (Amaturo, 2012). A plot has been employed as reminder during the interview.

Most of interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours; they were recorded and then transcribed. Some of interviews were with inhabitants and some representatives of the public office for housing policy were not recorded, as requested by the individuals being interviewed. Moreover, several informal interviews were carried out during the fieldwork. Since many inhabitants (both regular recipients and squatters) did not allow proper interviews, data, evaluations and comments were gathered through conversing with them daily. Later, a thematic chart was employed to organize the data based on a set of sub-themes that cut across all data in order to highlight the similarities and differences of the squatters' housing histories. This allowed us to both detect the primary dimensions of the objects of research and to analyse the relations between them (Sala, 2010).

In addition to interviews, during the fieldwork period, various secondary data was collected. Policy documentation (e.g., city master plan, housing policy documents, housing provision laws), national housing sector reports and statistics and scientific literature; national and local press constitute secondary data whose analysis has complemented primary data collection. It was a challenging task. First, adequate data and documented knowledge concerning public housing stock and the issues of illegal occupation was lacking in Naples. For instance, due to lack of already-processed data available locally, I geo-referenced a PDF map of public housing buildings in order to obtain a mapping of their distribution, by district, in the city of Naples (see figure 12). Regarding illegal occupation of public flats, a public official of the office for public housing policies in Naples (personal communication, 8 November, 2017) commented: 'Housing policy department of [the] city of Naples does not have any data to give you. We started to gather data relating to this issue when you sent us the official request to access to our data-set'. In spite of the above, secondary data collected was very relevant for the research aim.

#### *A piece of ego-geography: reflections on self-positioning in the field*

As mentioned above, fieldwork is the basis upon which this thesis has been built. It has been (and is still) an intimate journey of the 'ego (the epistemic subject within its identity dimension) with and through his/her geography (understood both as knowledge and method)' (Lancione & Rosa, 2017; p. 138). 'Ego-geography' is about the experience of ethnographer/researcher in his/her fieldwork; in other words, it is about questioning how we as researchers negotiate and make sense of our blurred roles and shifting positions in the field (Lancione & Rosa, 2017; Denshire, 2014). From this perspective, my reflections on my position along my journey in the De Gasperi neighbourhood may contribute to discussions about doing ethnography at urban margins today. To further this aim, I will try to give some insights about my fieldwork's most challenging task: building trust-based and intimate relationships with some of the De Gasperi neighbourhood's inhabitants.

I started my fieldwork in June of 2015, when I went to De Gasperi for the first time. I left my car in the historic centre of Ponticelli and walked toward my destination (see fig. 3). I was walking along the main road in the neighbourhood (see Fig. 6) when I met a girl whom I asked for some information about the renewal program for the district. That girl said to me, 'Yes, come with me. I am not very well informed. You will speak with those over there'. After no more than 15 minutes, I found myself plugged into a space too much dense to be

ignored, where squatting in a public house seemed to be an ordinary practise. The first thing each person I met that afternoon said was that they were occupying their home. I introduced myself as reporter interested in the renewal program for the area, since in that period I used to write reports for a national newspaper (NapoliMonitor<sup>7</sup>). In the following days, I went to De Gasperi several times; in the beginning of what would be my doctoral thesis fieldwork, asking for information about the renewal program was my method of getting in touch with district's inhabitants, since I did not know anybody who could introduce me to the neighbourhood. My encounter with *l'autre* was a cold relationship, which was mediated only by my position as reporter interested in a cold public policy.

As I started my PhD, the focus of my investigation (and my personal interest) changed. It was not about the renewal program any longer; instead, I started to be interested in squatting. In particular, my cognitive objective was to understand what the experience of *individualistic* squatting is. The questions 'What does breaking into a building without any collective support mean?' and 'How does a squatter live?' shaped my position as researcher. My interest became more intimate, since it was about an 'illegal' part of some inhabitants' life, and I began to investigate the personal (and human) dimensions of squatting, rather than the policy aspects.

As mentioned above, trust was needed before I could enter people's lives. I spent almost two years (between June of 2015 and March of 2017) walking around the district and talking to its inhabitants informally. Then, when I felt (almost) ready to carry out my first formal interview, I arranged it with those inhabitants with whom I conversed most (according to the notes I had taken during the previous two years). The same afternoon, I interviewed two squatters; when I turned off my recorder, I thought 'It has been easier than I expected'. In the following months and years I realised it would not always go smoothly like it did that afternoon. Several times, squatters denied my request for interviews; other times, I waited in vain for an interview because my interviewees changed their minds or simply forgot our appointments. In those cases, I felt I was (almost) helpless, and 'working hard for nothing' and 'waiting for nothing' were stressful. This kind of thing occurred very often; I learnt to be patient and to share the 'here and now' the De Gasperi district's inhabitants are embedded in. The more time I spent in the area, the more intimate my relationships with squatters became. I used to go to the district with a 'task' related to my work; it could be taking pictures of the area, arranging an interview or interviewing. However, each task was something I did in order to trick myself into spending more and more time in the area and getting in touch with more people. From this perspective, walking with my camera was a very profitable trick: it made me visible. People often asked me 'What are you photographing?' or 'Why do you spend all the time photographing?'. Those queries enabled me to introduce myself and my work in the De Gasperi district. However, once one pulls a person in, one needs to invest time into building a genuine and trust-based relationship. An episode might be helpful to stress this point. Once, during my first months of fieldwork, I was taking pictures of some children in the area, when an old woman, Ada (see Appendix A, p. 148), walked quickly towards me and yelled at me. She completely disagreed with my work. 'What are you still doing here? Leave us alone. We do not need your photos'. She was angry. I tried to explain

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<sup>7</sup> See my first writing on the De Gasperi neighbourhood:  
<http://napolimonitor.it/old/2015/07/21/30341/periferia-est-i-giorni-contati-del-rione-de-gasperi.html>.

my purposes; then, I accepted her request and I went away. In the time since, I have met Ada on several occasions; we used to have a cold and very formal relationship, but it has been getting better over the last year. The key moment in our relationship was when I promised to restore the frames of two photos that were important to her, since they were of her father and sister (see fig. 5). Ada accepted, but she only gave me the frames to restore some weeks after my proposal. When I returned the frames, Ada was emotional and surprised. Following on from that moment, our relationship changed and became warmer. We started to have conversations about her position as squatter and her housing biography, but I have never formally interviewed her. However, Ada's life history and knowledge about the district have contributed to building my thesis as well.



Figure 5 – Photographs and sacred images on a piece of furniture in Ada's home. Source: Author.

The episode stresses two factors that have been relevant throughout my fieldwork. First, the work is about the time I have invested in creating and feeding my personal relationships with the subjects/objects of my investigation. Each formal or informal interview (or photograph; see Appendix A) represents the outcome of a continuous sharing of spaces, objects, affects and emotions. Conversations have layers. I have gone deeper into the layers through spending time with the people in the De Gasperi neighbourhood. Empathetic listening is needed to catch those aspects of a tale that might be relevant for the interlocutor, and deepening those aspects might be helpful in navigating through the layers of the conversation. Such listening to inhabitants' stories has been the second relevant feature of

my fieldwork. Ada's episode stresses this point. She used to speak often about her father and sister; she really loved them. Once she showed me their photographs; the frames were in a very bad state. I thought that she would like to restore them. Ada never asked me to do it; probably she had never even thought about it, but at the end of the day, she appreciated it.

## STRUCTURE

The thesis is organized in three papers. A photographic portraits project of the inhabitants who contributed to this research. The summaries of papers along with a brief summary of photographic appendix are as follows.

### *Paper 1: The Grey Area between Legality and Illegality: Informal Access to Public Housing in Naples*

This paper focuses on informal access to public housing in Naples (Italy). It reports the existence of a specific mechanism of illegal access to public housing (the ‘informal takeover’) which is an alternative to ‘usual’ squatting practices in accessing a dwelling unit informally. This mechanism benefits from the shortcomings of the systems regulating the ‘inheritance’ of public housing units in the Campania region, which creates the “space of possibility” within which this informal practice was born, spread and has survived. Juggling between legality and illegality, the informal takeover – which is based on an illegal market of public flats – has developed in recent decades as a consolidated social practice among the residents of public housing complexes in Naples. This case study contributes primarily to the international debate on housing informality: it depicts a large-scale phenomenon of illegal access to housing that is under-estimated by research on informal housing, while showing the fundamental role of various public institutions in shaping it. At the same time, the paper contributes to research on squatting in the Global North: it sheds light on a liminal (non-political) type of urban squatting, thus enriching existing typologies of squatting that focus almost exclusively on political and countercultural forms of occupation.

Paper 1 has been submitted to *Urban Geography* and is titled ‘The Grey Area between Legality and Illegality: Informal Access to Public Housing in Naples’. The paper was conceptualized, designed and written by E. Esposito. Professor F. Chiodelli contributed to the writing and revising of the manuscript.

### *Paper 2: The Hidden Side of Urban Squatting: Individualistic Occupation of Public Housing Units in Naples, Italy*

The debate on urban squatting in Western countries has been dominated by research on politically motivated or counter-cultural occupations promoted by progressive movements and groups. In contrast, other forms of squatting have been almost entirely neglected; this includes the occupation of public flats in Italy, which in several cases, takes place outside any political or counter-cultural framework. This is the case in the current investigation, the so-called ‘individualistic squatting’ in the De Gasperi neighbourhood in Naples, Italy. After introducing and contextualizing the phenomenon of the occupation of public flats in Italy, we investigated the specific case of the occupation for dwelling reasons of non-residential public buildings in the De Gasperi neighbourhood. We explain the main features of this specific kind of squatting, which is an individualistic practice taking place within small

close-knit networks (e.g., family or neighbours) and occurring in some cases through (illegal) market mechanisms. This analysis contributes to the academic debate on squatting in Europe and shows a kind of occupation different from ‘ordinary’ political squatting, which shares with the latter some similarities in terms of opportunity structure.

Paper 2 has been submitted in *Housing Studies* and is titled ‘The Hidden Side of Urban Squatting: Individualistic Occupation of Public Housing Units in Naples, Italy’. The paper was conceptualized, designed and written by E. Esposito. Professor F. Chioldelli contributed to the revision of the manuscript.

*Paper 3: The Squatted Public Flat as Home. Material and Immaterial Dimensions of Public Housing: Squatters’ Pathways in Naples, Italy*

Within Southern-European housing models, individualistic squatting can be depicted as a channel through which households and individuals access the asset, ‘house’. It has relevant economic value. In light of a strong socio-economic stratification of housing models, low-income people suffer high levels of housing deprivation. Informal occupation of public housing units constitutes a mean that marginalised groups employ to satisfy their need for shelter. However, immaterial and more abstract meanings contribute to shape low-income inhabitants’ pathways to squatting. Search of house becomes search of home, which does not end when an empty space to squat is found. Individualistic squatting aims to satisfy needs across a number of different immaterial dimensions—psychological (control over an important part of one’s own life), emotional (need of social aggregation) and affective (familial warmth). This is the case of housing histories among the De Gasperi district’s squatters who were part of this study. Within the housing pathways framework, the analysis navigates the various dimensions of squatting. It is observed as a nonlinear journey during which households choose housing solutions that meet their material and immaterial needs within a given set of contextual circumstances. A biographic approach of investigation has been employed in order to analyse squatters’ housing history from leaving their parents’ houses through 2018. This method of research conducts us to depict individualistic squatting as the result of an embedded decision-making process that takes place in moments of households’ life cycles.

*Appendix A. A Photographic Investigation of Individualistic Squatting*

Appendix A provides the results of the photographic investigation that we conducted during the fieldwork. It is divided into two contributions.

The first part is a photographic portraits project, titled ‘Vacuum: The Human Side beyond Squatting’. It is aimed at investigating the way the relationship between the De Gasperi district’s squatters and the residential spaces where they squat shape their sense of home. The second part is a photo essay, titled ‘Our Lady of Squatters’. It focuses on a particular moment that plays an important role in defining the inhabitants’ sense of belonging to the district. It investigates the features of religious celebrations related to *Madonna dell’Arco* that take place during the Easter Triduum.

The second photo-essay will be published in *Visual Ethnography* as Esposito, E. (2019) Our Lady of squatters, *Visual Ethnography*, 31 1.

As mentioned above, photographs have been employed as a qualitative research method. On the one hand, it aimed to create a trust-based relationship with those squatters of the De Gasperi neighbourhood that we interviewed (Duneier, 1999). Photographs represent ‘the act of photographing’, which reveals the way in which the research was carried out (Rose, 2008; Ryan, 2003). Photographs unveil the researcher’s commitment to ‘enter into [a] dialogue’ with the subject/object of study. On the other hand, photographs are used here in order to disclose the complex set of feelings and emotional states that surround squatted public housing flats (Harper, 2003).

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## A PREMISE TO THE THESIS

The illegal occupation of public housing flats is a very sensitive topic with reference to the Neapolitan (and Italian) context. In the city of Naples —and in general in Italy— illegal occupation of public flats has been (and still is) one of the most relevant activities of organized crime. As we will argue in Paper 1, illegal occupation of public housing units often bases on a black market within which public units are bought and sold beyond the rules established by the law. According to some scholars<sup>8</sup> and investigative reports<sup>9</sup>, organized crime plays a specific role in the provision of public housing within the areas where each Camorra's clan is rooted. As we will stress in Paper 1, in the De Gasperi district organized crime —related to the Sarno's clan— often played as a real estate agency assigning informally the public flats of the area. In particular, members of the Camorra decided who could access to public flats of the district (through informal takeover or the classic occupation; see Paper 1 and 2). Managing the occupation and the allocation of public housing has been often aimed at achieving two main objectives. First, managing the allocation of public flats constituted a relevant economic activity; the Camorra's clan collected a 'fee' on each occupation of public housing within the De Gasperi neighbourhood. Second, such activity was aimed at controlling the area; it enabled associates of the clan to live close to each other. Since the rootedness of this activity in the area, the De Gasperi district is well-known in the national press as the 'fortress' of the Sarno's clan<sup>10</sup>.

Despite the relevance of the organized crime related to the occupation and the allocation of public housing flats, this work does not deepen the investigation of the role of the Sarno's clan within the De Gasperi neighbourhood for two main reasons. First, the issue of the Camorra has emerged in most part of the interviews I carried out during my fieldwork; however, the interviewed inhabitants told me not to use the information they provided me on this issue. Second, the topic of organized crime is very sensitive; for this reason, it needs to be deeply investigated relating it to its proper field of study. From this perspective, the role of the organized crime in the allocation of public housing units might be the focus of future research works. Deepening the understanding of this aspect will contribute to enrich the understanding of individualistic squatting in the Neapolitan context —as well as in Italy.

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<sup>8</sup> See Cillo, B. (2017). Il declino di Napoli e l'idea di città nei piani urbanistici. In Belli, A. (Ed.), *Competenze in azione. Governo del territorio, innovazione e sviluppo metropolitano a Napoli*. Milan: FrancoAngeli (pp. 147-148) and Brancaccio, L. (2009). Guerre di camorra: i clan napoletano tra faide e scissioni. In G. Gribaudo (Ed.), *Traffici criminali* (pp. 65-89). Turin: Bollati Boringhieri (pp. 86-87).

<sup>9</sup> See for instance: <https://video.corriere.it/video-embed/a664c2a0-37bd-11e6-ad05-6c8e02b5840c>.

<sup>10</sup> See for instance:

<https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2010/04/01/operazione-ponticelli-fermato-cognato-di-sarno.html>.



## **PAPER 1**

### **The grey area between legality and illegality: the informal access to public housing in Naples**

#### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on informal access to public housing in Naples (Italy). It reports the existence of a specific mechanism of illegal access to public housing (the ‘informal takeover’) which is an alternative to ‘usual’ squatting practices in accessing a dwelling unit informally. This mechanism benefits from the shortcomings of the systems regulating the ‘inheritance’ of public housing units in the Campania region, which creates the “space of possibility” within which this informal practice was born, spread and has survived. Juggling between legality and illegality, the informal takeover – which is based on an illegal market of public flats – has developed in recent decades as a consolidated social practice among the residents of public housing complexes in Naples. This case study contributes primarily to the international debate on housing informality: it depicts a large-scale phenomenon of illegal access to housing that is under-estimated by research on informal housing, while showing the fundamental role of various public institutions in shaping it. At the same time, the paper contributes to research on squatting in the Global North: it sheds light on a liminal (non-political) type of urban squatting, thus enriching existing typologies of squatting that focus almost exclusively on political and countercultural forms of occupation.

Keywords: illegality, informality, public housing, squatting, Naples, institutions, occupation.



## INTRODUCTION. THE GREY SIDE OF URBAN SQUATTING IN THE GLOBAL NORTH

Although informal access to housing is a phenomenon that characterizes urban areas in the so-called ‘Global South’ in particular, it exists also in many cities of the ‘Global North’ – even if there, with few exceptions, it is much less widespread. One of the ways in which informal access to housing comes about in the Global North in general (and in Europe in particular) is through the illegal occupation of a building without the consent of the owner, which often occurs through physical means (for example, by breaking into the building)<sup>11</sup>. This practice is mostly labelled ‘squatting’.<sup>12</sup> Urban squatting is usually understood as a political or countercultural practice, since in many instances it is directly or indirectly performed by social and political movements and intended to construct alternative lifestyles or defend the rights of minority groups (Pruijt, 2013; Wates, 1980). This understanding of squatting, however, accounts for only a small part of illegal access to housing in Italy, in particular when *public housing estates* are considered. Only some of these occupations, in fact, can be defined as politically-oriented. The majority of occupations organized and managed by political movements in Italy do not target public housing estates, but abandoned private buildings (see Mudu, 2014 on the case of Rome)<sup>13</sup>. In many other cases, the occupation of a public dwelling unit is tied to the activity of criminal groups (Tribunale di Roma, 2016) or to survival practices implemented outside any political or counter-cultural framework (Belotti, 2017).

Despite the importance of such diverse non-political variants of housing occupations in Italy, they are still under-investigated. This article is an attempt to fill this gap by analysing a specific case of informal access to public housing in a peripheral area of Naples. The main purpose of our study is to enrich the debate on the forms of urban informality in the Global North (through analysis of an overlooked type of informal housing) and the related theorization of the complex relationship between formal institutions and the informal sphere in the housing sector (by analysing the crucial role that public institutions play in shaping the ‘space of possibility’ within which this informal practice was born, spread and has survived). Simultaneously, this paper contributes to the Italian and international scholarship on urban squatting by revealing a liminal variety of this phenomenon that is largely unknown.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section provides an overview of the complex relationship between formal institutions and the informal sphere, with specific reference to housing. Information about informal access to public housing in Italy is provided as well.

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<sup>11</sup> Despite being aware of the debate on the different meanings and uses of the terms illegality and informality, in this text we will use the two terms as synonyms.

<sup>12</sup> On the different meanings attached to the word ‘squatting’ by urban research on the Global North and on the Global South, see Aguilera and Smart (2016).

<sup>13</sup> In some cases, social and political groups support squatters of public housing *after* they have occupied the dwelling unit (for instance, by providing them with legal support; see Belotti, 2017 on the case of Milan).

The subsequent section presents the case of the De Gasperi neighbourhood, contextualizing it within the framework of urban informality and the housing crisis in Naples. The fourth section investigates a specific mechanism of informal access to public housing in the De Gasperi neighbourhood (the 'informal takeover'), while the fifth section discusses the results of the case study in light of the wider international debate both on the relationship between informal and formal spheres and on urban squatting. The last section concludes.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK. FORMAL RULES, INFORMALITY AND PUBLIC HOUSING**

### **THE COMPLEX NEXUS BETWEEN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND INFORMALITY**

As various authors have stressed, the formal and the informal cannot be read as relating to distinct and unconnected domains; on the contrary, a multifaceted continuum of formality and informality exists. It is constituted by an intricate combination of different bundles of actors, practices and rules (McFarlane, 2012; Payne, 2001; Roy, 2005). The consequence is that formal (i.e. public) institutions can shape urban reality not only when practices and processes are compliant with the law, but also when they breach it – that is, public institutions play a direct role in moulding urban informality as well, for instance by creating the space of possibility within which informality develops and survives in a constant (troubled) relation with public actors, norms and practices (McFarlane & Waibel, 2012; Roy, 2009; Simone, 2004).<sup>14</sup>

Generally speaking, there are three main ways in which public institutions can affect urban informality. The first is ‘definition/labelling’. Public institutions draw the boundaries of what is formal (i.e. legal) and, by doing so, they automatically and simultaneously establish what does not fall within those boundaries, which, therefore, comes to be considered ‘informal’. Defining the boundaries of what is formal typically occurs through spatial norms and regulations. As Roy (2005) writes: “the planning and legal apparatus of the state has the power to [...] determine what is informal and what is not, and to determine which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear” (pp. 149-150).

Secondly, the operation (consisting in both actions and inactions) of institutions favours and influences the survival (and, eventually, the death) of informality. This role of public institutions becomes clear when analysing the sanctioning system against informal housing. For instance, the fact that certain sanctions are systematically not implemented creates a situation of *de facto* toleration of infringements, allowing existing informality to survive and favouring the birth of new kinds of illegality. The same applies to amnesty measures enacted to regularize illegal housing (see Author 2019, Zanfi 2013 and Zoppi 2010 regarding Italy) and, more generally, to inefficient public institutions, which generate high transaction costs for legal urban development, thus favouring the perpetuation of informality (Darabi and Jalali, 2018).

Finally, public institutions play a third role in shaping informality, one less explicitly visible but equally important. It relates to the *mere existence* of institutions and, in particular, to their regulatory acts (e.g. laws and policies). This role is obvious in the case of norms, which

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<sup>14</sup> This relation between formal institutions and informal space is not unidirectional; even informal spheres can in turn influence formal institutions. See Chiodelli and Tzfadia (2016) in this regard.

can *causally* influence infringements (e.g. illegal access to housing) through their *simple existence*, as expressed by the concept of ‘nomotropism’<sup>15</sup>. Nomotropism literally means ‘acting in light of rules’. But acting in light of rules does not necessarily entail acting in compliance with them (Conte, 2011). In fact, in several cases, when breaching the law, the transgressor takes account of the rule while failing to adhere to its proscriptions. This implies that “the rule causally affects an action even when that action does not correspond to what is prescribed by the rule” (Chiodelli and Moroni, 2014, p. 162). Take, for instance, the case of a thief, as suggested by Weber (1922): when a thief breaks the law, he masks his identity exactly in light of the legal penalties for his act (Conte, 2000). That is, the thief acts in a specific way (e.g. he masks himself) because of a law – with which, however, he is not abiding. Consider also the example of those who construct buildings during the night – as happens in the case of several informal settlements around the world. By working at night such persons act nomotropically, in light of two kinds of rules. First, like the thief, they operate during the night in order to conceal their illegal action and not be discovered. Hence, they act nomotropically in view of land-use rules that they knowingly violate. Second, completing their building in a short space of time (one night) they act in light of rules of possible demolition. In fact, in several contexts, the penalties for illegal building depend on whether the building has been completed or is still under construction (see Chiodelli 2017 on the case of Israel-Palestine, and Erman 1997 on Turkey); in the former case, the procedure for demolition is more complicated, and this is exactly why some people try to complete a building overnight (or in a few days). The concept of nomotropism clarifies that infringements cannot always be conceived as solely a simple negation of, disregard of, or objection to laws: that is, acting in light of rules is different from behaviour that does not take any rules whatsoever into consideration.

These different roles played by public institutions *vis-à-vis* informality highlight that the relationship between legal and illegal is complex and adaptive, and that the informal is not something outside or on the margins of oversight by public authorities; rather, it is inextricably connected to it. Public institutions *define* the informal, *determine* its conditions of action and survival, and *influence* its forms and paths of development. In short, they create the space of possibility within which an informal practice can arise, acquire form, spread and survive (and eventually die), in a process of constant negotiation with and adjustment to different public norms and practices. The case analysed in this paper shows how these intertwined roles of public institutions materializes in the case of informal access to public housing in Naples.

### **INFORMALITY, PUBLIC HOUSING AND SQUATTING IN ITALY**

As argued convincingly by Allen et al. (2004), the Italian housing system – as in some other Southern European countries – is characterized by several distinctive features. Two of them

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<sup>15</sup> Amedeo Conte (2000, 2011) propounded the concept of nomotropism; it has been developed with regard to urban studies by Chiodelli and Moroni (2014). See Rosa (2016) and Boamah and Walker (2016) for examples of nomotropism in the urban domain.

in particular are fundamental for contextualization of the case investigated in this paper. The first is the residual role of public housing, in a context characterized by high rates of home ownership made accessible to a wide range of social strata by a series of public actions. The second is the key role of informal mechanisms in the building of housing and access thereto, which arose from both the shortcomings of certain market mechanisms and a weak system of public control over land development. All of this takes place in an environment characterized by the pivotal role of the family as a third driver of housing provision alongside the state and the market.

Only few data are necessary to illustrate these two distinctive features of the Italian housing regime. With reference to the residual role of public housing, it suffices to stress that it represents less than 5% of the overall Italian housing stock. Whilst around 2 million people benefit from the public housing stock, which amounts to 770,000 units, at the same time 650,000 eligible households are on municipal public housing waiting lists across the country due to an insufficient number of available dwelling units (Federcasa, 2015). To be specified is that ‘public housing’ in Italy is defined as housing constructed directly by public authorities and assigned at very low rents to households that fulfil specific criteria (such as a low yearly income);<sup>16</sup> access to public housing occurs through rankings compiled at municipal level, which prioritize the more disadvantaged households. As regards informality, this is a structural characteristic of urban development and a commonplace way to access housing in Italy (Cremaschi, 1990; Allen et al. 2004). This is particularly apparent in the case of housing construction that breaches land use and building regulations (Berdini, 2010; Nocifora, 1994; Zanfi, 2013), and it is illustrated by the magnitude of such phenomenon: while precise estimates of the extent of illegal construction are not available, according to the National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT, 2017) in southern regions, during the past few decades, hundreds of thousands of new buildings have been erected in violation of planning and building rules. For instance, in 2016 almost 50% of all new residential units in southern Italy were erected without proper authorisation. In certain regions, the proportion is even higher: for example, in the Campania region illegal housing in 2016 accounted for 64% of the new housing stock (see also Legambiente 2018 on this issue)<sup>17</sup>.

Against this backdrop of widespread informality in a context characterized by urgent housing needs unsatisfied by the welfare system, it is not surprising that also access to public housing is characterized by broad transgression. Around 6% of public housing in Italy is illegally occupied, with a constant growth trend in the past decade; in Southern Italy the proportion is even greater, reaching 11.5% in 2013 (Federcasa, 2015). Illegal access to public housing does not identify only households that break illegally into vacant dwellings, but also individuals that replace legitimate tenants through an irregular procedure (such as buying and selling). Although both cases are labelled ‘illegal occupations’ in Italy, the former is closer to what the international literature considers squatting. In the latter case, the occupation, while having the approval of the recipient who sells illegally the flat that s/he occupies, happens without the consent of the owner (the public housing management company), so that this case too can fall within the broader category of squatting. A specific

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<sup>16</sup> Public housing does not include so-called ‘social housing’, a term which in Italy refers to housing built by private developers on the basis of specific agreements with public authorities, and sold or rented out below market rates.

<sup>17</sup> Illegal housing construction does not characterize southern Italy alone; it is also common in Northern regions (see for instance Author, 2019).

variant of this second kind of squatting takes place when the replacement of the original legitimate recipient, despite occurring through illegal means (e.g. trade of the public flat), is then regularized through a ‘scam’, so that the buyer become the new legitimate recipient. This distinctive case can be seen more as public housing fraud than as squatting proper, since the final possession (even if not the real process that led to it) is deemed legitimate by the agency for public housing. Alternatively, we can consider this case as a *liminal form of squatting*: it is squatting from the point of view of the process, since the *de facto* access to the dwelling unit occurs in an illegal way, without the consent of the owner. However, it is not squatting from the viewpoint of the outcome, because the final possession is legally recognized by the public housing management agency, which is apparently unaware of the illegal procedure that led to it.

Despite the frequency of illegal occupation of Italian public housing, the phenomenon is rarely explored in academic research. Indeed, with few exceptions (e.g. Belotti, 2017), studies tend to focus only the political side of housing occupations (see for example Grazioli 2017 and Mudu 2014 on Italy). This narrow focus is in line with most of the international research on squatting. In fact, even though many international scholars recognize that not all forms of occupations are directly politically oriented, it is widely acknowledged that “squatting is generally political” (Prujit, 2013, p. 36; see also Martínez-López 2013, SqEK 2013, Vasudevan 2015). Also less politicized forms of occupation, such as ‘deprivation-based squatting’ (that is, squatting by poor people suffering severe housing deprivation, their sole purpose being to provide themselves with a decent place to live) and ‘squatting as an alternative housing strategy’ (that is, squatting as an alternative to renting, by people who are generally not in urgent need of housing) are deemed to have some political or counter-cultural component, such as the fact that they are supported by activists, or that they can be embedded in counter-culture, or that they end up in movement building (Prujit, 2013). This political understanding of housing occupation, however, fits only with a limited part of the phenomenon of informal access to housing in Italy, as the case of the De Gasperi neighbourhood shows.

## **THE CONTEXT. DE GASPERI NEIGHBOURHOOD, EASTERN NAPLES: PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE MIDST OF POVERTY, MARGINALIZATION AND CRIME**

Naples is one of the most populous Italian cities, with around 965,000 inhabitants as of 2018 (the metropolitan area accounts for 3.1 million inhabitants). Its urban development in the second half of the twentieth century was marked by housing emergencies linked to the Second World War and the 1980 earthquake (Donolo, 2015; Felice, 2015). In the aftermath of the Second World War, in Naples around 40,000 rooms were completely condemned due to war damage (while 15,000 rooms were used for military purposes), while the 1980 earthquake caused 6,810 buildings to be destroyed or made inaccessible, forcing around 147,000 people to abandon their homes (Del Piazz, 1985). The state's response to these two events was the creation of several public housing neighbourhoods, comprising more than 50,000 dwelling units (Comune di Napoli, 2013). These public housing neighbourhoods consisted of low-quality housing, usually located in the city's periphery, with poor connections to the rest of Naples. Living in these areas soon became synonymous with social hardship and isolation; this, together with the absence of territorial control by public authorities (e.g. local police and municipal departments), encouraged the development of widespread illegal practices (Dal Piazz, 1985; De Seta, 1984; Pagano, 2012). Against this backdrop, some of these public housing neighbourhoods rapidly turned into a metaphor for deprivation, poverty, stigmatization and crime in the Italian public discourse. This is epitomized by the case of the infamous Scampia, where a huge block of buildings called *Vele* [Sails] has emerged as the largest drug dealing centre in Europe, managed by the *Camorra* (a mafia-type criminal organization originating in the Campania region), thus symbolizing the failure of public housing in Naples<sup>18</sup>.

Among the informal practices that are common in these neighbourhoods there is also illegal access to public flats. To grasp the extent of this phenomenon in Naples, consider that, according to the Municipal Housing Policy Department in Naples (personal communication, 8 November 2017), in 2017 only 11,000 out of 24,700 public housing units were legally occupied under the 'standard procedures'. Additionally, there were 8,000 squatted units, while 6,000 units were occupied under the takeover [*subentro*] provision. Takeover refers to a case in which a dwelling is transferred from the original recipient to one of his/her family members, through a peculiar mechanism that allows a sort of inheritance of the flat (see Section 4.2). As our research shows, it appears that this takeover mechanism has gradually developed into a sort of legal mask for illegal cases of buying and selling public housing units. Against this backdrop of widespread illegal access to public housing, several thousand households have been waiting for years to access a public dwelling regularly, due to the lack of available units<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Successful movies like *Gomorra* by Matteo Garrone – and the homonymous TV series – have been filmed in this area, thus contributing to the (negative) popularization of Scampia.

<sup>19</sup> The ranking of eligible applicants for public housing in Naples dates back to 1995. In 2011, the Municipality of Naples issued a new call for applications, to which 16,000 family units responded.

Foremost among the areas most characterized by public housing and related critical issues in Naples is District No. 6, a zone marginalized in both spatial and social terms (Dal Piaz 1989, Pagano 2010) (see Table 1), located in the eastern periphery of the city.

	<i>Employment rate</i>	<i>Unemployment rate</i>	<i>Illiteracy rate</i>	<i>Percentage of high school graduates</i>	<i>Percentage of university graduates</i>
<b>District No. 6</b>	20.7	11.9	2.1	19.5	4.1
<b>Naples</b>	26.8	10.3	1.4	25.0	12.1
<b>Italy</b>	56.8	8.4	1.0	28.0	10.6

Table 1 - Socio-demographic indicators, District No. 6, Naples and Italy, 2011. Source: Naples Council<sup>20</sup> and Istat<sup>21</sup>.

This article focuses on a portion of this district, the De Gasperi neighbourhood in the Ponticelli area, which consists entirely of public housing. The neighbourhood was one of the first public housing complexes built in post-war Naples: it was erected between 1952 and 1954, and comprises 28 apartment buildings totalling 656 housing units. According to a recent council survey, illegal occupants made up 50% of its total inhabitants (Comune di Napoli, 2016). The neighbourhood is characterized by very low urban quality: public spaces, like gardens and squares, have been abandoned; buildings are crumbling and subject to water infiltration and breakdowns; apartments are overcrowded; public services, like sports or recreational facilities, and private businesses like bars, shops and restaurants are absent (see Figures 1 and 2). Moreover, the De Gasperi neighbourhood was historically ruled by members of the Camorra, which, among other activities, managed the occupation and the allocation of public housing within the neighbourhood (the mafia boss *Ciro Sarno* was called ‘*O Sindaco*’ [The Mayor] in the 1980s for this reason). The Camorra clan acted as a sort of ‘informal real estate agency’, handling two main activities related to the allocation of public apartments. First, it intermediated between buyers and sellers, asking for a ‘fee’ on the selling and buying of every public housing unit in exchange for its brokerage services. Second, in some cases the Camorra clan rented out public apartments that it controlled within the area. It was only in the first decade of this century that, through a combination of increasing state

Nevertheless, the Department of Housing Policies has never drafted a ranking of eligible applicants for that new call.

<sup>20</sup> See: <http://www.comune.napoli.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/21423>.

<sup>21</sup> See: <http://dati-censimentopopolazione.istat.it/Index.aspx?lang=it>.

actions and internal clan conflicts, the Camorra clan's hold over the area was diminished and eventually ceased (Brancaccio, 2009; Vallone, 2013).



Figure 6 - Block 22, Rione De Gasperi. January 2016. Source: Author.



Figure 7 - Rione De Gasperi, Ponticelli. June 2017. Source: Author.



## **JUGGLING FORMALITY AND INFORMALITY: THE INFORMAL ACCESS TO PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE DE GASPERI NEIGHBOURHOOD**

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This paper is based on thorough ethnographic fieldwork conducted in various stages between July 2015 and December 2017. Twenty-five semi-structured interviews were carried out with inhabitants of the neighbourhood (regular recipients of public housing units, as well as squatters and people who had accessed public housing through other informal ways), who were selected by means of snowball sampling. The interviews focused primarily on the practices of access to public housing and on the respondents' perceptions of the role of local authorities in governing the area. They were essential in revealing the informal takeover mechanism used to access public housing and its specific functioning. For reasons of space, only two of the collected stories of informal takeover have been reported in section 4.4. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of various institutions, including the district alderman for urban requalification of degraded areas, members of National Union of Tenants and bureaucrats from the Municipal Housing Policy Department of Naples. Most of the interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours. Some of them were recorded and then transcribed, while many others were not recorded, as requested by the individuals being interviewed. All interviews have been anonymised for privacy and safety reasons.

### **THE FORMAL MECHANISM OF TAKEOVER IN PUBLIC HOUSING**

This section analyses the formal procedures that, in the Campania region, regulate the 'inheritance' of public housing units. These procedures are the legal framework within which informal access to public housing – as described in the next section of this article – takes place.

The allocation of public housing units in Italy occurs through public calls for applications at the municipal level. Only households that fulfil specific criteria (such as a maximum income) can participate. The applications for public housing are analysed by the municipal housing office, which draws up a ranking that determines access to the available flats. As said, due to the lack of a sufficient number of housing units, however, not all households entitled to a public flat are able to access a unit immediately: several of them must wait for an apartment to become available. This waiting period may last several years.

Besides the regular process of accessing public housing, there is also a special mechanism to be used in exceptional cases: the takeover process. This expression refers to the case in which the legitimate recipient of a public housing unit transfers his/her title of recipient to a family member, for example after death. The regional law that regulates the allocation of public housing in Campania states that takeover can occur in only three cases: death,

separation, or when the legitimate recipient decides to leave. Furthermore, a specific relationship must exist between the original recipient and the person taking over (hereafter ‘*subentrante*’), who can be a first-degree relative, a spouse or a person who has been part of the household for at least two years (obviously, the *subentrante* must also meet the general criteria for accessing public housing, for example in terms of income).

According to the law, a household [*nucleo familiare*] is defined as a group of individuals that have been in stable cohabitation [*convivenza stabile*] for at least two years, without the necessity of kinship ties. The concept of stable cohabitation is a crucial factor: it refers to people living together on an enduring basis in the same residence, regardless of the reasons for this cohabitation (for instance, kinship, affection, care or employment). Municipal authorities, in collaboration with the local police, must confirm the existence of the habitual residence requirement of a person who declares stable cohabitation with someone else. If an individual is recognized as a stable cohabitant by the authorities, s/he qualifies as a legal member of the household. Hence, s/he has the right to initiate a takeover procedure for a public flat if the legitimate recipient abandons the apartment.

In the city of Naples, the takeover procedure requires submitting two documents in which the aspiring *subentrante* must provide detailed information – for instance, regarding the reason why the legitimate recipient of the dwelling has renounced his/her right to it, as well as details about personal income and assets. If the bureaucratic controls find no problem, the aspiring *subentrante* becomes the legitimate recipient of the public flat in question. To be stressed is that, as we will detail later, these controls are usually very superficial, and the data provided in the documents are rarely carefully checked.

#### **THE INFORMAL USE OF THE TAKEOVER PROCEDURE**

The formal takeover procedure was designed to allow the inheritance of a public flat in cases of family crisis: for example, to guarantee housing stability for a mother and children when the father – the legitimate recipient of the public apartment – divorced his wife. However, this mechanism has become an alternative, ordinary channel to obtain public housing in Naples, allowing informal access to a public dwelling unit based on its illegal trade. It seems that such illegitimate use of the takeover mechanism has been practiced for decades in the entire municipal area, and not only in the De Gasperi neighbourhood (public official of the Municipal Housing Policy Department, personal communication, 8 November 2017). Consider that approximately 6,000 (out of 24,700) public housing units in Naples have been accessed through the takeover procedure – and it is likely that legitimate takeovers comprise only a small part of the total.

Informal takeover stands on the border of legality, juggling between the formal and the informal spheres. In fact, contrary to ‘ordinary squatting’ – where the occupant is always in a state of illegality – the informal takeover guarantees that, even though part of the process is illegal, the result is legal, since possession of the public flat is recognized as legitimate by the public authorities. The informal takeover mechanism functions as follows (see Figure 3): Paolo, who is looking for cheap housing, agrees with Marco, the legitimate occupant of a public flat, on the price for the purchase of Marco’s public apartment. Once the agreement

has been reached, Paolo changes his residence to Marco's apartment, so that he can become formally part of his household after two years. However, the change of residence does not mean true cohabitation, since Paolo does not move to Marco's apartment. Two years later, Marco leaves his home and Paolo applies to inherit Marco's public flat, since he is now legally part of Marco's household.

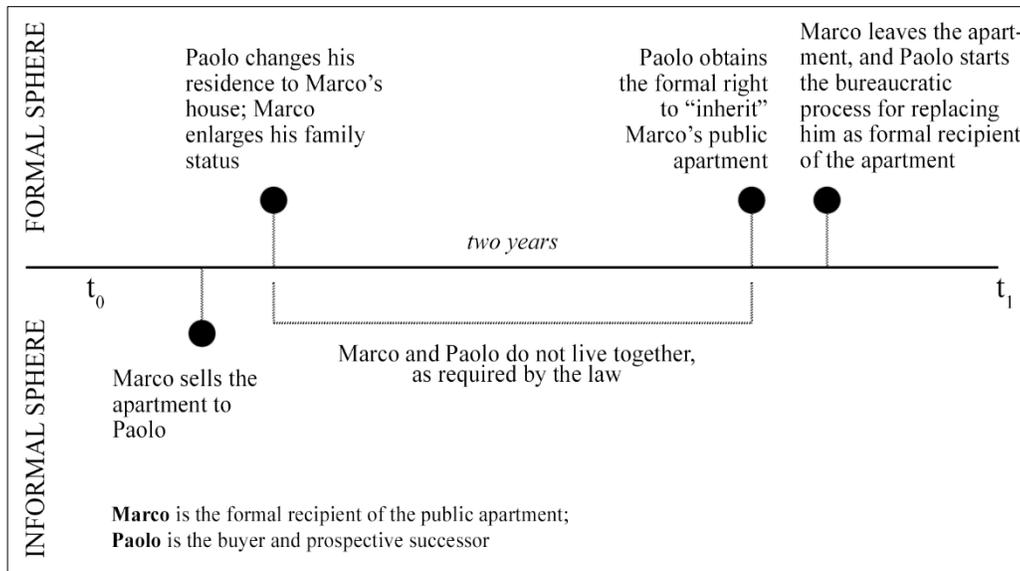


Figure 8 - The mechanism of informal takeover. Source: Author and Francesco Chioldelli.

The concepts of household, cohabitation and takeover are the *formal* elements of this mechanism. The *informal* part of the practice relates to both the money exchange that activates the takeover procedure and to the two-year dummy cohabitation between Paolo and Marco.

Specific features of institutional practices and norms draw the space of possibility within which the informal takeover takes place. For instance, documents necessary to activate the takeover procedure are submitted in the form of a self-declaration. Local authorities are responsible for checking the truthfulness of their contents. However, controls are very superficial, if not non-existent – as our interviews with inhabitants and civil servants revealed. For several years, local authorities have not examined the applications for changing residency, because of “a combination of laziness and political will” (public official of the Municipal Housing Policy Department, personal communication, 8 November 2017), thus generating a sort of automatic authorization in the application process. Even when local authorities check the applications, the controls are often cosmetic. This is the case of controls by the local police, who are supposed to check whether people live in the dwelling units to which they have declared their transfer. To pass such controls, in fact, it is sufficient that the

person applying for a change of residence is present during the police inspection – which takes place during a pre-set week – and that there is a bed in the flat, allegedly belonging to this person.<sup>22</sup> Also to be stressed is that, in some cases the *subentrante* can have a real income higher than the threshold set for accessing public housing; nevertheless, the declared personal earnings are below this threshold because a part of such income derives from the shadow economy (the black economy accounts for a large part of Naples' GDP; Vicari, 2001).

To summarize, the public housing takeover procedure constitutes the formal space within which the informal purchase of public housing takes place; this informal mechanism is allowed by both shortcomings in the law and the weakness of the control system.

### **INFORMAL TAKEOVER: TWO PARADIGMATIC STORIES**

Two paradigmatic stories show the various nuances of informal takeover practices in the De Gasperi neighbourhood.

*Salvatore's story* (Salvatore, personal communication, 14 December 2015). Salvatore, over 70 years old, lived most of his life close to Ponticelli, in the eastern part of Naples. In the 1990s he moved to the De Gasperi neighbourhood, where he 'inherited' his nephew's apartment. Before moving to the neighbourhood, he agreed to pay five million Italian *lire* (around 2,500 euros) to his nephew — so that he could transfer his residence to his nephew's public apartment. The nephew, in fact, was planning to leave the flat to move to his wife's house in a nearby municipality. Salvatore applied successfully to change his residence to his nephew's apartment. However, he did not immediately move to live in his nephew's home, as the law required; in fact, the pact was that Salvatore would move at the end of the two years necessary to become a member of his nephew's household and subsequently submit the takeover application. The story is complicated by the fact that Salvatore's nephew reached a similar sale agreement with another person. In other words, the same public flat was sold to two different people. The case ended positively for Salvatore, because the nephew decided to leave the apartment to him. Salvatore did not specify what happened to the other person to whom the apartment had been promised (however, he declared to us that the nephew had returned the money that such person had paid for his apartment).

To be stressed is that Salvatore's interview evinces a sense of ordinariness with respect to the informal takeover process. He perceives the illegal housing trade as commonplace. While he is aware that the process was illegal, he does not consider it to be illegitimate: for him, it was just another way to deal with poverty and housing need. The kinship relation with the nephew and the sum he paid to him for accessing the flat are regarded by Salvatore as factors sufficient to legitimate his possession.

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<sup>22</sup> We did not find evidence of episodes of corruption during our fieldwork. However, given the widespread corruption in several sectors of public administration in Italy (Transparency International, 2013) – and in Naples in particular (Allum, 2003) – also bribery may occur in order to avoid inspections.

*Rosa's story* (Rosa, personal communication, 10 May, 2017). Rosa was a child when she moved with her family to Ponticelli in the years following World War II. She was one of the people that left the city centre of Naples because of the bombing. Rosa grew up in the De Gasperi neighbourhood; at the age of sixteen, she decided to marry her partner. Her husband worked in a factory in Germany, while she devoted herself to informal business and casual jobs (e.g. caregiving). The public flat to which she and her husband moved was a wedding gift from her sister. Rosa did not explain what she meant by 'gift'; however, it is likely that her sister obtained the flat simply by paying the legal recipient, but without engaging in the takeover procedure. A few years later, in the late 1980s – when organized crime still ruled the neighbourhood – the Camorra clan forced Rosa to leave her apartment, but it provided her with a new public flat in the neighbourhood. Beside allocating the flat, the clan also gave her the opportunity to become the legal recipient of the apartment through the informal takeover mechanism, which she started and concluded successfully. Since then, she has lived in that apartment for 32 years.

Rosa, like Salvatore, could not explain precisely how the takeover system works. She said generically that her family handled the formal aspects of the process. Although she did not mention any specific role of organized crime in the procedure, it is likely that the Camorra clan, which controlled the area until the late 1990s, played a key role in the takeover process, for instance providing local inhabitants with forms of support and assistance for takeover procedures.

Today, Rosa spends her daily life between two dwellings in the same building. The first, on the first floor, is the apartment where she sleeps: this is the apartment that she received from the criminal organization, which she legally occupies. The second, on the ground floor, is the 'apartment' (it is only a single room with a sink, a stove and a table) where she spends the rest of the day. Rosa squatted this latter space in the 1970s – it was previously a storehouse for gardening tools – and transformed it into an informal shop, where she used to sell foodstuffs. When she retired, she converted it into a sort of living room.



Figure 9 - A part of Rosa's ground floor "house", Rione De Gasperi. Source: Author.

## **DISCUSSION. THE SPACE OF POSSIBILITY OF PUBLIC HOUSING OCCUPATION**

The case of the De Gasperi neighbourhood brings to light several aspects useful for discussing the complex interaction between public institutions and informal access to housing, as well as for enriching the typology of illegal housing occupations in Italy.

### **FORMAL INSTITUTIONS AND INFORMAL PRACTICES**

Examining informal takeovers is an entry point for deeper understanding of the intricate and multifaceted relationships between formality and informality, rules and transgressions, formal institutions and informal space production. Three relevant findings have emerged from our case study.

*i) Informality does not necessarily imply opposition to the law.* The relationship between informality and formal rules is much more complex than a simplistic *opposition*. Formal and informal spheres are constantly and structurally interrelated; a practice can pass from one sphere to the other, depending on the phase of its life-cycle. In this regard, informal takeover is paradigmatic: the various steps that compose such practice are sometimes situated in the formal sphere and sometimes in the informal one, in a kind of seesaw relationship between legality and illegality. The fact that informal practices are multifaceted and not static, thus moving through several stages, implies that they must be studied in processual and diachronic terms, considering their internal complexity in relation with the temporal dimension: an accurate heuristic of informality requires that the entire life-cycle of the informal practice be scrutinized and all the elements composing it be disassembled and analysed.

Informality is not simply opposition to formal rules also from another viewpoint: even when the practice lies within the informal field, the law continues to be a pivotal benchmark. This point as well is exemplified by our case study. In fact, during the informal takeover procedure, every illegal act is performed taking into careful account the norms that it violates and the related practices by local authorities (e.g. in terms of controls), so that the chances of a successful conclusion of the procedure are maximized. It is within this framework that nomotropism emerges as a crucial concept in the analysis of informality. In many cases, indeed, informal practices are not simply outside the law, that is, without any connection with it: on the contrary, even when the law is breached, it continues to influence offenders' actions, who take it into consideration in light, for instance, of their will to regularize their position (that is, the offender acts nomotropically with respect to the law s/he violates).

*ii) Public institutions have an active role in the informal production of urban space.* Formal institutions play an active role in producing and shaping informality. They do so by defining through their functioning both the space of action and the survival threshold of the informal. This can occur in several ways, as the case of the De Gasperi neighbourhood shows. The inaction of public authorities – which causes a notorious lack of controls over cohabitation and takeover procedures, even though the municipality is aware of these informal practices in accessing public housing – is one of the main elements that allows the survival of informal takeover. The production of faulty laws, which furnish opportunities for purposes other than those envisaged, is another example of institutional responsibility in the re-production of informality. In this regard, the case of legislation on the inheritance of public housing is blatant: while the reason for having such a law is clear and understandable, the law nevertheless goes hand in hand with an ambiguous conceptualization of a household and a lack of control over residence change and cohabitation, making takeover an easy way to gain informal access to public housing. Imperfect norms, lack of controls and absence of sanctions are three (public) components that shape the wide space of possibility within which an informal practice not only appears and is reproduced, but can also be legalized smoothly.

*iii) Informality is not a space characterized by a mere absence of rules.* Many informal institutions govern the informal world, playing a complementary or substitutive role with respect to conventional, legal institutions. As McFarlane (2012) stresses, “people’s relations – in their economic, political, and social dimensions – are negotiated not just through formal institutions, but through households, networks, cultural norms, and practices, through conflicts, trust and cooperation, modes of power and authority, and exclusion, and through relations of gender, age and religion” (p.103).

Until the late 1990s in the De Gasperi neighbourhood these informal practices (related not only to accessing public housing, but also to other fields, such as drug dealing and black economy) occurred within the institutional field – illegal, but strictly regulated and structured – of organized crime. The Camorra clan exercised firm governance over the neighbourhood and its inhabitants instead of the public authorities; with reference to the specific field of housing, it acted as the guarantor of informal purchases of public flats – a sort of specialized broker responsible for settling disputes and ensuring the reliability and certainty of the illegal exchange (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999). The case of Rosa, who was forced by the Camorra clan to abandon her flat while being assigned a second one by it, is a paradigmatic example of the management of public flats by the criminal group. To be stressed is that, despite being a criminal organization, the Camorra clan was not unconcerned with the public regulation: in fact, by promoting and supporting the informal takeover process, it tried to regularize its allocation of public flats through the existing, legal normative framework.

When the regulatory role of organized crime was eradicated, some informal norms applied to govern the area – and, in particular, to manage informal access to public housing – remained in place, so that informal takeover continued to exist as a shared social practice with precise internal rules. Salvatore’s case, where the purchase of a flat by two different persons occurred, demonstrates the risks of such informal social practices taking place outside any institutional framework *lato sensu*: there is no longer a third party able to

guarantee compliance with contracts, such as the informal contract concerning the sale of the apartment of Salvatore's nephew. Against this backdrop, the established social relationships among inhabitants of the area – strengthened by family ties – are the key factor that allows informal takeover to survive without external guarantors to supervise (and eventually enforce) informal contracts, since they guarantee a sufficient degree of social sanction in the case of violations. Today, informal takeover resists within this loosely regulated environment as a form of cognitive capital shared among all the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

### **THE GREY SIDE OF URBAN SQUATTING: ACTORS AND RATIONALES OF A SELF-INTERESTED FORM OF HOUSING OCCUPATION**

Illegal access to housing in Italy<sup>23</sup> has usually been studied within the frame of ordinary squatting: that is, a collective practice supported or led by organized groups such as social movements or trade unions as part of a political campaign (for instance, in order to assert the right to housing for minority groups or to create spaces for alternative lifestyles or counter-politics) (see Mudu, 2014; Grazioli, 2017; Di Feliciano, 2017). The picture emerging from the case of the De Gasperi neighbourhood complements this conceptualisation, highlighting that politically oriented and collectively organized squatting does not represent the entirety of the informal access to existing dwelling units in Italy, in particular when *public* housing is considered.

As said above, the informal takeover of public housing units can be seen as a liminal case of (deprivation-based or survival) squatting: it is a kind of informal access to housing without the consent of the owner from the viewpoint of the real entry process; it becomes regular possession when illegal access is regularized through the successful conclusion of the takeover procedure. Regardless of whether we consider it a liminal case of squatting or prefer to label it simply as a specific form of illegal (fraudulent) access to housing (thus avoiding the word 'squatting'), this case shows clearly that there are instances in which (public) housing units are informally accessed by self-interested people, alien to any political environment, solely in order to gain possession cheaply and quickly of a modest dwelling unit in order to satisfy their urgent need for housing. The collective and organized actors very active in ordinary squatting in Naples (for example, tenants unions or social movements that defend housing rights; Punziano and De Falco, 2016) are not part of the story in the case of informal takeover in the De Gasperi neighbourhood.

To be stressed is that a possible reason for the spread of informal takeover is that it is beneficial for all the parties involved. It does not benefit only the legitimate recipient, who sells a flat that is not his property, obtaining a financial gain through an illegal sale. It also benefits the *subentrante*, who can access a public apartment avoiding the bureaucratic machinery with its long waiting times and uncertainties. Obviously, the informal takeover is costlier than the (free) formal procedure of access to public housing. However, it has the advantage of achieving the same result – the legitimate allocation of public housing – within

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<sup>23</sup> We refer here to illegal access to *existing* buildings for residential purposes. Illegal access through the unauthorized construction of housing units (e.g. in violation of planning and building norms) is not considered.

a short and guaranteed time-span. Compared to ordinary squatting, the informal takeover is costlier (squatting is often almost free, except in cases where it occurs through intermediation with criminal groups that demand sums of money; Belotti, 2017) and less immediate (it takes two years for the right to succession be granted); nonetheless, it has the advantage of being less risky from a legal standpoint and, importantly, it guarantees a legal status, since the possession of the flat is recognized by public authorities. Also some institutional actors seem to benefit from the informal takeover, as some public officials hinted during our interviews (public official of the Municipal Housing Policy Department in Naples, personal communication, 8 November 2017). Informal housing in Italy is often promoted (or, at least, welcomed) by both politicians and civil servants, who can gain different kinds of personal benefit from it (Chiodelli, 2019; Coppola, 2013), and the case of informal takeover in Naples seems not to be an exception. These gains are sometimes of economic nature, linked to corruption: it is possible that in the case under investigation some public officials in charge of a part of the takeover procedures turned a blind eye to illegal acts in exchange for a bribe. In other cases, such gains are political: the support of housing informality is a way to build large clienteles at local level, and informal takeover, too, may constitute a means to build political consensus through the creation of a ‘vote bank’ among occupants<sup>24</sup>.

Against this backdrop, an important feature of the Neapolitan system of public housing emerges: the multifaceted self-interest rationality underpinning both formal and informal actors’ agency in the public housing sphere. This situation diminishes the transparency and efficiency of the public housing system in responding to inhabitants’ housing needs and forces informal occupants to build their negotiation strategies on reciprocity rather than on stable and clear rules (Grashoff, 2019). Weaker social groups and individuals – such as people outside networks and social contexts that allow these practices (e.g. migrants and newcomers) – are those that pay the price of this self-interest rationality guiding informal takeover, which reduces the number of public housing units available for allocation based on waiting lists (as said, in Naples thousands of people are waiting for public housing)<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> To be specified is that, although both squatters and some institutional actors benefit from the informal takeover, individuals accessing public housing informally operate within a field of unequal power dynamics. In fact, institutional actors run the show, by determining through their (often arbitrary) acts the space of possibility for informal takeover. Even if squatters act in different ways in order to maximise their chance of successfully concluding the informal takeover process, public officials always have the last word – that is, informality necessarily needs a public sanction to be regularized (Clough Marinaro, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Obviously, the shortcomings of public housing in Naples (as well as in the rest of Italy) cannot be related only (or even mainly) to the illegal occupation of public dwelling units; rather, they are linked to the structural problems of the Italian system of public housing (Tosi, 2017). However, in some specific contexts the magnitude of occupations can exacerbate such structural problems.

## CONCLUSIONS

Urban informality is a structural characteristic of many Italian cities, which is usually equated with the construction of dwelling units in violation of planning and building norms. However, there is a second main form of informal access to housing in Italy that, despite being important, is somewhat neglected by academic research: the illegal occupation of public housing units. Although housing occupation is widely debated in scholarly research, with reference to both Italy and other European countries, most of the literature tends to focus primarily on politically-oriented occupations (usually labelled ‘squatting’). However, this is only one of the different forms in which illegal occupation of an existing building for residential purposes occurs, at least in Italy. Indeed, there are non-politically-oriented ways in which a (public) dwelling unit can be informally accessed, as exemplified by the case of informal takeover revealed by our analysis of the De Gasperi neighbourhood in Naples. Here, public apartments are bought and sold illegally; this trade is then legalized thanks to the space of opportunity provided by shortcomings in the normative framework (and in the related controls) governing the access to public housing in the form of ‘inheriting’ public dwelling units. Informal takeover can be conceptualized as a third way to access public housing besides both the (legal) ranking system and (illegal) ordinary squatting – a practice in tension between being a liminal form of squatting and being public housing fraud.

This peculiar kind of informal access to housing is highly significant for two main theoretical reasons. Firstly, informal takeover provides a clear example of the complex and variable relationship between the formal and the informal: a constant, seesawing relationship between the formal and the informal spheres characterizes the entire process of informal takeover, with fluctuations related to the different phases of the life-cycle and the different sub-components of the practice. This suggests that any robust heuristic of informality needs to approach it from a processual, diachronic viewpoint, carefully disassembling the practice in order to take its internal variations into consideration. Secondly, the case study highlights how urban informality can have deep institutional roots: formal agents and regulations causally shape informal practices in different ways (for instance, through inaction or incomplete and imperfect regulation), thus determining the space of possibility within which such practices originate, take shape, spread, consolidate and eventually die.

To be specified is that, although the case of informal takeover is significant in particular for the aforementioned theoretical reasons, it contributes also to the international debate on urban squatting in the Global North, showing how illegal occupation of (public) housing can occur for multiple purposes and through diversified forms, some of which are individualistic and self-interested.

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## **PAPER 2**

### **The hidden side of urban squatting: the individualistic occupation of public housing units in Naples, Italy**

#### **Abstract**

The debate on urban squatting in Western countries has been dominated by research on politically motivated or counter-cultural occupations. By contrast, cases of squatting which take place outside any political framework has been almost entirely neglected. This is the case of the example under investigation in this paper: the ‘individualistic’ occupation of public housing flats in Italy. After introducing the phenomenon of the occupation of public apartments in Italy, the paper investigates the case of the occupation for dwelling reasons of non-residential public buildings in the De Gasperi neighbourhood, which is an individualistic practice occurring through illegal market mechanisms. This analysis contributes primarily to the academic debate on squatting in Western countries, through the conceptualization of a kind of occupation (i.e. individualistic squatting) which is different from ‘ordinary’ political squatting; however, the paper aims also to impinge on the international literature on informality/illegality in the housing sphere as well.

Keywords: squatting, occupations, public housing, illegality, informality



## INTRODUCTION. URBAN SQUATTING IN THE GLOBAL NORTH

Even if informality is a constitutive feature mainly of the so-called ‘Global South’, it characterizes also several cities of the Global North (and, in particular, of Southern Europe; see for instance Allen et al. 2004), even if with different features and magnitudes. One of the specific kinds of housing informality in the Global North is so-called ‘squatting’, which means “living in – or otherwise using – a dwelling without the consent of the owner. Squatters take over buildings for relatively (>1 year) long term use” (Prujit, 2013: p 19). As regards cities of Western Europe, urban squatting has been studied especially as a politically motivated or counter-cultural collective practice [hereafter: ‘political squatting’], that is, actions taken by organized progressive groups (mainly left-libertarian, anarchist or communist) aimed at building an alternative way of life or expressing political claims (Watson, 2016; Lopéz, 2013). Italy is characterized by this political kind of squatting as well (Piazza, 2012); here, occupying a building without the consent of the owner is a very common practice, which has been entrenched in many cities for some decades (the case of Rome is exemplary: Di Feliciano, 2017; Grazioli, 2017; Mudu, 2014). However, only a small proportion of occupations in Italy can be properly considered as political squatting – despite the fact that political squatting dominates Italian academic debate on urban occupations. Accordingly, this paper intends to shed light on what it will term ‘individualistic squatting’, investigated with reference to the case study of the De Gasperi neighbourhood. In so doing, the paper aims to contribute both to the debate on squatting in Western countries and on the international literature on informal/illegal practices in the urban sphere (and in the housing field in particular).

The paper is structured as follows: the next section provides an overview of the most recent debate on squatting in Europe, highlighting the pre-eminence of the discussion on political squatting. Subsequently, housing crisis and illegal occupations of public flats, together with public policies on these issues, are introduced with reference to Italy and Naples. Later, the case study of the De Gasperi neighbourhood is presented, and how illegal occupations occur in the area is described. The section that follows deals with two exemplary cases of residential occupation of a nursery school. The penultimate section discusses the case study in light of the conditions of possibility of squatting, highlighting similarities and differences between political and individualistic squatting. The last section concludes.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK. POLITICAL SQUATTING: RELEVANCE, FEATURES, OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE**

### **THE RISE OF POLITICAL SQUATTING IN EUROPE AND ITALY**

The academic literature on squatting has mostly focused on political squatting in Western countries (see, among many others: Aitchison, 2018; Piazza and Genovese, 2016; Lopéz and Cattaneo, 2014; Lopéz, 2013; Mayer, 2009). By ‘political squatting’ we mean the practice of collectively occupying a building, which is then often used also as a residence by squatters, promoted by an organized group for political or counter-cultural reasons (Corr, 1999). Such practice has been widespread in many European countries since the 1960s, becoming over time one of the most common ways to fight for the “right to the city” (Lopéz, 2014; Mayer 2009; Anning et al., 1980). In this framework, the occupation of a building always has two simultaneous goals. First, it is a way for certain groups to have access to a space (e.g. a house or a gathering place) that they could not access through the formal channels of the private market or of public assistance. Second, it is a way to build wider political and cultural campaigns: squatting becomes a way to challenge housing shortages, urban speculation and absolute private property rights (de Moor, 2016; Lopéz and Cattaneo, 2014; Gibson-Graham, 2006), together with the effectiveness of some public policies and the legitimacy of some public institutions (Watson, 2016; Parson, 1987). Against this backdrop, it is clear why political squatting is usually seen as necessarily a collective action by leftist (libertarian, anarchist or communist) groups (Vasudevan, 2015a; Pruijt, 2013; Leontidou, 2010)<sup>26</sup>.

It is interesting that even if the practice of squatting is always entrenched locally (being related to specific contextual conditions and to the agency of specific local subjects), at the same time it is often characterized by a trans-local geography: people and places, ideas and objects are continuously connected and shared (Vasudevan, 2015b). This is why squatting can be defined a ‘rooted cosmopolitan movement’ (Tarrow, 2005; see also Squatting Europe Collective, 2013). Italian political squatting has a particular relevance within this international context, due to its magnitude and its fundamental contribution to the trans-national diffusion of political occupations – for instance through the co-organization of large-scale demonstrations and international meetings, such as the demonstration against G8 in Genoa, 2001 and the European Social Forum of Florence, 2002 (Yates, 2015; Leontidou, 2010). For decades, squatting in Italy was epitomized by ‘squatted social centres’ (despite some occupations with a primarily residential aim existed as well, in particular during the 1970s). Squatted social centres can be defined as places occupied with the primary aim of forming political and counter-cultural identities alternative to the dominant ones; they

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<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, there are occupations promoted by groups belonging to the extreme right, like CasaPound in Rome (Di Nunzio and Toscano, 2011).

function in particular as gathering and recreational spaces, to which a secondary residential function can be added. In the past decade, however, due to the increase in housing problems connected to the economic crisis, the specific practice of occupation mainly for dwelling purposes has proliferated in Italy as well, usually promoted by specific movements for the right to housing, sometimes linked to squatted social centres (Di Felicianantonio, 2017; Di Felicianantonio and Aalbers, 2018; Grazioli and Caciagli, 2018; Mudu, 2014).

It is in the light of the political and social importance of occupations in many Western countries that academic research in Europe (and particularly in Italy) has focused mainly on squatting as a political and counter-cultural collective action. In so doing, however, non-political forms of squatting have been left aside<sup>27</sup>. This is the case, for instance, of ‘individualistic squatting’, that is the occupation of flats (mainly in public estates) with the sole aim of dwelling, done outside any collectively promoted practice by social and political movements (for a conceptualisation of individualistic squatting, see the second to last section of this paper).

#### **THE FACTORS THAT MAKE POLITICAL SQUATTING POSSIBLE**

Some authors have underlined the importance of specific factors in favouring the emergence of political squatting (see for instance López, 2013 and Prujit, 2003). In general terms it is possible to identify seven factors that make political squatting possible.

i) *Housing shortage*. At the core of every case of squatting there is a need for housing not fulfilled by either the government or the private market (Watson, 2016; Vasudevan, 2015c)<sup>28</sup>, as demonstrated by several studies referred to different contexts (on the Italian case, see for example Mudu and Aureli, 2016).

ii) *The availability of abandoned buildings*. To be able to practice squatting, it is first necessary for there to be a certain number of abandoned buildings that can be occupied. This is both a practical opportunity that makes the occupation possible and a ‘political excuse’ that justifies (directly or indirectly) the occupation – which is presented as a legitimate self-organized assertion of the right to housing and against the ‘waste of housing’ (Aureli and Mudu, 2017).

iii) *The technical conditions of the buildings*. The physical conditions of abandoned buildings to be occupied is crucial: they must be acceptable at least in structural terms. In some countries, in fact, the precarious structural conditions of occupied buildings are a reason why local authorities decide to intervene and clear the structure. This was, for instance, the case of New York (Prujit, 2003). By contrast, this factor is less significant in Mediterranean European countries, where it is quite rare for occupied buildings to be cleared due to the risk of collapse.

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<sup>27</sup> A partial exception is research on Rome; see for instance Puccini (2016) and Villani (2012).

<sup>28</sup> It is in light of this that, according to Kinghan (1977), the difference between squatting as a housing necessity and squatting as a way to express political or counter-cultural claims is misleading. For a different viewpoint, see Gonzalez et al. (2018).

iv) *Urban renewal projects*. The existence of urban renewal projects (related mainly to working-class residential areas) is a factor that encourages political squatting, especially where such projects entail profound functional and social transformation of the area in question (Holm and Kuhn, 2011). These projects can create social conflicts that lead to the occupation of buildings in the area involved in the plan (Annunziata and Lees, 2016; López, 2013)<sup>29</sup>.

v) *Effectiveness of repression*. The level of repression by public authorities determines the success or failure of occupations. Repression can take the form of direct forceful action (like evictions), or softer measures like the anti-squatting methods adopted recently in Italy (Grazioli and Caciagli, 2018). When measures against occupation are applied resolutely by the local authorities, squatting becomes almost impossible (López, 2014; Pruijt, 2013).

vi) *Squatters collective agency*. The act of occupying an abandoned building always depends on the existence of a collective agency, which involves also (even if not exclusively) people who will finally run the occupied building (e.g. future inhabitants). They can be motivated by the urgent need for accommodation or by ideological reasons (Finchett-Maddock, 2016; Van der Steen et al., 2014). Such a collective agency needs a very strong individual motivation by the squatters: the occupation is an illegal act, which can lead to criminal conviction, and also involves a great deal of time and energy.

vii) *Connection to other social movements*. The possibility of squatting – and its duration – increases when the occupation is linked to other social movements (Watson, 2016). Such connections are important for example in providing organizational support, especially in hard times like the initial act of resistance against eviction. It is important also because it makes squatting look legitimate in the eyes of the general public through sensitization and awareness-raising campaigns about the motivations of the occupation (López, 2013; Moroni and Aaster, 1996).

The aforementioned factors are the main conditions that make political squatting possible. However, are they relevant also in the case of non-political squatting, such as in the case of the individualistic occupation of public flats in Italy? The next section analyses the case of the occupation of public housing units in Naples, as a base for answering this question.

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<sup>29</sup> This type of occupation is usually not mainly for housing purposes.

## THE HOUSING CRISIS IN ITALY AND NAPLES, BETWEEN REPRESSION AND TOLERANCE

As mentioned in Paper 1, according to national report (Nomisma, 2018), in 2013 6.4% of public housing units were illegally occupied in Italy<sup>30</sup>. Eighty-one percent of these occupations (around 40,000 units) occurred by force, while the rest of occupied flats were in the hands of people whose regular rental contracts had expired. This phenomenon has been on the rise in recent years: between 2004 and 2013 illegally occupied public apartments rose by 20.9%. More than half of these occupations took place in southern Italy, especially in major cities, as we have stressed in Paper 1 (Nomisma, 2016). In Naples 8,000 public housing units out of 25,000 were illegally occupied in 2017 (Official of the Department for Public Housing in Naples, personal communication, 8 November 2017).

Against this backdrop, the Italian regulatory and policy approach to this phenomenon is marked by a structural ambivalence between repression and tolerance/regularization. On the one hand, illegally occupying public (and private) buildings in Italy is a criminal offence, punishable with up to a two-year jail sentence and a fine of up to 2,000 euros. On paper, on the discovery of an illegal occupation, not only a charge is made, but an order of eviction is issued and expected to be carried out in a few days by the public authorities (Specific regional laws regulate the details of evictions). There are also further deterrents to occupation. For example, in 2014 a new law stated that anyone who illegally occupies a building cannot apply for connection to amenities like water and electricity, nor can obtain official residence (which excludes him/her from other basic services and social assistance offered by the Municipality). Then, in September 2018 the new Italian government issued a decree to facilitate the eviction of illegal occupants. Moreover, in some regions illegal occupants are subject to an embargo on application for public housing (e.g. five years in Lombardy region and ten years in Emilia Romagna).

On the other hand, periodic amnesties to regularize the occupation of public flats have been approved at the regional level. For example, in the Campania region two amnesties have been issued in the past twenty years (in 2000 and 2013). In other cases (see for instance the Lombardy region), permanent channels have been established to regularize occupations involving families in particularly complex situations (e.g. families with minors) (Belotti and Annunziata, 2017). To these legislative measures aimed at regularizing occupations, *practices* of tolerance are sometimes added: for example, public officials charged with managing public housing estates tend to avoid repressive interventions if the occupation involves ‘delicate subjects’ (e.g. pregnant women or people with disabilities) (see Belotti 2018 on the case of Milano). A similar tolerant approach is promoted also by politicians, as

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<sup>30</sup> These figures are probably low estimates. In fact, they do not capture illegal forms of accessing public flats like sales disguised as hereditary transfers that we have analyzed in Chapter 1.

in the case of Naples, where the Mayor Luigi De Magistris (in office since 2011, at the head of a center-left coalition) has always maintained a soft stance on illegal occupations for dwelling purposes. For instance, in 2011 the municipal council of Naples approved a formal document introducing an innovative legal type with regard to squatting for residential purposes; i.e. *commons* [*bene commune*] (Comune di Napoli, 2016). Seven squatted social centres have been legitimated, since they have been defined as material and immaterial commons belonging to the community. In particular, such legislative measure concerns two specific squatted social centres —*ex-scuola Schipa* and *Villa Medusa*—that function primarily for residential purposes (De Falco and Punziano, 2013).

To complete the contextualization of the phenomenon under investigation, it is necessary to mention two more factors. The first is the inadequacy of the public housing system in Italy (Gentili and Hoekstra 2018; Tosi, 2017). Since the 1990s, this sector has been marked by a progressive reduction in long-term investments and privatization, which in twenty years has reduced available public housing units by 22% (Puccini, 2016; Adorni et al., 2017). The inadequacy of the public housing system is demonstrated by the fact that, at the national level, there were 650,000 families on the waiting list for public housing in 2015 (Federcasa, 2015). In Naples this figure is some tens of thousands (see Paper 1). Families on the waiting list usually have to wait for years (in some cases decades) before accessing a public flat.

The second factor is the progressive worsening of housing distress in Italy, especially with reference to families in rented homes (Baldini and Poggio, 2012; Tosi, 2017). Monthly rents have risen from 15% of the family income in the 1970s and 1980s to 30% today, on average (Fregolent et al, 2017). Families in rented housing in a situation of housing deprivation (i.e. the rent exceeds 30% of monthly family income) rose from 16% of the total in 1993 to 35% in 2016 (equal to 2 million families) (Nomisma, 2016). Further evidence of the harsh housing situation of many families is provided by data on evictions. In Italy, court orders for evictions increased from 40,130 in 2002 (of which 27,154 for being in arrears) to over 77,000 in 2014 (of which 54,892 for being in arrears) – this figure rose immediately after the economic crisis of 2008, and diminished somewhat between 2014 and 2016 (Ministero dell’Interno, 2016). In 2016, in Naples eviction orders numbered 3,624 (in 2007 they were 994), 87% of which were for being in arrears (in 2007 evictions for arrears represented 59% of the total). The relation between orders of eviction for arrears and the number of families residing in Naples is one in 351 families, compared with a national average of one in 471 (ibid): this demonstrates that housing deprivation in Naples is more acute than the national average.

## **INDIVIDUALISTIC SQUATTING: THE CASE OF RIONE DE GASPERI**

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study is based on ethnographic research carried out in different phases between November 2017 and April 2018, focused mainly on a long period of participant observation (including a period of cohabitation with one of the squatters), life history interviews. To understand living conditions in the neighbourhood and the mechanisms regulating illegal access to public flats, we carried out seven life-history interviews were conducted with families who live in those public places of the neighbourhood that were initially designed as non-residential (e.g. the elementary school, the general store, the grocery and the mini market). Each interview lasted between one and two hours, and was recorded and transcribed. The names of all those interviewed have been changed for reasons of privacy and security. Data that we have gathered in this phase of fieldwork have been crossed with those that we collected for Paper 1.

### **THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE DE GASPERI NEIGHBORHOOD AND THE CASE OF THE NURSERY SCHOOL**

As we have argued in the previous paper, the De Gasperi neighborhood is particularly problematic from a social point of view: it is characterized by a low level of education and a high level of unemployment. In addition, like many other cases of public housing neighbourhoods in Naples, Rione De Gasperi is characterized also by poor urban quality. Public spaces, like gardens and squares, have been abandoned; buildings are crumbling and subject to water infiltration and breakdowns; apartments are overcrowded (it is common for a 50 sq.m. apartment to be inhabited by a family of five or more components). Moreover, the area is characterized by the total absence of public services, like sports or recreational facilities, and by lack of private activities like bars, shops and restaurants. In fact, over time all the ground floors of residential buildings and other structures, initially meant for public services or commercial activities, have been occupied and turned into dwelling units. This reduces the entire neighbourhood to a large dormitory.



Figure 10 - Residential buildings in Rione De Gasperi. Source: Author.



Figure 11 - The nursery school. Source: Author.

A typical case of informal conversion of a non-residential structure into housing is that of the nursery school “Centro Italiano Femminile”, built in 1969 for the children of the neighbourhood (fig. 2). The school had functioned until the early 1990s, when it was closed because of structural problems. Immediately after the closure, the school was occupied by

some inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who transformed the classrooms and offices into dwelling units<sup>31</sup>.

Such a high level of decay, not only in Rione De Gasperi but generally in all public housing neighbourhoods in Naples, induced the Municipality to promote renewal programmes on various occasions (see Introduction) Among these programmes there was also a regeneration plan for Ponticelli, approved in 1997, which had the objective of renewing Rione De Gasperi as well. Most of these renewal programmes, however, have not been implemented (or only partially implemented). This is the case of Rione De Gasperi as well, in which the renewal project, approved twenty years ago, is still in its initial stages.

### **HOW DOES THE OCCUPATION OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS WORKS IN THE DE GASPERI NEIGHBOURHOOD**

The occupation of public flats is a practice entrenched in the De Gasperi neighbourhood. It concerns roughly 50% of the apartments in the area (Comune di Napoli, 2016). In general terms, there are two ways to illegally access a public housing unit in the neighborhood. The first is the one described in detail in Paper 1, in which the legitimate beneficiary of a public flat sells (illegally) the apartment of which s/he is a legitimate beneficiary to a buyer. The transfer of possession is later legalized taking advantage of loopholes in the law (and of lax control by public authorities) on hereditary transfer of the right to occupy a public dwelling unit.

The second mechanism is a 'standard' form of squatting, which consists essentially in breaking into an unutilized public property by force. Squatting in the Rione De Gasperi refers to both empty public apartments and spaces meant originally for other purposes (like commerce or public services), mainly situated on the ground floors of apartment buildings or in other structures. As mentioned earlier, all non-residential spaces in the neighbourhood have been occupied and converted into dwelling units.

Squatting a residential space or a non-residential space does not differ in how the occupation takes place nor how it is subsequently managed by the squatters. The most significant difference is in the possibility of regularizing the illegal occupation. The usual practice of those who occupy a public flat is as follows. After having occupied an apartment, the squatter reports him/herself to the local police (as we will explain later, this self-reporting serves to establish the initial date of the occupation, which is important in the case of future legalization). In the 'worst' case, this act of self-reporting to the police is followed by a judicial process, which can end with a fine; in the majority of cases, however, nothing happens after the self-reporting and, after a few years, the statute of limitations applies. Payment of this fine does not imply the legalisation of the occupied property. On paper, in fact, the squatter should still be evicted from the building. However, a court sentence of

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<sup>31</sup> Currently, four families occupy the administrative offices located on the ground floor, while two families occupy the classrooms on the first floor.

eviction is rarely executed. On the contrary, various regional laws granting amnesty to squatters have been passed over the years, which have envisaged legalization for occupations which took place before the amnesty's approval: for example, the 2013 amnesty allowed for the legalization of occupations which occurred before 31 December 2010. This is one of the reasons why squatters report themselves to the police: in this way, they certify the date of beginning of their occupation, hoping that, in the case of a future amnesty, their status will be legalized – and being sure that, in any case, this self-reporting will not imply any negative consequence, considering the rarity of evictions and the high level of tolerance of local authorities in Naples. Contrary to public flats, according to the regional law the occupation of space not formally designed for residential purposes cannot be legalized. However, the occupants of such spaces are automatically included in the waiting lists for public flats.

### **A SQUATTERS' CAMEO: TWO EXEMPLARY STORIES**

Two stories among those encountered during our field research are exemplary: they describe the diversity (e.g. of squatters and their way of accessing a flat) and similarities (e.g. in terms of hope of legalization and methods of recovering the dwelling unit) of squatting practices in non-residential spaces of Rione de Gasperi.

*The story of Pasquale* (Pasquale, Interview, 15 January 2018). Pasquale is a little over fifty years old, and originates from Portici, a town close to Naples. As a teenager, Pasquale left school to help his father, who sold soft drinks from a roadside kiosk. But Pasquale's ongoing heroin addiction was too costly for the little money he earned from the family kiosk. This gradually shifted him toward organized crime in the De Gasperi neighborhood (i.e. the Sarno clan), on behalf of which he began pushing drugs. During the first period he worked for the clan, Pasquale did not bother to find a dwelling, although he earned quite well. His car was his home. After a while, he was offered accommodation by the Sarno clan in one of the offices on the ground floor of the nursery school, which in those years was already being occupied by some families for residential purposes. Today, he still lives there.



Figure 12 - The home of Pasquale (bedroom). Source: Author.

His flat consists of two rooms, of around 40 sq.m. in total. The first room at the entrance is used as both a kitchen and a garage for his scooter. The second room serves as a bedroom, and hosts a bathroom which Pasquale has built within this space. The furniture is basic. In the kitchen there is a table with two seats facing the stove and the cupboard that contains the bare minimum (few plates and some cooking utensils) (fig. 3). In the bedroom, a sofa is placed in front of a cabinet, which has a cathode ray tube TV on top of it. A small electric heater, which is used to heat the entire apartment during winter, is placed at the side of the bed, whose headboard is attached to an old wooden closet (fig. 4). The walls are covered by mould due to water infiltration, and because the bathroom has no ceiling nor a window with access to the external part of the apartment (the bathroom is simply separated by two thin walls from the rest of the bedroom) (fig. 5). Pasquale has constantly engaged in maintenance of the flat and tried to improve the living conditions by investing time and energy. Even if he is aware of living in a former school in terrible hygienic conditions, he is very much attached to this place that he calls home<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> See Paper 3 for an analysis in detail of meanings of ‘home’ in the housing histories of inhabitants of the De Gasperi neighborhood.



Figure 13 - The home of Pasquale (bathroom). Source: Author.

Some years ago, Pasquale decided to initiate the procedure of legalizing his occupation by following the usual bureaucratic procedure, which starts with self-reporting to the police. However, he did not succeed in regularizing his status, because inhabitants of non-residential buildings were excluded from the 2000 amnesty. Today, Pasquale has abandoned any idea of legalizing his occupation, even considering the fact that this will not bring him any concrete and immediate advantage. In fact, currently he has no rent to pay, has illegally tapped water from the public pipes and electricity from the line to the nearby church. He is aware of living in an illegal situation, but has no alternative and he is sure that he will never be evicted.

*The story of Flora and Davide* (Flora and Davide, Interview, 16 February 2018).<sup>33</sup> Flora arrived at the De Gasperi neighbourhood in 2017, with her husband and two children of eight and thirteen years. She is a neighbour of Pasquale. She lives in what was the school principal's office. Flora and her husband Davide are both around 30 years old. Neither of

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<sup>33</sup> The photographs of Flora and Davide's flat do not appear in the text at their request.

them originates from Rione De Gasperi: Flora originates from a nearby neighbourhood, while Davide used to live in the city centre. Flora graduated from high school, but she has never worked. Davide abandoned education before completing middle school and for some years he lived by expedients and minor swindles. Today he works as a bricklayer for a local construction company.

Flora and Davide got married when they were 18 years old. Before to arrive in the De Gasperi district, they lived in an area on the fringes of the neighbourhood where they occupied an empty private property, which, however, they soon had to abandon due to problems with neighbours. It was during that period that Davide found a job as a bricklayer thanks to an acquaintance – the father of a boy who played soccer with his son. It was the same person who advised him to move into the nursery school in the De Gasperi neighbourhood.

Currently, there are two (illegal) market options for accessing an occupied space in the De Gasperi district. The first is paying rent to the squatter who ‘owns’ the place; the second is ‘buying’ the place. Davide preferred buying in order to avoid the burden of a monthly rent. Even without telling us the exact cost of the apartment, Davide claims he paid too much, considering both the fact that it is an illegal space and the terrible condition in which he found the apartment. Nevertheless, this was the best alternative he had. In fact, the flat is spacious: it consists of an entrance hall, which functions as a kitchen and living room, and a large bedroom where the whole family sleeps. There is even a terrace, which Flora and Davide use for various purposes (laundry, storage and relaxation). As in the case of Pasquale, Davide also insists on the time and energy he spent on transforming the flat according to the family’s needs (e.g. renovating the furniture, illegally connecting to the electricity grid and the water pipelines). After only one year from their arrival, Flora and Davide feel very much at home, because the place is convenient and suited to their needs. Regardless of their state of illegality, they perceive themselves as the licit owners of the dwelling.

Although Flora and Davide have reported their presence to the police, they cannot currently be included in any amnesty. However, their hope is that they will be regularized in some way. It is worth stressing that they are on the waiting list for a public flat; however, considering the very long waiting time, they think that they are more likely to have their current status legalized than receive a public dwelling unit from public authorities.

## DISCUSSION. CONCEPTUALISING INDIVIDUALISTIC SQUATTING AND ITS OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

### THE CONSTITUTIVE FEATURES OF INDIVIDUALISTIC SQUATTING

The case of the De Gasperi neighbourhood provides an interesting example of squatting, different from most of the politically-driven examples analysed by the international literature on urban occupations. This is a case of what we can define as ‘individualistic squatting’: the occupation has a purely individualist goal, that is providing accommodation to the squatters, and it is done outside any collectively promoted practice by social, counter-cultural or political movements. Despite this individualistic character, the occupation does not always take place in a purely individual way: in some cases, in fact, it mobilizes and succeeds thanks to a small network of people (e.g. family members, neighbours and friends). The main distinctive features of individualistic squatting are analysed in this section, using the variables related to urban squatting as a point of reference. This allows to conduct comparative reflection on the factors that make different forms of squatting (that is political squatting and individualistic squatting) possible (see next section).

i) *Housing needs*. The squatting initiatives of Rione De Gasperi are – in a similar way, but even more clearly than political squatting – the direct results of housing needs unfulfilled by both the private market and the public authorities. In fact, the cost of renting an apartment in Naples, even if less than in Italian other cities<sup>34</sup>, is still too high for low-wage families like those residing in Rione De Gasperi<sup>35</sup>. At the same time, although all the families in occupation that we interviewed met the economic requirements that gave them the right to access public housing, there were no public flats available to be assigned to them. It is interesting to note that squatting offers economic advantages besides not paying rent: the lack of other costs related to housing, such as electricity and water bills, since these services are obtained through pirate connections to the public grid.

ii) *Empty buildings*. In similar manner to political squatting, also in the case that we analysed the availability of empty buildings is a key factor in triggering the occupation. In this regard, there are two points to be stressed. The first is that the original function of the building is not a significant factor for the occupants – as in many cases of political squatting: the space occupied is subsequently transformed according to the squatters’ needs. The second is that not only the availability of *empty* buildings provides an opportunity for squatting, but, more

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<sup>34</sup> The price to rent (€/m<sup>2</sup>) is 66,5 per year on average in the city of Naples; while it is 124,4 in Rome, 130,7 in Milan, 115 in Florence, 98 in Bologna, 87,2 in Turin, 85,6 in Genoa and 56,7 in Palermo (Agenzia delle Entrate, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> An apartment for three people in Naples costs 460 euros per month on average, while it costs around 230 euros on average in Ponticelli (Agenzia delle Entrate, 2017).

generally, also the availability of spaces where one can live informally. Consider the case of Flora and Davide: they did not occupy an empty space; they just replaced another family in a building with a long history of occupation. Even occupied buildings have cycles of life and evolution similar to traditional residential buildings, in which families come and go following acts of buying and selling.

iii) *Condition of buildings*. The condition of a building seems not to be a significant variable in the case of individualistic squatting. Obviously, as in all cases of squatting, occupation involves buildings with a minimum level of structural integrity and functionality (in short, they should not be in ruins). In the case considered here, the building – a nursery school – was not ready to be inhabited (e.g. it lacked connections to electricity and water); however, this did not discourage the occupants, who invested significant time, energy and resources in converting the school and making it suitable for living comfortably.

iv) *Regeneration projects*. Like in other contexts where political squatting arose, also Rione De Gasperi is subject to a project of urban renovation, which envisages the complete demolition of the neighbourhood and the relocation of the majority of residents. Many of them will lose their homes. In fact, relocation to new housing units is guaranteed only to legitimate occupants (including those who have legalized their status); on the contrary, all non-regular occupants – including those who have occupied non-residential public buildings – are excluded from the relocation process (they should be housed in temporary shelters, while waiting for a definitive solution, even if it is not clear in what this will consist) (Official of the Department for Public Housing in Naples, personal communication, 8 November 2017). However, there is no causal relation between the renewal project and squatting in the neighbourhood: not only did the practice of squatting begin before the renewal project, but it seems not to have been affected by the plan. This may be the result of the fact that, as in the case of Flora and Davide, many occupants are confident that the regeneration plan will never be implemented (the facts are proving them right: the project was approved in 1997 but is still in its initial stages).

V) *Effectiveness of repression*. According to the law, public authorities in Italy must ensure that illegally occupied public (and private) buildings are promptly cleared. However, evictions from public apartments are quite rare (in Italy in general, and in Naples in particular). This is the case of Rione De Gasperi as well: although it has been characterized by squatting for decades, there have been only two attempts at eviction in the early 2000s, which failed, however. Although the real risk of eviction is very low, squatters have adopted strategies to defend their occupation and enhance their security of tenure. The first (and foremost) consists in attempts to legalize the occupation: the process of regularization is initiated by (or is the objective of) any squatter in the De Gasperi neighbourhood (this refers also to people who are not legally entitled to regularization, like Pasquale). The second is seeking a dialogical, non-conflictual and sympathetic relationship with local authorities. This materializes through the act of self-reporting to the police, which serves also to make local authorities aware of the conditions of extreme deprivation that led to squatting. The intention is to build personal relations and dialogue with public officials, in order to mitigate repression.

It is interesting that not only are public authorities not a deterrent to occupation (e.g. because evictions are almost never executed), but they also provide some (direct and indirect) incentives to squatting – that is, urban informality is *produced*, directly or indirectly, by formal institutions (Chiodelli and Tzfadia, 2016). This is primarily linked to the lack of effective housing policies (as epitomized by the very long waiting lists for public housing in Italy), which contribute greatly to the spread of occupations. A second indirect incentive by public institutions for squatting is the string of amnesties on illegal occupations of public flats: in a way similar to other amnesties in Italy (e.g. amnesties on illegal buildings: see Chiodelli, 2018 and Zanfi, 2013), public buildings are often occupied not only because squatters are sure that they will not face any penalty or eviction, but also because they hope that, sooner or later, a further amnesty will legalise their occupation. In the case of non-residential public buildings, any possibility of amnesty is currently excluded by law; however, the concept of regularization is so embedded in Italian society that, even in this case, the possibility of future legalization through a new amnesty plays a role, as demonstrated by Pasquale and Flora, who are both certain that, sooner or later, they will be able to regularize their status.

vi) *Squatters' agency*. As in the case of political occupations, also for individualistic squatting a strong motivation is necessary on the part of squatters. However, apart from this similarity, there are substantial differences between these two types of squatting in terms of occupants' agency. Individualistic squatting is not based on a collective agency that involves a large number of people forming a structured network. Forms of collective agency in the occupation of public flats were in place in the past in the neighbourhood, when the Camorra clan managed the occupation and allocation of public housing units in the area. In this latter case, the squatters were not direct actors of the occupation process, but mere recipients of a space, which was occupied and allocated by members of the Camorra clan (this is the case of Pasquale). As we have mentioned in Paper 1, organized crime played a central role within the informal occupation of public housing units between the 1980s and 2000s. After the disappearance of the Camorra clan, its centralized and top-down system of allocation was replaced by a myriad of individual exchanges, based on free market mechanisms (even if an illegal market; on this issue, see Beckert and Dewey, 2017), as in the case of Flora and Davide. This system of individual exchanges operates within the framework of specific rules and constraints set by the local context. Among these is the existence of personal relations between the squatter and some inhabitants of the neighbourhood. In fact, it is within such close-knit networks that information and suggestions regarding the availability of empty flats, the procedure of legalisation and relation with the local authorities circulate<sup>36</sup>. Furthermore, individualistic squatters in the De Gasperi neighbourhood commonly camouflage themselves with facades of formality, as we have mentioned before with regard to the amnesty (and we have argued in the first paper 1). Unlike politically-oriented squatting, individualistic squatters complied with registration law (reporting their presence to the police) in order to avoid criminal prosecution. Individualistic squatters reify their agency through a process of 'self-institutionalization'; i.e. attempting to legalize the

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<sup>36</sup> Something similar happens in political squatting, which also presupposes the building of trust relations with the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in which the occupied buildings are located (Di Felicianantonio, 2017; López, 2013).

occupation, individualistic squatters channel themselves into a stable pattern based on formalized rules and laws. Such process also concerns politically oriented squatting (Pruijt, 2003), but with a relevant difference. We can define the institutionalization of political squatting as a ‘political-goals led institutionalization’ (López, 2014; Pruijt, 2003). Political squatting bases on wider political and cultural campaigns (e.g. housing shortages, vacancies and speculation) achieving a high level of legitimacy. In other words, the institutionalization can be seen as both outcome and mean within power dynamics with authorities. On the one hand, institutionalization reflects institutions’ recognition of the social relevance of urban squatting — as we have argued with reference to the case of legitimated squatted social centres in Naples. On the other hand, institutionalization means a widespread public support to squatting that might make political squatters stronger within the political bargaining with authorities about broader political issues related to housing. By contrast, we can define the institutionalization of individualistic squatting as a ‘self-interested institutionalization’. Individualistic squatters’ self-institutionalization does not concern wider political meanings. Rather, institutionalization of individualistic squatting might reflect squatters’ weak political bargaining power. Basic housing needs prompt squatters to search for solutions that entail security. Self-reporting to the police —in order to achieve amnesty in the future— constitutes a more efficient strategy from a legal point of view than public campaigns and protests as in the case of political squatting. Such strategy bases on individualistic agency highlighting a relevant feature of individualistic squatting: the absence of squatters strictly political identity, as we will argue.

vii) *Connections to social movements*. Individualist squatting has no direct political nature. It is possible to argue that it has an indirect political nature. It would be a sort of ‘anarchic lawmaker’, which denounces the unequal distribution of spaces and resources in the city, and reveals the ineffectiveness of some public policies (Mudu & Aureli, 2016; Pruijt, 2013). It is not *ab initio* connected to any social movement (e.g. movements for the right to housing); nor does it develop in relation with organizations like tenants’ unions. In short, there is no form of political organization in the neighbourhood. On the contrary, squatting is an individual way to satisfy a basic need; it takes form within a collective institution like the family or within weak solidarity networks on the neighbourhood scale, which can provide support in the form of information on the availability of flats or procedures to follow after occupation. Normally, individualistic squatters in the De Gasperi neighbourhood do not develop a ‘squatter identity’ (Grashoff, 2018). There is no squatting as protest, nor are there public campaigns, nor banners or slogans on facades. Individualistic squatters are not organized by groups nor defended in public —in sharp contrast with politically oriented urban squatting that claims the ‘right to inhabit’ as a universal right. By contrast, we can stress the relevance of a ‘*legalized dweller* identity’; in other words, the practice of individualistic squatting that we have investigated highlights the De Gasperi neighbourhood squatters’ desire to be recognized as legitimate dwellers of the house where they live (see Paper 3 as well).

## **POLITICAL SQUATTING AND INDIVIDUALISTIC SQUATTING**

In the light of the previous analysis on factors that make individualistic occupation possible, we can state that individualistic squatting is a subset of the broader family of squatting in Western countries, of which political squatting represents the best known and most frequently investigated type. In fact, individualistic squatting shares with political squatting some features related to its opportunity structure: for instance, its origin in housing needs unsatisfied by both private market and public authorities, the requisite of available empty buildings, the central role of squatters' agency, the necessity of a certain degree of tolerance by public institutions in order to survive. That said, it is a very peculiar case: its most evident difference vis-à-vis political squatting relates to the absence of any political or counter-cultural motivation and of any connection with organized groups (such as social movements for the right to housing or tenants' unions) and their political campaigns. As a consequence, it pursues purely individualistic goals related to basic needs (e.g. accessing a dwelling unit) and it takes place in 'unstructured' forms which exploit the (low) relational capital of squatters (e.g. small family or neighbour networks – to which organized crime must be added with reference to the past). As we have stressed in Paper 1, small illegal market transactions (e.g. public flats are illegally rented, sold and bought) are a constitutive feature of this kind of squatting, which occurs in a context deeply imbued with informal arrangements related to different aspects of everyday life (e.g. housing, job market, services). Against this backdrop, individualistic squatting can be seen as a constitutive element of the Southern European welfare regimes sketched by Allen et al. (2004), which, according to the authors, is characterized, among other features, by the central role of self-provision and self-promotion in the housing sector, alongside the role of the state and of the (formal) market. Together with the construction of illegal housing units (Chiodelli, 2018), the squatting of public flats is the second main core of informal access to housing in Italy. However, while the first is undertaken mainly by the middle-class which act for reasons of personal advantage (e.g. accessing something of better quality than they would otherwise be able to afford) (ibid.), individualistic squatting of public flats is practiced by poor and marginalized people who are induced to occupy, directly and explicitly, also by the ineffectiveness of Italian public policies on housing. Many squatters, in fact, have the right to access a public flat, but they have been waiting for years for the allocation of a public dwelling unit, so that in the meantime they must resort, like it or not, to occupations.

## CONCLUSIONS. THE VARIETY OF URBAN SQUATTING

Squatting is a significant urban phenomenon which characterizes many Western cities. It has often been read as a collective practice promoted by progressive groups and social movements aimed at building alternative lifestyles or generating political struggles. This is what has been termed ‘political squatting’. However, if by squatting we mean the fact of living in (or using) a building without the consent of the owner for a long period of time regardless of its political motivation, then other practices fall within this definition. Among them is the (non-political) occupation of public buildings in Italy.

In Italy, the occupation of public flats is a widespread, complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Belotti, 2018). One of its variants is represented by the practice investigated in this paper, which we termed ‘individualistic squatting’. Public buildings of the De Gasperi neighbourhood (not only residential spaces, but also non-residential spaces like the nursery school) have been occupied for residential purposes, by families or individuals affected by poverty, marginality and housing deprivation. In many cases, these families have the right to access public housing, but cannot afford to rent a private home while waiting to access a public flat. This kind of squatting happens outside any political collective framework: it is an individualistic practice, which takes place within neighbourhood or family networks. It is accordingly clear that this form of squatting is radically different from political squatting. However, it shares some similarities with the latter, as evidenced in relation to the factors that make squatting possible (e.g. it requires a significant agency on the part of squatters and it is greatly influenced by the authority’s attitude toward repression).

Political squatting and individualistic squatting are, therefore, two variants of the same phenomenon. Due to its public visibility and its cultural and political significance, the former has always dominated academic research on squatting. By contrast, individualistic squatting has been rather neglected (and it is not clear if it characterizes Western countries other than Italy); nonetheless, it has huge social relevance, for instance due to its magnitude, which urges further investigation by researchers in the fields of urban and housing studies.

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## **PAPER 3**

# **Squatted public flat as home: material and immaterial dimensions of public housing squatters' pathways in Naples, Italy**

### **Abstract**

In Southern European housing models, 'individualistic squatting' can be depicted as a channel through which households and individuals access the asset of the house. Individualistic squatting is an expression meaning the act of occupying a building for residential purposes that takes place outside any political framework. Such kind of squatting has significant socio-economic value. In these housing models with strong socio-economic stratification, low-income people suffer high levels of housing deprivation. Informal occupation of public housing units thus serves as a means for marginalised groups to meet their need for shelter. However, more abstract, immaterial meanings also shape low-income inhabitants' pathways into squatting. A search for a house becomes a search for a home that does not end when an empty space to squat is found. Individualistic squatting aims to satisfy needs across numerous immaterial dimensions—psychological (control over an important part of one's life), emotional (a need for social aggregation) and affective (familial warmth). Immaterial meanings characterise the housing histories of the squatters in the De Gasperi district studied in this research. Within the housing pathways framework, this analysis of the various dimensions of squatting traces it as a nonlinear journey during which households chose housing solutions that meet their material and immaterial needs within their given contextual circumstances. A biographic approach of investigation has been employed in order to analyse squatters' housing history from leaving their parents' houses through 2018. This method of research conducts us to depict individualistic squatting as the result of an embedded decision-making process that takes place in moments of households' life cycles.

Keywords: squatting, biographic approach, housing pathways, home.



## INTRODUCTION. INDIVIDUALISTIC SQUATTING AS A STAGE OF HOUSING PATHWAY

In the light of previous analysis, we can argue that individualistic squatting of public housing is an informal mechanism of public flats provision within the housing models in Southern Europe, including Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal —see Papers 1 and 2 (Belotti, 2018; Allen, Barlow, Leal, Maloutas & Padovani, 2004). The academic literature has underlined the economic relevance of individualistic squatting as it can be conceived of as a channel through which individuals, households and groups meet their need for shelter. People who do not secure housing solutions within the formal housing market (both private and public) adopt informal practices to satisfy their housing needs related to price, physical space, quality and location (Grashoff, 2018).

The academic debate has also considered the broader and more abstract meanings of informal housing arrangements, or the feelings and emotions that shape the decision-making processes that prompt people to inhabit informally their dwellings (Skobba, 2016; Natalier & Johnson, 2012). This paper is aimed at shedding light on this aspect of individualistic squatting, highlighting the phenomenon as a multidimensional decision-making process. Individualistic squatting is a matter of a lack of physical shelter, but squatters' search for dwellings does not end at the first available empty space. The search for a house can also be depicted as a search for a home. Individualistic squatting involves numerous dimensions—psychological (control over an important part of one's life), emotional (a need for social aggregation) and affective (familial warmth).

Following this aim, individualistic squatting is analysed using the housing pathways framework, which enables investigating this phenomenon as an embedded, complex decision-making process that takes place in moments of households' life cycles. Drawing on a social constructionist approach, the housing pathways analytical framework accounts for structure (the contextual variables that define pathways), agency (individuals' movement along pathways according to their desires and means) and the interactions of these two factors (Wiesel, 2014; Clapham, 2005; 2002). In this perspective, housing pathways can be conceived of as the housing choices and moves that characterise households' residential histories. Residential mobility involves decisions related to the material features of housing, such as tenure, costs and physical characteristics, but the housing pathways framework also includes the particular, abstract meanings people relate to the experience of a dwelling as a *home*. This immaterial dimension also shapes housing choices (Clapham, Mackie, Orford, Thomas & Buckley, 2014). In short, this theoretical strand suggests a complex understanding of the housing experience, defining it as a nonlinear journey during which households try to satisfy their material and immaterial needs related to housing within their given contextual

circumstances (Coulter, Ham & Findlay, 2016; De Decker & Segers, 2014; Fitzpatrick, Bramley & Johnsen, 2013; Clapham, 2005).

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the international debate on squatting, focusing on individualistic occupation of public flats as a stage in a non-linear, sentimental journey through case studies from the De Gasperi neighbourhood. The De Gasperi district presents an interesting case study for this investigation as its large, well-established population of individualistic squatters has followed a wide range of housing pathways into informal occupation of public flats. Through observing the features of that sentimental journey This study provides hints about the broader meaning of ‘home’ at the ‘margins of the city’. As Lancione (2019) stresses, by margins we don’t mean a space characterised by determined socio-economic conditions, but a tension emerging from historically unbalanced power relations. That tension refers to the bordering processes through which the margins become actualized. So the margins explored in this paper are not the squatted public houses in the De Gasperi neighbourhood per se, or the squatters themselves, but the historical, socio-economic and cultural processes through which pathways into individualistic squatting come to the fore. At this aim, in this article observation of squatting as a means to access housing within a given context is combined with analysis of the emotional features that influence squatting choices.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section provides an overview of the analytical contributions from the housing pathway framework, highlighting the multidimensional conceptualisation of housing. The housing welfare model in Naples and Italy is then introduced. Next, the case study of De Gasperi public housing is presented, underlining two main features of public housing management. The following section presents an analysis of three households’ housing pathways into individualistic squatting of public flats. The next section discusses the case studies in light of the multidimensional features of individualistic squatting, while the last section gives the conclusions.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK. THE MULTIFACETED DIMENSIONS OF HOUSING PATHWAYS**

### **HOUSING CHOICES: COMPLEX PLOT OF CONSTRAINS AND MEANS**

Residential moves can be conceptualised as the results of embedded decisions. Households base their housing-related choices on their needs, preferences and aspirations not fulfilled in their current dwellings and neighbourhoods (Warner & Sharp, 2016; Coulter & Van Ham, 2013). Housing disequilibrium arises during transition phases or life events. Significant changes within family units can lead to changes in housing demands, prompting households to find alternative housing solutions and perhaps relocate to reduce this disequilibrium (Bricocoli, Gnan & Marani, 2018; Basolo & Yerena, 2017; Meeus & De Decker, 2015; Clapham, 2005). Transition moments often originate from endogenous life events related to the demographic and socio-economic conditions of household members. Dwellings can be rendered inadequate to satisfy new housing needs by cohabiting partnerships, full-time employment, job displacement, retirement, entry into parenthood, end of a study period and the exit of members of the family unit (e.g. death or children leaving the family; Lersch & Dewilde, 2015; Meeus & De Decker, 2015; Skobba & Goetz, 2013; Clapham, 2005)<sup>37</sup>.

The academic literature aimed at investigating the housing field has conceived of housing pathways as the complex sets of micro (households' needs and preferences) and macro (configuration of the housing welfare model) variables that influence family units' housing choices during transition phases (Clapham et al., 2014; Clark, 2013; Kley, 2010; Rossi, 1980). Families long seek a better match between their space requirements and the space they occupy, but they must deal with various factors in the housing sector that influence their decisions. This plot of desires and constraints does not guarantee that housing pathways move linearly towards homeownership. Instead, it increases the likelihood of chaotic pathways characterised by high levels of uncertainty and changes in housing tenure status. The literature has highlighted that volatile (unstable) pathways characterise the housing experiences of weaker socio-economic groups, particularly young people, low-income households, migrants and single women (Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015; Phinney, 2013; Murdie, 2008). Scholars have reported evidence that informal housing solutions (e.g. homelessness, subletting rooms and doubling up with relatives and friends) are alternatives to which weaker groups resort to meet their immediate housing need (Skobba & Goetz, 2013). The literature has identified two main kinds of variables that influence households' (and individuals') residential choices (Basolo & Yerena, 2017; Clapham et al., 2014).

*Macro-contextual variables.* When life events generate housing disequilibrium, households search alternative housing solutions. Key contextual and structural drivers shape the range

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<sup>37</sup> Some scholars have argued that transition moments can originate from exogenous events directly related not to household members' conditions but to external factors, such as urban renewal projects, extraordinary building maintenance works and evictions (Bricocoli, Gnan & Marani, 2018; Clark, 2012).

of the best housing solutions households can access (Olagnero, 2008; Clapham, 2002). The housing model often has been viewed as the main factor setting the broader context within which households make housing choices (Filandri & Bertolini, 2016; Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015; Clapham et al., 2014). Differences in the level of state support, role of the market and extent to which the family is a key provider of welfare are defining characteristics of housing models (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

The configuration of the housing model clearly affects the availability and affordability of housing options (Arundel & Ronald, 2016). For instance, in Southern European housing models, tenure status is one of the most important dimensions of housing inequality. In the urban contexts of Mediterranean Europe, strong socio-economic stratification goes hand in hand with housing tenure. Weaker socio-economic groups are excluded from homeownership, and the rental sector serve as the housing solution for those who cannot afford to own dwellings. The rigidity of the private housing market closes off low-income groups from buying their own homes. The supply of public housing estates is inadequate to satisfy demand for low-cost housing, so the extended family becomes a relevant actor in providing shelter for household members (Belotti, 2018; Arbaci, 2007). Moreover, the gap between owners and non-owners furthers the uneven distribution of housing affordability. Home ownership guarantees access to higher levels of housing affordability, while housing distress affects largely renting families (Filandri & Olagnero, 2014).

*Micro-subjective variables.* In addition to analysing variables related to households' characteristics, the literature has stressed that access to housing is influenced by class position or habitus (Stillerman, 2017; Bourdieu, 2005). Habitus refers to heterogeneous forms of capital deployed in a range of strategies and tactics to search for the best housing solutions. Most studies on the relationship between housing and class have focused on the economic dimensions of class (e.g. income and access to mortgage loans). Some scholars, however, have also stressed the importance of other dimensions (Van Kempen & Özüekren, 1998). Among these, cognitive and social capital have often been considered to be crucial factors in gaining advantages during transition moments. Boterman (2012, p. 324) argued that 'middle classes do not only have relatively more economic capital, but may also have better access to information, and have a broader and more "useful" social network'. Scholars have also underlined the importance of social capital for weaker socio-economic groups, such as the homeless. De Decker and Sergers (2014) highlighted that social networks can function as safety nets providing provisional shelter, bringing individuals into contact with welfare services and assisting the search for a dwelling. Social capital thus can be conceived of as the resources persons mobilise to transform their contingent relationships into useful relationships (Lévesque & White, 1999).

According to the literature, housing pathways influence households' capability to take housing-related decisions based on the available resources and the contextual conditions when housing dissatisfaction arises. In this perspective, housing histories cannot be conceived of as linear pathways along which households move towards incrementally better solutions. Instead, housing choices are reasonable decisions that lead households towards the best achievable living domestic arrangements in light of the peculiar interplay between their

contextual conditions and available resources. The housing pathways framework thus highlights the efforts households make to gain the best shelter achievable in terms of tenure and space requirements.

### **IMMATERIAL DIMENSION OF HOUSING CHOICES: MEANING OF HOME**

The decision-making process related to housing solutions is complex. It not only results from reasonable evaluation of households' means and contextual constraints, but immaterial and more abstract features also motivate family units' decisions on housing moves and solutions (Skobba, 2016; Natalier & Johnson, 2012). These features consist of the feelings, sensations and emotional desires beyond the physical need for shelter that contribute to housing decisions. In this perspective, it can be argued that simply having one's own physical refuge might be neither necessary nor sufficient to enable the socio-psychological experience of home (Ruonavaara, 2012). For instance, extended (and welcome) stays with friends can provide positive housing experiences that involve neither residential stability nor ownership or renting of property (Skobba, 2016; Tomas & Dittmar, 1995).

Home, therefore, is understood as simultaneously a socio-spatial unit and a psycho-spatial unit. In other words, home can be conceived of as an emotional locale wherein the peculiar relationships (re)produced by those living together generate emotive connotations. The emotions of housing experiences contribute to households' housing satisfaction and play a central role in the decision-making processes related to residential moves (Coulter et al., 2016; Reinders & Van Der Land, 2008; Mulder, 2007; Easthope, 2004). As Mallet (2004, p. 69) argued, the search for the ideal home 'can be a sentimental and a nostalgic journey', during which households try to satisfy immaterial desires within their constraining circumstances. The literature has identified specific, important immaterial features favouring the experience of home (e.g. Soaita, 2015; Parsell, 2012; Mallet, 2004). Broadly speaking, three factors characterise the conceptualisation of home as an experience beyond the physical structure.

*Home as a refuge.* Home is depicted as a place of comfort, where people can retreat and relax from everyday-life activities, such as work and studying. This understanding of home assumes that home is a place where people exercise control over their space and achieve comfort and security through engaging in social and intimate relationships (Parsell, 2016; Clapham, 2010). This conceptualisation stresses a twofold idea of home underlining the importance of relationships that people create with both the physical space in which they live and the significant others with whom they live. On one hand, the exercise of control through personalisation of the home increases households' perceptions of home. Remodelling layouts and demolishing walls to merge the kitchen, hallway and living room can be conceived as practices through which people exercise control over their domestic space (Soaita, 2015; Clapham, 2010). On the other hand, the feeling of comfort is based on the quality of the relationships that link people regardless of the physical location of the dwelling where they take place (Coulter et al., 2016). For instance, Skobba (2016) found that some women escape

abusive relationships by leaving their dwelling and moving near friends to feel that they live in a comfortable, secure place. Such a broad conceptualisation of control over the domestic space is important to understand what it means to be at home as controlling the home space entails the ability to take some control of one's life (Parsell, 2010).

*Home as a space of social aggregation.* Home as an emotional experience of living has often been associated with the understanding of home as an aggregation space. As mentioned, the relationships that link household members within a dwelling produce feelings of comfort (or discomfort) and security (or insecurity). These relationships foster a sense of community, fulfilling individuals' basic need for social aggregation (Manzo, 2014). Home is conceptualised as being with others (Mallett, 2004); it is where one is being continually born within that womb called other people, in their being *not* oneself. In this perspective, the home does not necessarily overlap with the dwelling but goes beyond the physical structure of housing to the environment within which individuals and households build their everyday relationships with others (Cellini & Saracino, 2016). These relationships can take the form of mutual support networks among neighbours. Visiting each other's homes, chatting over coffee, giving car rides, running errands for one another, taking neighbours to doctor's appointments, and sharing food are community practices through which households and their individual members feed their sense of home (Manzo, 2014). Similarly, Cellino and Saracino (2013; 2016) highlighted the importance of neighbourly relationships and practices in building a feeling of affectivity through which people experience being part of a community broader than their own families (Wilkinson, 2014).

*Home as a space of memory.* Focusing on affective bonds between people and their houses, some scholars have stressed the importance of memory in maintaining a sense of home (Meah, 2016; Reinders & Van Der Land, 2008; Mallett, 2004). From this perspective, home has been conceived as 'a private museum', a space where objects of personal, artistic and cultural interest are stored and displayed to narrate untold stories of lives being lived, those lived and those imagined (now and in the future) within them (Meah, 2016, p. 50). Scholars investigating the home as a space of memory have described the sedimentation of significances that characterise the physical structure of dwellings (Meah & Jackson, 2016; Soaita, 2015; Pollack, 2011). As private space of memory, dwellings assume twofold meanings. On one hand, the items furnishing houses can evoke memories and emotional connections with individuals both alive and dead. On the other hand, the physical features and items in dwellings are incorporated in everyday usage in the present and potentially could create imagined memories in the future<sup>38</sup>.

Such an understanding of home highlights its complex nature. While usually understood as situated in space and time, home is made of more than its physical dimensions and the natural and built environment of its district or region (e.g. tenure status, structural characteristics,

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<sup>38</sup> Investigating the kitchen as a space of memory in the Yorkshire and Midlands areas of the United Kingdom, Meah and Jackson (2016) noticed that in some cases, the kitchen walls served as height charts for parents to mark children's growth. These wall bore the marks of the children's growth, ensuring that memories of this activity would remain.

location and quality of the space). Homes can be conceived as places that hold considerable social, psychological and emotive meanings for individuals, households and groups.

## THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRATIFICATION OF HOUSING

### HOMEOWNERSHIP-BASED HOUSING MODEL. THE NATIONAL-LEVEL CONTEXT

The Italian housing welfare system can be described as a homeownership-based model (Baldini & Poggio, 2014). In 2016, almost 80.3% of all households (25.3 million families) owned the dwelling where they lived, an increase of 30% from 1971. The share of renting households decreased from 44.2% in 1971 to 19.7% in 2016<sup>39</sup>.

Concerning private housing market, the literature has stressed two particular features of strong socio-economic stratification in the Italian housing model. First, the private housing market is rigid. Accessing homeownership is especially complicated for low-income households (Fregolent, Gibin & Torri, 2017; Baldini, 2010; Poggio, 2009). Research dividing the Italian population into income quintiles has found that the share of renting households within the richest quintile group decreased from 40% in 1970 to 13% in 2016 as first-time homeownership increased (Torri, 2017). However, the rate of rental households in the poorest quintile has not changed in the past forty years, staying around 40% (ibid.). Second, in the rental housing sector, housing distress (housing costs, including rent, taxes, maintenance costs and utilities that exceed 30% of monthly household income) has increased over recent decades (Fregolent & Torri, 2017; Tosi, 2017; Agustoni, Alietti & Cucca, 2015). On average, monthly rent has risen from 15% of family income in the 1970s and 1980s to 30% in 2016<sup>40</sup>. In 1993, 16% of families in rental housing suffered housing deprivation, while in 2016, 41% did (2 million families) (EU Silc, 2016; Nomisma, 2016).

As we have argued in Paper 2, the public housing market presents two major inadequacies. First, public housing provision cannot satisfy demand for low-cost housing (Bricocoli, 2017). In 2014, public housing estates numbered around 770,000 flats, while around 700,000 families lived in rented dwellings, equivalent to 2.8% of all renting households (Federcasa, 2015). Since 1993, the available public housing units have decreased by 22% due to privatisation and reduction in long-term investment by national government in public housing production (Adorni, D'Amuri & Tabor, 2017). Almost 2 million people live in a state of housing distress and are searching for low-cost housing (Federcasa, 2016). Second, economic unsustainability has affected management of public housing estates. The main revenue source of the public housing sector is recipient households' rent, while taxes paid by managing authorities generate amounts equal to 30% of households' rents. Amid increasing economic uncertainty, lowering rent has been observed in the past decade. Moreover, due to sales of public flats over the past twenty years, the public sector has lost

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<sup>39</sup> See <http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?QueryId=18306>.

<sup>40</sup> See European Union Statistics on income and living conditions (EU Silc), 2016.

6.5 billion euros—which could have financed the building of 75,000 new flats (Federcasa, 2016).

Considering these trends, some scholars have highlighted two effects the Italian housing model has on the ways of living in public housing complexes. First, public flats offer permanent leases that can be extended for up to thirty years. For instance, 49% of all families live in public housing units for more than twenty years, and 28% of these remain in public flats for more than thirty years (Federcasa, 2015). As some scholars have argued, increasing economic uncertainty and the rigidity of the private housing market have made the public housing sector a more sustainable option for low-income households (Bricocoli et al., 2018). Second, squatting in public housing has risen, as we have stressed above (see Paper 1). In 2013, 6.4% of total public housing units was occupied by persons without any formal entitlement, an increase of 20.9% over the past fifteen years (Boreiko & Poggio, 2018; Nomisma, 2016).

Southern Italy, particularly larger cities such as Naples and Palermo, have higher rates of informal occupation of public housing units (see Paper 1). Squatting for residential purposes is a long-established, variegated phenomenon in Naples (Davoli, De Falco & Punziano, 2018). Politically oriented and collectively organised squatting for residential purposes—so-called urban squatting (see Paper 2)—resembles individualistic squatting in its aim to satisfy individual, self-interested housing needs. Naples, therefore, appears to be an interesting laboratory to deeply investigate squatting. The next section provides an overview of the city's housing model, focusing on the De Gasperi public housing complex due to its spatial concentration of individualistic squatters.

## HOUSING TENURE IN NAPLES

Naples is Italy's third-largest city, with a population of 375,045 households (equivalent to 966,144 inhabitants). Half the population lives in the peripheral belt surrounding the historic centre. Following national trends, Neapolitan housing tenure is dominated by homeownership. In 2011, 52.4% of all families owned their houses, up from 12.4% in 1951. The rate of renting families decreased from 82.3% in 1951 to 37.3% in 2011<sup>41</sup>.

A peculiar configuration characterises the city's housing tenure. The spatial distribution of districts' homeownership rate is inversely proportional to the spatial distribution of the rental rate (Fig.1). The highest homeownership rates are in central and southwestern districts of Naples, while the highest rental rates are in the north-eastern neighbourhoods. For instance, in the eastern Ponticelli district, 41.8% of homes are owner occupied, while 49.2% are occupied by renters, higher than the city average<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> See Istat (2018), [http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCIS\\_POPRES1](http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=DCIS_POPRES1).

<sup>42</sup> See Istat (2018), <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/104317>.

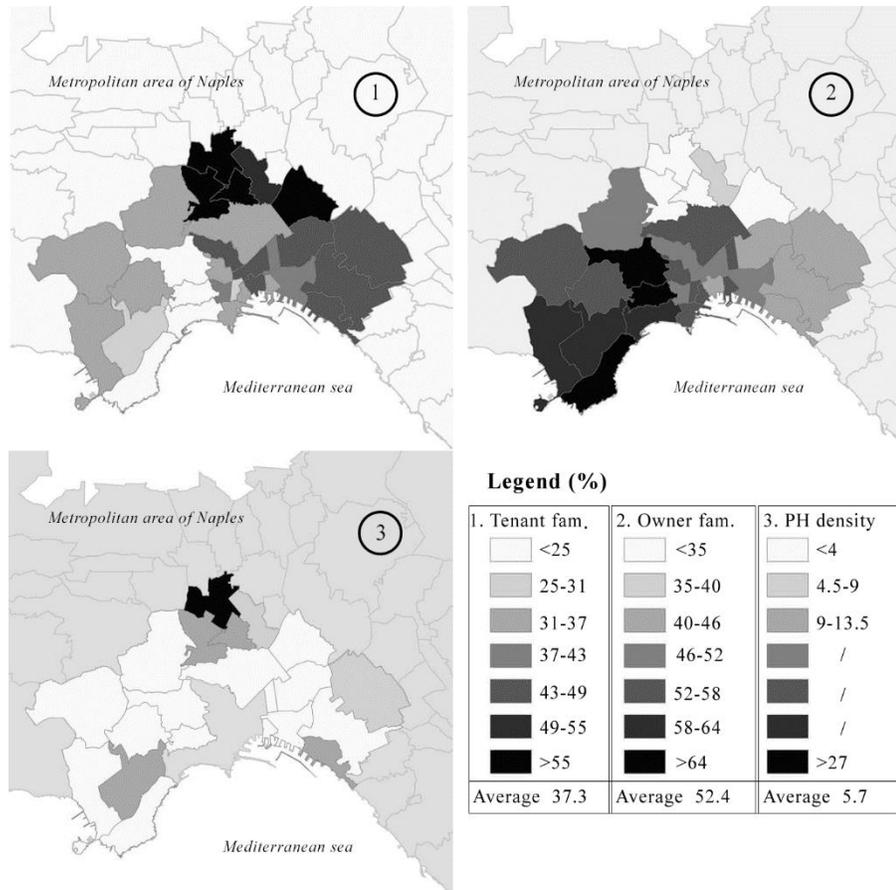


Figure 14. Spatial distribution of renting households (1), homeownership (2) and public housing density (3) (2011)<sup>43</sup>. Source: Author.

As scholars have shown, the north-eastern neighbourhoods of Naples have worst socio-economic indicators, with low income and education levels and high unemployment levels (Lanzi, 2016; Laino, 2007). Socio-economic distress goes hand in hand with urban decay, seen in crumbling public buildings and a lack of public transportation and social centralising factors (Pagano, 2012; Acierno, 2007). Considering the spatial distribution of districts'

<sup>43</sup> Public housing density refers to the ratio of the area of public housing buildings (m<sup>2</sup>) and the area (m<sup>2</sup>) of the neighborhood in which the buildings are located. For public housing buildings, see <http://www.comune.napoli.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/14438>. For neighborhood area, see <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/104317>.

Social Distress Index (SDI)<sup>44</sup>, north-eastern Naples has higher SDI values. For instance, the Ponticelli district has an SDI of 19.08, higher than the city average of 11.09 (Fig. 2).

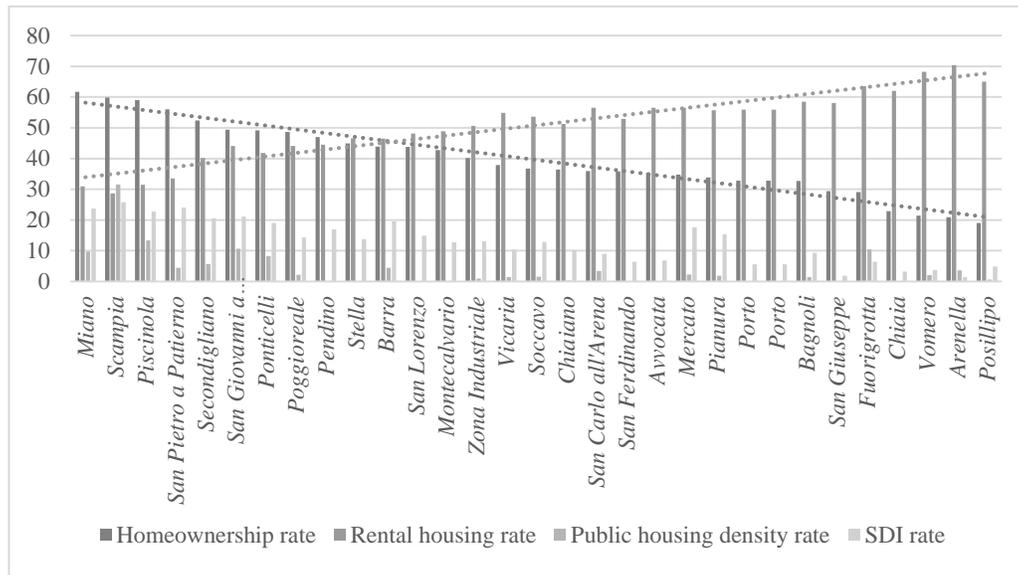


Figure 15. Homeownership, rental housing, public housing and SDI rates (2011). Source: Gabriella Punziano.

The spatial distribution of public housing density across districts follows the same trend as rental rates (Fig.1). The north-eastern districts have the city’s highest density of public housing settlements. In particular, Ponticelli has a rate of 8.3%, more than the city average of 5.7%. The local administration designated the north-eastern districts as the main sites for public housing settlements in Naples in response to housing needs related to two major events in the twentieth century that destroyed much housing: bombing during WWII and the earthquake of 1981 (Donolo, 2015; Felice, 2015; Pagano, 2012; De Seta, 1984). Planning authorities selected the north-eastern districts, especially Ponticelli, for building public housing as these rural areas had much available land (Pagano, 2012; Cerami, Cunsolo & Visalli, 1994). After WWII and during the 1990s, public housings complexes were constructed in the historic centres of the rural north-eastern districts. The urban structure changed, favouring the dominance of residential functions (Acierno, 2007; Laino, 2007).

Today, inadequacy of responding to local housing demand and high levels of informal occupation characterise the public housing sector in Naples. For instance, in 2018, public housing estates totalled around 25,000 units, while more than 16,000 families had been on

<sup>44</sup> The SDI is based on the difference between the national and the weighted average of the local unemployment and employment rate, youth population and education levels (Servizio Statistica, 2016).

the waiting list for public housing since 2011, and the local administration still allocated flats according to the 1995 ranking<sup>45</sup>. As mentioned, 12% (around 3,000 units) of total public flats were informally occupied (director of the Department for Public Housing in Naples, interview, 27 February 2018).

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<sup>45</sup> In Italy, the access to public housing occurs through rankings, which prioritize more disadvantaged units.

## **CASE STUDY. HOUSING PATHWAYS INTO SQUATTING IN THE DE GASPERI NEIGHBORHOOD**

### **THE DE GASPERI NEIGHBORHOOD**

De Gasperi is about a twenty minutes' walk from the rural historic centre of the Ponticelli district. Walls and railroad tracks surround the district, isolating it from the rest of the neighbourhood. Today, it consists of 656 public flats and has around 2,000 inhabitants<sup>46</sup>. It is one of the most problematic areas of the city, with high levels of unemployment and informal employment and low education levels.

Two main features characterise housing in the district. First is to the large population of early recipients of public flats. De Gasperi was built to give shelter to people evacuated from the city centre during WWII (Dal Piaz, 1985). Many of those who obtained flats in the 1950s still live in them, while others have moved within De Gasperi. Second, half of the district's inhabitants have no formal entitlement to their houses (Comune di Napoli, 2016). Public flats squatting can be conceived as an individualistic practice unrelated to any political or collective squatting movement. It constitutes a rooted practice in this district. During the 1980s and 1990s, a Camorra group managed the occupation and allocation of public housing units in De Gasperi and Ponticelli. Only during the first decade of the 2000s did the Camorra's hold over the area diminish and gradually fade away (Vallone, 2013). The practice of public flats occupation in the district takes two forms, described in detail in Papers 1 and 2. The next section traces the housing pathways in the housing histories of some inhabitants in order to describe the multidimensional nature of individualistic squatting.

### **RESEARCH METHOD: A BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH OF INVESTIGATION**

Research on housing pathways has adopted the biographical approach to investigate the various dimensions of housing histories (see for instance Skobba, 2016; De Decker & Segers, 2014). Such works analyse inhabitants' long-term life stories to locate residential moves within the crucial events of housing histories and the broader meanings that shape the concept of home (Somerville, 2013; Tomas & Dittmar, 1995). The present research followed a biographical approach to deeply investigate the material and immaterial dimensions influencing the residential choices that led De Gasperi inhabitants to squat in their flats. Deep ethnographic work was conducted over July–December 2018 to gather information on the inhabitants' housing pathways from leaving their parents' houses through 2018. The data were combined with data gathered during previous fieldwork in 2015–2018. During previous

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<sup>46</sup> See Istat (2018), <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/104317>.

phases of fieldwork, we focused on those features that favour the emergence of individualistic squatting (e.g. housing need, private rental housing sector unaffordability).

The ethnographic fieldwork consisted of participant observation and life history interviews focusing on current and previous housing conditions. In addition to the inhabitants' housing histories, the district context was investigated. Three life-history, individual interviews were conducted with households squatting in various sites, including public housing flats and nursery school offices (see Paper 2). The interviews based on a plot that has been employed as reminder. The main objective has been to investigate the housing pathways and the variables influencing residential mobility and feelings of home. A thematic chart was developed to organise the data into sub-themes across the data, highlighting the similarities and differences of the squatters' housing histories and pathways (Sala, 2010).

## HOUSING PATHWAYS TOWARDS INDIVIDUALISTIC SQUATTING

The current conditions of informal occupants of public housing in De Gasperi are marked by a dynamic, relentless search for accommodations. The housing solutions adopted by inhabitants during their life courses highlight several variables influencing their residential journeys. Retracing the housing pathways of squatters in public buildings in De Gasperi enables investigating the interplay between the macro and micro variables that shape the residential stages (Fig. 4).

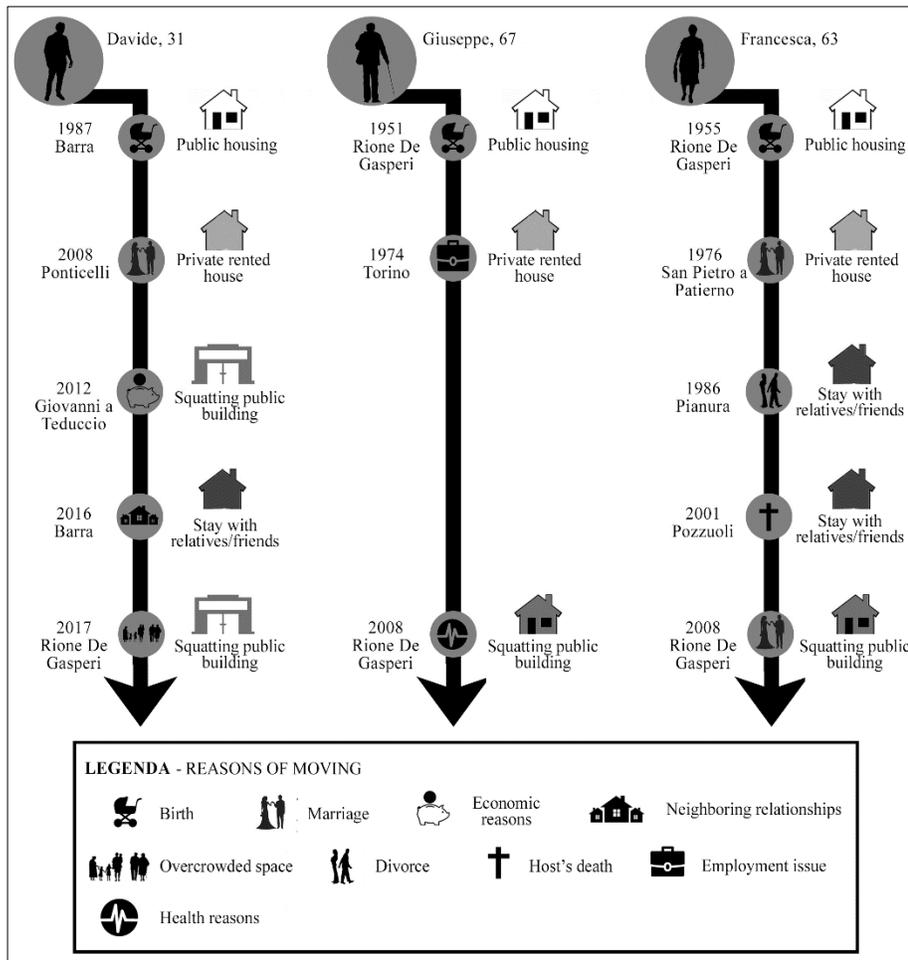


Figure 16. Housing choices and reasons for residential moves. Source: Author. Based on Bricocoli, Gnan, & Marani (2018), p. 122.

*Davide*<sup>47</sup> (interview, 20 September 2018) is a young bricklayer. He has lived with his wife and three sons in the former nursery school in De Gasperi for one year. They occupy what was the school principal's office. Their house is on the ground floor and divided into two huge internal spaces. The first is an open space containing the kitchen, living room and bathroom, while the only bedroom has beds for all five household members. The house has a garden accessed from the bedroom. The dwelling is cosy and well maintained due to several remodelling works Davide has carried out with the intent to make it more suitable for his family's needs. However, two aspects remain unsolved, according to Davide. First is the perception of living in a school rather than a proper house despite the improvements he has made. Second is the moisture that fills the space. The building is old and crumbling, and its condition has worsened in recent decades.

Before arriving in De Gasperi, Davide changed dwellings four times. He hails from a neighbourhood near Ponticelli, where he lived with his family of origin in a public housing flat for twenty years. When Davide and his wife married, they moved to a private rented house in Ponticelli. At that time, he had an employment contract as a bricklayer, and the housing costs were affordable relative to his income. The house was tiny (30 square meters) on the ground floor of a residential building in the historic centre of Ponticelli. Davide paid rent without a formal contract. He and his wife lived there for four years. When he lost his job, they had to move as they could not afford the rent.

A prolonged state of unemployment and temporary, unreliable jobs in the black market compelled Davide to illegally to occupy an unused building owned by the Napoli city council in a nearby district (San Giovanni a Teduccio). The space was large enough for the needs of the family of three, who were expecting their second child. The illegal electricity and water connections also reduced their housing expenses. However, after four years, Davide decided to leave the place. The sense of insecurity in the area and poor relationships with neighbours created high tension within his family.

Davide returned to his parental house while waiting for a better solution to his housing needs. Many people lived in the house, and it did not provide privacy for the couple or their children. One day, while picking up his eldest son from practice at the football field, he had a conversation with the father of one of his son's teammates, who informed Davide about a dwelling in De Gasperi that had been empty since the previous squatter had left it. The father gave Davide the contact for a person he could call if he wanted to move there. Davide consulted his wife, and they both agreed to squat in the former office of the school, where they still reside today.

Three relevant immaterial features have interplayed with the material need for shelter to shape the stages of Davide's housing pathway. First, negative relationships with neighbours prompted him to leave the first space where he squatted in San Giovanni a Teduccio and to search for a comfortable neighbourhood. Second, Davide moved from his parental house to search a space where he could cultivate more intimate relationships with his family members. Third, control of the space of his current dwelling has contributed to Davide's sense of home.

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<sup>47</sup> We have already illustrated Davide and his wife's story in Paper 2. However, here we focus on variables that contributed to shape their housing pathways. From this perspective, Davide and Flora's housing story is illustrated through the lens of biographical approach. Moreover, their case is interesting from a comparative perspective (with reference to other inhabitants' housing stories) since they are new-comers of the De Gasperi district.

The renovation work has transformed the house to serve his family's needs, and the time and resources he has devoted to maintenance has built his tight, affective bond with his dwelling.

*Giuseppe* (interview, 21 September 2018) is a pensioner. Without any entitlement, he and his wife occupy a public flat on the third floor of one of the twenty-eight buildings in De Gasperi. The small house (about 50 square meters) consists of a living room off the entrance from which one can access the bathroom, kitchen and bedroom. Two sides of the house face east and west, exposing it to a lot of sunlight. Indeed, the dwelling is bright for most of the day. It also has an internal balcony, where Giuseppe often relaxes. The apartment is quite comfortable, thanks to the regular maintenance and dedicated domestic and shared spaces (e.g. building stairs and walkway).

Giuseppe was born in De Gasperi and lived there until he was twenty. Then, he moved to Turin, where he lived and worked as an assembly line worker for almost forty years until he retired. His job stability enabled him to rent a house in Turin with his wife, who also originated from De Gasperi. In Turin, they had three children. The house was a spacious, ground-floor apartment in a residential building and had an internal garden. The housing costs were affordable relative to Giuseppe's income.

In the early 2000s, the possibility of returning to Naples arose. Giuseppe's mother-in-law, who lived in De Gasperi, had fallen ill, and his wife commuted between Turin and Naples to take care of her mother. In 2003, the mother-in-law's condition worsened, and Giuseppe's wife visited her more frequently, so the couple decided to move to her mother's dwelling in their neighbourhood of origin. Another factor was also relevant. Existing laws allowed Giuseppe's wife to inherit her mother's house after her death (see Paper 1). This represented a perfect housing solution given Giuseppe's forthcoming retirement. Public housing rent was lower than private rent in Turin and was more advantageous for the pensioners' income. Thus, his wife's desire to join her mother and the low rent prompted Giuseppe to return to De Gasperi. In 2008, they changed their residence to their current dwelling, with the hope to inherit the house after two years of cohabitation. Only after moving did Giuseppe find out that his mother-in-law informally occupied the apartment and was waiting for legalisation (see Paper 2). In 2012, Giuseppe's mother-in-law died, and left him the duty of legalising their status as squatters.

Two emotive elements have characterised Giuseppe's housing pathways. First, like Davide, Giuseppe has experienced that the time and resources he has given to remodelling his current dwelling have shaped his feeling of being at home. The daily maintenance of private and shared spaces feeds his feeling of controlling his domestic environment. Second, his wife's move to take care of her mother created an affective bond with the dwelling based on the memories linking Giuseppe's wife and her mother in the house before and after the illness.

*Francesca* (interview, 20 September 2018) is a 63 years old woman who lives on the top floor of a building in De Gasperi. Her tiny house (55 square meters) consists of a kitchen, bathroom and two bedrooms. The furniture is lavish, with ornamental decorations. Everything in the house belonged to the family that formerly occupied the apartment. As humid as the rest of the houses in the neighbourhood, the dwelling is also very cold. Francesca spends most of the day outside as she has two jobs. In the morning, she works as

cleaner in some banks in downtown Naples, while in the afternoon, she runs a minimarket in the neighbourhood.

Like Giuseppe, Francesca was born in De Gasperi to parents displaced from the city centre by WWII bombing. When she was twenty, Francesca married and left her parental house. She and her husband moved to a nearby district (San Pietro a Patierno), where they rented an apartment. She stayed in that house for ten years until she divorced. She left her husband and moved with her new partner to northern Naples, where he owned an independent housing unit in the Pianura neighbourhood. Francesca lived in her new house for almost fifteen years until her partner died. His children (from an earlier marriage) had the right to inherit the house, so she was compelled to leave.

Francesca moved to the town of Pozzuoli, in northern Naples. A son (from her former marriage) hosted her in his rented house as she did not want to live alone and could not afford housing due to her temporary jobs. In 2008, Francesca moved again as her son married and needed more space for his new family. Then, she returned to De Gasperi, where her mother and three brothers still lived. Francesca stayed with her mother for a short time, but the house was too small for them. After some months, she was given the opportunity to occupy a flat in De Gasperi, which is her current home. Although Francesca has reported her illegal occupation of the flat, her situation has not been legalised yet.

A significant immaterial feature can be traced in Francesca's housing pathway: she has never lived alone during her housing history. The search for aggregation and inclusion has shaped her residential moves. Her current housing situation of living alone can be interpreted in light of this immaterial need: her decision to squat in her current dwelling came from her desire to move closer to her family of origin. In other words, the desire to experience daily, positive relationships drove Francesca's move to De Gasperi.

## DISCUSSION. SQUATTING LIKE AT HOME

These housing pathways can be conceived as proxies that highlight the multidimensional complexity of trajectories towards individualistic squatting of public flats in Naples. This section presents a discussion on how individualistic squatters seek emotive bonds with the dwelling where they decide to live. The need for shelter triggers squatting, and in light of housing unaffordability and more general economic uncertainty, the dwelling becomes a pillar in squatters' life course. However, the search for a house does not end when a roof over one's head is found. Affective bonds and forms of rootedness with the physical structure of the house also shape residential mobility. Material factors (e.g. obstacles to first-time homeownership, the unaffordability of the private rental sector and the inadequacy of public housing supply) and immaterial factors (e.g. social aggregation, nostalgia and a search for refuge) shape the housing choices that lead to squatting public apartments (Mallet, 2004).

### MATERIAL DIMENSION OF SQUATTING: SEARCH FOR SHELTER

Pathways into squatting arise during housing transition moments due to housing disequilibrium. Squatters' housing histories highlight the nuances of changes favouring the emergence of housing dissatisfaction. For instance, demographic changes, such as marriage, influenced Davide's leaving his parental house and Francesca's decision to move to squat in her current house, whereas socio-economic changes, such as job loss and retirement, prompted Davide and Giuseppe to seek alternative housing solutions. The squatters' housing pathways mentioned in section 4 highlight the material features that prompt households and individuals to squat to access housing. This analysis of the inhabitants' housing pathways towards individualistic squatting stresses two main factors that we discuss in the rest of this section.

*Micro (subjective) variables.* The interviewed inhabitants' housing histories started in the public housing complexes of eastern Naples, where their families were the recipients of public flats. As emphasised in section 3, the public housing districts in north-eastern Naples were characterised by high levels of socio-economic distress. Habitus influenced the interviewed squatters' housing pathways in two ways (Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015). First, low-income households and individuals sought to settle in the rental housing sector as homeownership tenure was economically inaccessible. Davide's consideration of his housing pathways related to housing tenure confirms the rigidity of private housing market:

*When my wife and I married, we decided to move to our own house. [...] We did not even consider buying a dwelling. Nobody in my family bought their own house. It is something for rich people. [...] I think that homeownership is for high-income families, rented housing is for working-class*

*households, and public housing is for, let us say, very poor people.* (Davide, interview, 20 September 2018).

The squatters' uncertain employment did not allow them to establish stable housing solutions. As highlighted in national reports, housing distress has become widespread among low-income households due to falling incomes over the past ten years (Nomisma, 2016). Informal, part-time and flexible employment have affected housing-related decision-making processes. Second, as Boterman (2012) argued, habitus influenced the housing pathways not only through the economic resources households used to satisfy their needs but also through the social capital crucial to finding housing solutions during transition moments.

The case studies highlight two functions of social capital related to the housing sector. Networks of relatives and friends acted as safety nets as parents and friends provided temporary housing solutions for both Francesca and Davide during housing changes. Social capital acted as a network for the circulation of information and resources related to squatting (see Paper 1 and 2). For instance, Giuseppe's case reveals the importance of social networks in long-term housing strategies. He and his wife moved to their current flat shortly before he retired. They left their rented house in Turin to gain the opportunity to inherit the public apartment where his mother-in-law had been living. Public housing rent represented a more economically sustainable solution than a pension-based income.

*My wife commuted between Turin and Naples every month until 2008, when we decided to move. It was a couple of months before my retirement. [...] Years later, in 2012, my mother-in-law died; then we applied to inherit the apartment.* (Giuseppe, interview, 21 September 2018).

The inhabitants' housing histories highlight the influences of micro variables on their trajectories. On one hand, the economic resources the inhabitants could mobilise for their housing purposes prompted them to search for accommodations within the rental housing sector. Buying their own homes was out of reach. On the other hand, the inhabitants employed their social capital to maximise their housing goals. Social capital served as a tool to secure housing, particularly temporary shelter to meet immediate housing needs. Social capital also aided the development of long-term strategies, including planning how to reach the best housing solution (De Decker & Sergers, 2014).

*Macro (contextual) variables.* Two elements seem to have influenced the squatters' housing pathways in De Gasperi. First, the unaffordability of the private rental housing sector affected the interviewed inhabitants' pathways towards informal occupation of public flats. The interviewed squatters began their independent housing histories privately renting homes, but these arrangements proved to be only temporary. Housing distress (housing costs exceeding 30% of the household's monthly income) produced housing disequilibrium, prompting the families to find more sustainable residential solutions. Some life-events had great impacts, leading to housing disequilibrium. For instance, Davide left his rented house when he lost his job. He could not afford housing costs, and the owner decided to evict him. Davide chose to squat as he did not find stable employment in the later months. Despite an employment contract as a bricklayer, Davide has continued to prefer to squat until he achieves better economic stability as renting a house would not be an affordable solution.

Giuseppe's history revealed another aspect of the economic unaffordability of the rental housing sector. He decided to move to De Gasperi to gain an economic advantage over paying for housing on a pension.

*I could still live in a rented house. [...] Public housing rent, like that people pay in the De Gasperi neighbourhood (around 20 euros per month), makes me live like a nabob with my pension. (Giuseppe, interview, 21 September 2018).*

Second, inadequate supply and inefficient management in the public housing sector contributed to the pathways into squatting. Long waiting lists for an insufficient supply of public flats has made squatting a preferred alternative, when feasible (see Paper 1). As mentioned, around 16,000 families were waiting for public flats, according to the more recent ranking in 2011. However, the local housing department has continued to assign flats according to rankings from his 1990s. Davide and his wife have been the legal recipients of a public flat according to the public housing ranking since 2008 but were still waiting for a public flat. In the meantime, they preferred to squat as information about their assignment was not available.

*My wife was at the 41<sup>st</sup> position in the final ranking for public housing. It was 2008. We were waiting. Sometimes, we went to the department for public housing policies to ask information. [...] It seems that they lost our documents. I do not really know. However, we decided to squat as we could not wait any more to find a solution. (Davide, interview, 20 September 2018).*

The peculiar configuration of public housing management also seems to have influenced households' choices to squat. For instance, Francesca accessed her current house through the informal inheritance mechanism (see Paper 1). Informal occupation of public flats was based on this long-practiced mechanism exploiting the regulatory system for inheritance of public flats.

*The local authorities have never intervened to manage public housing occupation. [...] The municipality is informed of the fact that people 'sell and buy' their houses; it simply does not care. (Francesca, interview, 20 September 2018).*

Contextual and macro variables seem to have had great impacts on the interviewed inhabitants' housing pathways. The private housing market did not guarantee affordable housing solutions as the broader economic uncertainty characterising the squatters' lives made it difficult to meet housing costs. The job instability, general socio-economic unaffordability and higher levels of housing distress among renting families (as evidenced by national and local trends) faced by the De Gasperi inhabitants influenced their housing pathways into squatting. At the same time, the public housing supply seemed inadequate to satisfy low-cost housing demand. With long waiting lists for public apartments, squatting became a preferable solution for the need for shelter. Moreover, inefficient management of public housing estates made squatting a feasible option.

## IMMATERIAL DIMENSIONS OF SQUATTING: SEARCH OF HOME

The previous section stressed the high housing uncertainty characterising low-income households' search for shelter. Within broader economic instability, home can be conceived as a relevant pillar in households' life courses, providing shelter to meet housing needs (Maranghi, 2016). The housing histories studied demonstrate the relevance of squatting as practice to access to a roof over one's head. At the same time, home assumes broader, more abstract meanings as individuals and households respond to their immaterial and emotive needs, such as affectivity, refuge and social aggregation (Mallett, 2004). A dwelling thus can be conceived of as more than its physical structure and sheltering function and can become the place where one feels at *home*. Feeling at home arises from the practices and relationships through which people reproduce a particular atmosphere that fosters certain emotional states, relaxation, escapism and space for memories (McCarthy, 2018).

In this research, the emotions and feelings filling the domestic walls exhibited the process through which the squatters gained a sense of experience and home in the spaces where they lived. This section discusses the distinctive immaterial and emotional meanings the interviewed squatters ascribed to their domestic spaces based on the dimensions analysed in section 2.2. The broader abstract dimensions of home are discussed as drivers to move and to stay. Drivers to move refer to elements favouring the decision to change residence, particularly factors contributing to housing disequilibrium (Bricocoli et al., 2018; Clapham, 2005). Drivers to move push households both from and towards housing solutions. Drivers to stay refer to the processual features through which a sense of home is produced and reproduced within a given dwelling. Through these actions and experiences, inhabitants and households consciously build affective bonds with the shelters where they live (Easthope, 2004; Casey, 2001). Such features prompt people to stay in the places they feel are home.

*Home as a refuge.* The housing histories studied shed light on the affective bonds the De Gasperi squatters wove with the spaces where they lived. Such affective bonds did not seem to match their legal position. They occupied public spaces without any formal entitlement, so they ran the risk of eviction. However, their affective ties went beyond the material dimension of the position of illegal squatters. People slowly and daily became attached to their houses through the materiality of dwelling with the symbolic meanings of home (Jacobs & Malpas, 2013). For instance, extraordinary maintenance (e.g. changing layouts, demolishing walls and renovating rooms) was a crucial practice through which people felt that they had control over their domestic space. The inhabitants studied employed this practice to satisfy their needs and desires. In this perspective, the personalisation of dwellings can be conceived as a relevant driver to stay that contributed to the households' perceptions of home through which family members built tight affective bond with the houses they inhabited (Soaita, 2015). Part of the home was assembled and sustained through the confort of technical provision, which includes both renovation and ordinary maintenance works (Lancione, 2019). The housing experiences of Davide and Giuseppe underlined the importance of renovation work to make their houses fit their household's desires.

*We like our home now. It has a garden outside that during the summer is wonderful. [...] We know that is not a proper house; it is, better, it was a school. You see that it was a school, but we*

*transformed it. Now it is our home. [...] I would not leave it. It is nice. I have spent a lot of time, energy and money to make it as we desired. [...] I would not leave this house now. It is better than the previous place where we lived, and it is much better than many apartments in this district.* (Davide, interview, 20 September 2018).

*Our home is good. I mean, it fits with our needs as we remodelled it according to our needs. [...] I made the kitchen bigger and changed the living room.* (Giuseppe, interview, 21 September 2018)

Ordinary maintenance (e.g. cleaning and changing shared light bulbs) and everyday life activities (e.g. relaxing activities) also created the sense of a safe, comfortable home. Giuseppe contributed the upkeep of some shared spaces in his building, cleaning the gallery floor and replacing shared lights. Such maintenance activities helped make domestic spaces comfortable, feeding positive feelings related to housing. The daily use of rooms also contributed to the squatters' feeling of home. For instance, Davide viewed his garden as important as he and his family used it to relax, especially during the summer time.

*We used to spend a lot of time out there during the summer. It is nice to have a space like that. My wife uses it to dry the family's clothes as well, but it is perfect to relax. [...] Children play a lot out there with Leone (i.e. their dog).* (Davide, interview, 20 September 2018).

A feeling of control over one's domestic space originates from the home-building process, or the actions and experiences through which inhabitants ascribe the broader meaning of home to the physical structure of the house (Easthope, 2004). As Davide and Giuseppe stressed, feeling of control over space influences the decision to stay through the lack of more convenient options and emotional appreciation of the place where they live. Such a feeling of home builds the intimate relationship with the house, particularly in the efforts (e.g. time, money and energy) spent to build a comfortable space.

*Home as a space of social aggregation.* The need and desire for social aggregation can influence transition moments when individuals and households make housing-related decisions. For instance, feeling at home entails feeling integrated into a group, such as family kinship or a network of neighbours. Home thus concerns emotional states, such as loneliness, and does not relate simply to the absence of people with whom to interact. Home can be conceived of as the space where individuals satisfy their need to build relationships with people who play important roles in their lives (e.g. relatives, partners and friends; Bricocoli et al., 2018; Mullins & Dugan, 1990). Not feeling lonely is a subjective, immaterial dimension need that can influence residential decisions. From this perspective then, social aggregation acts as a driver to move that shapes decisions to move towards certain housing solutions. For instance, each stage of Francesca's housing pathway was characterised by cohabiting with loved ones. She first lived with her partners and then moved to live with her son. Today, Francesca lives alone in her house, but her decision to move to De Gasperi arose from her desire to move closer to her family of origin. That her family of origin still lived in De Gasperi motivated her return to the district during a transition moment (her partner's death).

*When my partner died, I could not afford rent by myself. It seemed to be a good option to squat in a flat here. [...] Moreover, I decided to come back to the De Gasperi district in order to move closer to my family. My mother and siblings still live here. [...] I accepted to living alone for this reason. [...] I have been away for a long time, forty years. Sometimes, I came to visit my relatives and friends. It has been easy for me to come back.* (Francesca, interview, 20 September 2018).

Social aggregation can also be increased through the daily experiences of inhabiting places and thus act as a driver to stay. Francesca, for instance, satisfied her daily need of social aggregation through relationships with neighbours. Isolation, in this case, Francesca living by herself, did not entail loneliness as she established such relationships although not necessarily within her domestic space. Neighbourly linkages are fluid and carried out in various places, such as relatives and neighbours' houses (Manzo, 2014; Netto, 2011). Indeed, in these cases, the large population of early public-flat recipients and low turnover levels contributed to a strong, community of neighbours. As Vereni (2013) asserts, people live neighbouring relationships like family relationships; in particular, social and affective relationships overlap with economic exchanges within a mechanism of neighbourhood (or extended family) care.

Social relationships among neighbours are not always linear and positive but ebb and flow. Home, therefore, is always an ambiguous space of aggregation as it can also be a space of negative relationships (Brickell, 2012). Social aggregation then can also be a driver to move from a place. It can undermine a sense of home and prompt households to leave their current dwellings and search for other housing solution. For instance, Davide decided to move from where his family lived to De Gasperi due to poor relationships with neighbours.

*It was a blighted area. It had a negative influence on my relationship with my wife. The neighbours were bickering all the time. [...] There was tension between my family and the neighbours. I think that it made my wife and I bicker often. We decided to go away for this reason. We did not like that place at all.* (Davide, personal communication, 20 September 2018)

Home as a space to satisfy the need for social aggregation is a powerful trigger of residential moves. The search for a positive daily atmosphere (or social relations that did not negatively affect everyday life) prompted Davide and his wife to leave the house where they had lived for four years, although they did not have an alternative housing solution when they moved.

*Home as a space of memory.* Through memory, people can endow objects with broader symbolic meanings (Jacobs & Malpas, 2013). Physical elements (e.g. furniture, walls and dishes) activate memories—about individuals both living and dead—which are wrapped in feeling (Marcu, 2012). The role of home as a repository of memories is strikingly expressed in Giuseppe's story. The decision to move to his current home was related to his wife's desire to care for her mother. The dwelling became the place where a strong affective bond was built, the nuanced relationship between a daughter and the mother for whom she cared. Consequently, for Giuseppe's wife, the house held memories of love and suffering. It carried positive memories of her mother before she feel ill but also became a place of suffering where she cared for her mother, who died there.

*This was my mother-in-law's house. We inherited it when she died. [...] My wife spent a lot of time taking care of her. She is attached to this place.* (Giuseppe, interview, 21 September 2018).

Giuseppe's wife's affective ties to their dwelling as a depository of memories of her mother motivated their decision to stay despite their illegal position. Such bonds constitute the intimate dimension of housing that goes beyond the materiality of dwellings, such as tenure status, the quality of the space and the legality of occupation (Pollack, 2011). Choosing to remain contributes to the feeling of being at home through meeting the abstract need for memory. In this perspective, home as a space of memory is an ambiguous driver of residential decisions. In this case, it represented a trigger to move for Giuseppe, who left Turin and moved to De Gasperi to accommodate his wife's desire to stay in the place where she had taken care of her mother. At the same time, home as a space of memory originates from the sedimentation of affective meanings within the physical structures of dwellings (Meah & Jackson, 2016). In this perspective, the more abstract meaning of space of memory refers to the ongoing process of memory building that shape inhabitants' sense of home. Such memory construction often bases on idealised stories of the past (Cellini & Saracino, 2013). Inhabitants describe a prettier and safer district; they make even bothers and conflicts more pleasant than they were. Stories about the past fulfil everyday life, especially among the older people of the De Gasperi neighbourhood. For instance, Francesca uses to reminisce with her neighbours in the minimarket where she spends the most of the afternoons. Stories are (re)told daily, while memories sediment and reconnect the present to the past feeding the sense of belonging, as Francesca asserts:

*I have been away for a long time, but I was born and raised here. [...] The district was prettier. People called it 'the De Gasperi Park'. Today, it is riskier and dirtier, but I feel at home at the end of the day.* (Francesca, interview, 20 September 2018).

Along their housing pathways, squatters' histories highlight that housing may be viewed as a material commodity that is both 'socialized' and 'socializing' (Netto, 2011; Appadurai, 1986). Housing is not just a reflector of human activity, but can become an active mediator and agent of human activity as it provides the physical space for human interaction, relationships and development within the home —and the surrounding neighbourhood. From this perspective, immaterial and more abstract triggers to move stress the fact that the emotive features of home affect significantly squatters' identity construction. As we have argued in Paper 2 (see pp. 84-85), individualistic squatters in the De Gasperi neighbourhood do not develop a strictly political squatter identity, but commonly strive to be recognised as legal recipient of their homes. For instance, Giuseppe underlines several times during our conversation that he feels as 'a *normal citizen*':

*I pay regularly the rent and utilities on time, take care of his home and shared spaces. I feel and act as 'normal citizen'. I am a 'normal citizen' in practice, but I am not officially since local authorities do not legitimate my (and my wife's) position* (Giuseppe, interview, 21 September 2018).

As some scholars have stressed (Netto, 2011; Liu, 2010), 'place' (referring not only to the location, but also to the subjective feelings associated with it, and as the context for social

relations) plays a relevant role in identity construction. As squatters in the De Gasperi neighbourhood feels at home, not in a political space of squatting, long for legitimation of their homes. We can argue that squatters' experience of inhabiting is an appropriation of the right to housing (and city); they demand legalization. As we have argues in Paper 1 and 2, individualistic squatters in the De Gasperi neighbourhood wait for amnesty. The wait time for legitimation becomes a sort of space of action where squatters shape daily their *feeling at home*, because they want to feel at home.

The immaterial dimensions, feelings and desires provide hints on the meaning of home 'at the margins'. A 'home' is, after all, is what someone defines as such. It is a space of belonging that tells stories of *homemaking* (and un-making) process (Lancione, 2019; Laino, 2016; Netto, 2011). Squatters feel at home through taking care daily of the house, sharing lunch and dinner times with neighbours, looking after each other. These practices and habits shape inhabitants' perception of being at home beyond the physical structure and characteristics of dwelling. Of course, physical features matter, as Giuseppe and Davide argue with reference to the (low) quality of the space. However, home is a never finished project through which the 'shelter' is continuously (re)made within and beyond the front door.

## CONCLUSIONS

Individualistic squatting of public housing flats is a significant urban phenomenon. In Southern European cities, it provides a crucial mechanism for informal allocation of public housing units in the familistic housing welfare model (Belotti 2018; Allen et al., 2004). In the homeownership-based housing model, individualistic squatting has high economic value as a means for which people to access housing assets. Informal occupation of public flats results from a multidimensional decision-making process. Immaterial needs and desires related to housing drive households and individuals towards squatting. The desire to feel at home influences squatters' housing decisions within an embedded context. Contextual and macro variables (e.g. private rental housing sector unaffordability, job instability) seem to have had great impacts on the interviewed inhabitants' range of housing choices. Housing distress and unaffordability and more general economic uncertainty prompt squatting. However, the search for a dwelling does not end when an empty space to squat is found. The search of physical shelter blends with the search for *home*: a place where people create intimate relationships with the space and other inhabitants, fulfilling their need to feel at home (Lancione, 2018). Informal occupation of public housing thus can be conceptualised as a complex, multidimensional housing pathway into individualistic squatting.

This research investigated both material and abstract factors shaping the dynamic, nonlinear trajectory of inhabitants' search of home. When life events generate housing dissatisfaction, households seek new solutions. Public housing units in De Gasperi are squatted for residential purposes by families and individuals affected by housing deprivation and economic uncertainty. Economic and social capital are utilised to attain the best available option given the contextual constraints (e.g. the rigidity of the private housing market and inefficiency in public housing). Emotive and affective meanings (as control over an important part of one's life and familial warmth) are also mobilised by inhabitants within decision-making process with reference to housing. The desire for familial warmth, memory and social aggregation make the search for shelter the search for home, a particular place with and within which one experiences strong social, psychological and emotive attachments. However, the emotive dimension of home can also produce negative feelings and motivate residential moves. For instance, negative feelings can refer to negative neighbouring relationships that Davide experienced during previous stage of his housing history. Negative experiences of inhabiting was not the object of this study but will be analysed in further investigations.

The case of the De Gasperi neighbourhood is complex, as several dimensions characterise the inhabitants' pathways towards squatting in public housing units. As we have highlighted above, the individualistic squatting is a deeply rooted phenomenon in the De Gasperi district (and in the city of Naples) —for its magnitude, socio-economic relevance and immaterial meanings. People living in squatted public housing units have a community. As Lancione

(2018; p. 2) highlights, they make life: they do not just ‘get going’, or ‘survive’. Many inhabitants of the De Gasperi district feel to be at home in their squatted flats (or buildings). There is a life characterised by caring relationships and by an economy —monetary and affective— to support the ‘squattling’ world. It is a weird and nonlinear arrangement, but it works. The point is not that the squatting should be let proliferate, but it would be helpful a kind of politics to appreciate first, and embrace second, the insights of squatters. From this perspective, policy of improving the living conditions of squatters would be important in the context of the De Gasperi district. This means that local authorities do not try to stop people from squatting, but they would make sure that squatters live in better conditions, by creating socio-economic hub in the neighbourhood, maintaining the buildings where they live and improving the quality of the public spaces. Local authorities can improve life in a squatted place without destroying it. Local authorities could maintain the relationships, economy, care and affectivity of squatters through soft interventions embracing them into the broader city community, rather than evicting them. Such soft interventions could base on neighbourhood-level focus groups, within which local authorities and inhabitants define local policy of caring. This kind of policy design would achieve two objectives. First, it would improve squatters’ living condition by involve squatters’ needs and problems into policy design process. Second, such approach would make local authorities design policies cut for broader squatting-related issues (e.g. uneven distribution of socio-economic resources or private housing market rigidity and public housing sector inadequacy).

Considering the above, further research is needed to deeply understand the multidimensional, complex phenomenon of squatting and to design more detailed policy implications, since individualistic squatting has rather neglected by academic and political debate.

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## APPENDIX A

# Individualistic squatting through the photographic lens

## INTRODUCTION

Appendix A provides the results of the photographic investigation that we conducted during the fieldwork. While visual methods in sociology and anthropology today may rejoice in a growing number of enthusiasts, along with a number of sceptics, most social scientists are unaware of their existence or potential. Visual sociology and visual anthropology are grounded in the idea that valid scientific insight in society can be acquired by observing, analysing and theorising its visual manifestations, the behaviour of people and the material products of culture (Pink, 2013). Visual research in the social sciences predominantly has material culture and human behaviour as its subject and—when visual representations are being produced—as its ‘referent’ (that which is represented or related to) (Pauwels, 2010). Visual material culture includes artefacts and objects (home settings, residential spaces, instruments) and larger visible structures (urban areas, gardens, train stations) that may provide useful information about both material and immaterial features of a given society.

Human behaviour is another crucially important subject of visual social research. ‘Naturally occurring’ and ‘nonreactive behaviour’ have been usually considered valid subjects of visual social research. However, researchers can prompt people to react to visual stimuli (pictures, drawings, artefacts) and use reactions as input (Harper, 2000). Other researchers may prompt people to produce their own imagery or visual representations as a response to a specific assignment. These methods aim to encourage people to speak. This work has employed visual methods (in particular, production of photographs) as an ‘ethnographic trick’; i.e. the photographic enquiry has been employed to enforce the relationship between the De Gasperi district’s and me —as researcher (see next section).

The appendix is divided into two sections. The first is a photographic portraits project aimed at investigating the way the relationship between the De Gasperi district’s squatters and the residential spaces where they squat shape sense of *home*. The second part focuses on a peculiar moment that has an important role in defining the inhabitants’ sense of belonging to the district. It investigates the features of religious celebrations related to *Madonna dell’Arco* that take place during the Easter’s Triduum.

As mentioned above, photography is a tool that has been employed as a qualitative research method. On the one hand, it aimed to create a trust-based relationship with the squatters that we interviewed (Duneier, 1999). Photographs represent ‘the act of photographing’, that reveals the way in which the research was carried out (Rose, 2008; Ryan, 2003). Photographs

unveil the researcher's commitment to 'enter[ing] into dialogue' with the subject/object of study. On the other hand, photographs are used here in order to disclose the complex set of feelings and emotional states that surround squatted public housing flats (Harper, 2003).

Appendix A is structured as follows: the next section provides portraits of the De Gasperi neighbourhood's district. This is the result of a collective work entitled 'Vacuum'. The following section introduces 'Our Lady of Squatters', which investigates celebrations of a relevant religious event. It focuses on peculiar meanings that such ritual assumes in the De Gasperi neighbourhood in the squatters' everyday lives.

This photographic investigation contributes to the currently existing visual investigations on the district of Ponticelli. For, instance see Fiorito & Rossomando (2012).

## VACUUM: THE HUMAN SIDE BEYOND SQUATTING

'Vacuum' is from the Latin word meaning 'empty space'. It focuses on the peculiar relationship between squatters and domestic spaces where they live. Vacuum aims to unveil on the nuanced set of meanings through which the De Gasperi district's inhabitants fulfil physical structure of their dwellings. Squatting is the main feature with reference to a way of inhabiting the De Gasperi neighbourhood. It is a complex and deeply-rooted phenomenon, as we have argued above. Informal occupation of public buildings has risen over the past decades. It benefits from the shortcomings of the public housing provision regulative system. An informal use of public housing rules allows inhabitants to gain access to housing, that is, a relevant asset within one's life. From this perspective, individualistic squatting can be conceived as a channel through which households and individuals face by themselves and their need of shelter. Lacking controls, a weak housing and urban welfare state, and faulty rules represent the formal and institutional empty space wherein squatting proliferates. On the other hand, informal occupation of public housing flats has been a relevant economic activity of the Sarno clan, a powerful Camorra group based in the De Gasperi district. This criminal organization behaves as the guarantor of informal occupation of public flats, a sort of specialized estate agency. It was responsible for granting the informal access to housing against payment of fee and solving disputes related to informal purchase of public flats (see Paper 1). It was in the first decade of 2000 that organized crime disappeared due to increased state action and internal conflicts. The dissolution of organized crime in the area did not terminate these practices. The absence of a 'guarantor' (that may have increased the uncertainty linked to informal occupation of public flats) represents the other side of vacuum.

This portraits project investigates the multidimensional experience of living as a squatter in a place that inhabitants describe through using words such as abandonment and isolation. It aims at navigating deeply the squatters' emotions with reference to their home, life-course and district history. Most of these portraits were made in the last stages of manuscript preparation. It is a collective project carried out in collaboration with Davide Scognamiglio. Moreover, Tommaso Vitiello has worked as photographer of backstage. We used three cameras. Two are medium format analogical cameras, while the other is digital. We have employed wide (28 mm) and normal (50 mm) angle lenses in order to include a significant amount of the environment that locates subjects in their domestic spaces.

The photographic camera has been employed as ethnographic tool aimed at strengthening the relationship between the De Gasperi neighbourhood's squatters and me —as researcher. As mentioned above (see Introduction), visual methods of research have been employed in the second phase of the fieldwork (the 'living in' phase). The photographic enquiry constitutes the middle stage of a broader threefold method of analysis, through which we have carried out part of the fieldwork. The photographic portrait of squatters within their domestic space is a thoughtful choice. Shooting a photographic portrait is a slow practice. It requires that both photographer/ethnographer and photographed subject stand 'eye-to-eye' for a certain amount of time (Hunt, 2014). Some portraits that I have shot needed several

hours, months and years (see Introduction; pp. 33-34). Shooting a portrait is the final moment of a long and slow trust-based relationship building process. A photographic portrait represents a very intimate act. First, for the (photographed) subject/object posing for a photographic portrait entails to be visible —not only to the photographer, but to those spectators that will see the portrait. Since the De Gasperi district's neighbourhood commonly camouflage in order to avoid criminal implication (as discussed in Paper 2), shooting a portrait was a challenging task. I invested the most of time in explaining the reasons, objectives and outcome of my thesis. Since ethnography is about sharing, about giving and taking (Lancione & Rosa, 2017), I used to share the progresses of my work with the subjects/objects of my thesis. This practice (of sharing and explaining my work) predated the stage of portrait shooting. Setting a photographic studio within a squatters' house involves several actions including organizing flash units and lighting and balancing exposures. Moreover, speaking with the subjects can require several hours in order to make them feel comfortable. Thus, the stage of photographing required a deep intimate relationship between researcher and subjects<sup>48</sup>. Fig. 17 reveals the number of shutter clicks employed during the photographic session; it might require up to 30 minutes of shooting pictures during which conversation is carried out. Finally, I used to give a print of each portrait to the photographed subject in order to repay of the time inhabitants shared with me.

However, it is worth mentioning that the following images tell only a part of the story; they originate from the interplay between inhabitants' voices and our gaze on the experience of squatting.

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<sup>48</sup> See the backstage video of the portrait of Pasquale (p. 142): <https://www.instagram.com/p/BeBtTjOn9jJ/>.



Figure 17 – Scanned negatives and the chosen frame. Source: Author.































## OUR LADY OF SQUATTERS

During the Easter Triduum in Naples, inhabitants celebrate *Madonna dell'Arco*, one of the many representations that the Virgin Mary takes in Italy. Myth describes her as a vindictive Virgin Mary. She punished a blasphemer who had lost a bocce match causing him huge pain. Nowadays celebrations remember the myth; teams of devotees (*fujenti*, literally meaning fleeing men) dance carrying on their shoulders heavy floats upon which the Virgin Mary's statue stands. Physical suffering is the way through which devotees expiate their sins. Every district of Naples has its own team.

In the eastern part of Naples in the De Gasperi' neighbourhood, this celebration has a particular meaning. The district is a public housing complex where almost half of inhabitants illegally occupy the space where they live. Local authorities are walling up the apartments left by inhabitants as they will be demolished according to the regeneration plan for Ponticelli (see Esposito, E. & Chiodelli, F. (Forthcoming) The hidden side of urban squatting; the individualistic occupation of public housing units in Naples, Italy, *Housing Studies*).

Public debate usually focuses on the economic dimension of squatting highlighting its function as a tool to access housing for weaker inhabitants. However, squatting has an immaterial dimension. Affiliation, aggregation, affectivity and a sense of belonging contribute to defining the everyday lives of squatters. Religious rituals constitute important elements in the everyday lives of the De Gasperi neighbourhood's inhabitants. Especially, the ceremony of *Madonna dell'Arco* plays an important role feeding the inhabitants' sense of belonging to the district. This work highlights the immaterial meaning of squatting through focusing on the religious dimension of squatters' everyday lives.

This photographic work has been employed also as an 'ethnographic trick'. In particular, it contributed to enforce my relationship with inhabitants of the De Gasperi district. Sharing the days of the ceremony of *Madonna dell'Arco* with inhabitants of the district has helped me to evaluate cultural and emotive aspect of living in the De Gasperi neighbourhood. Moreover, sharing those days with them has contributed to put me closer to (and be accepted by) the neighbourhood's inhabitants. I argue that the district's families and people appreciated that I reported those special moments. For this reason, I used to print and donate them some of the photos that I took during the Easter Triduum.





Sant'Anastasia is a small town, about ten kilometres from Naples, where the shrine of *Madonna dell'Arco* was built in the XVI century. Thousands of devotees go on pilgrimage to the shrine of *Madonna dell'Arco* to pray Virgin Mary's statue. Some devotees tell that a state of trance comes over their body at entering in the shrine.



A very common ritual is to wave holy flags representing saints or Virgin Mary. Richer families finance flags that will be used during celebrations in order to guarantee blessing for their members.



Every team has his own uniform. Red, blue and white are the usual colors of rituals. Uniforms' sale contributes to finance the organization of celebrations.



Ground floors of the district's residential buildings are used as spaces where devotees can rest. Those inhabitants that do not take part to the rituals contribute serving food and drinks for the *fujenti*.



A young boy standing with holy flag close to one of the De Gasperi district's closed public housing units.



A nun handing a child to the altar within the *Madonna dell'Arco*'s shrine



Typically men carry the floats. However, in the De Gasperi neighbourhood women have a crucial role. They arrange the holy statue of Virgin Mary upon the float.



A child is praying one of the many Virgin Mary's portraits that decorate the district.



A devotee smoking a cigarette while the holy float is carrying through the city. During the Easter Triduum, devotees perform in the closer neighbourhoods in order to show their float.



Two devotees are riding a motorbike to get to the main procession.



Devotees perform several choreographies during the precession.



Sometimes team's women carry the holy float along the road to the shrine.



Many devotees decide to walk until the shrine. Some of them prefer to go barefoot as symbol of penance.

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **Organizing the primary data. A sample of thematic chart**

This section provides a sample of thematic charts that were employed to organize the data that were gathered during the fieldwork. It is based on a set of sub-themes that cut across all data in order to highlight similarities, differences and pathways. In particular, the following tables provide the thematic charts that have been employed in Paper 3.

The following data have been through life history interviews during which I have defined the starting question as follows: 'I would like to know you housing and life history since you leave your parental house.' I recorded and transcribed the interviews; then, I organized the data as follows. Interviewed people allowed me to include the whole interviews in this manuscript.

Table 2 – Thematic matrix ‘Housing pathway’.

<i>Theme of enquiry Interviewed subject</i>	<i>Housing provenance (place and housing tenure)</i>	<i>Transition moment I</i>	<i>Transition moment II</i>	<i>Transition moment III</i>	<i>Transition moment IV</i>	<i>History of the place of residence</i>
<b>‘Francesca’ (She squatted in her home in 2008)</b>	I was born here, in the district. My mother still lives here.	When I got married, I moved with my husband to Capodichino. We rented a house [...] It was the 1970s and the rent around 10,000 lira per month. Our house was very tiny.	Then, problems arose between my husband and me. We divorced and I moved to Pianura. Again, in a private house. Actually, I did not pay rent since I moved into my new partner’s place. He owned the house.	When my partner died, his house was sold and I had to move again. That time, I went to Pozzuoli, where I lived with my son [with her first husband].	Finally, when my son got married, I had no place where sleep. I decided to come back here. It was in 2010 when I arrived in the district. I was informed of the fact that a flat was empty and that I could occupy it. A member of Camorra’s clan lived here. Then police captured him and his mother allowed me to squat in it. [...] I had to come back here when my son got married. I could not continue to pay a private rent. Moreover, I moved closer to my family. My mother and my siblings still live here.	A woman lived here. She moved for some her personal reasons. This is why I took over her position. I paid the rent in her place for a period. Let’s say that she allowed me to live here. [...] The local authorities have never intervened to manage public housing occupation. [...] The municipality is informed of the fact that people ‘sell and buy’ their houses; it simply does not care (Paper 1).
<b>‘Davide’ (He squats in the nursery school)</b>	I was born in Barra, in a public house. [...] My family has never owned a proper home. I have never lived in my own house.	When my wife and I married, we decided to move to our own house. It was in the historic center of Ponticelli. We rent a private house. It was very tiny, around 30 m <sup>2</sup> . We did not even consider buying a dwelling.	We left the house when I lost my job. I could not pay a private rent and our landlord decided to send us away. We moved to San Giovanni a Teduccio, where we squatted in a local municipality’s office.	I lived in Germany, then I came back to San Giovanni. It was a blighted area. It had a negative influence on my relationship with my wife. The neighbours were bickering all the time. [...] There was tension between my family and the	My parents’ house was overcrowded. Imagine, you cannot have any privacy for you and your wife, for your children either. [...] Then, a friend told me that there was an empty house here. I could occupy it and I decided to do it.	When we arrived here, this place was a ‘house’. A former squatter remodeled it. I paid him to come in. This was the way in which I ‘squatted’ in this place. [...] Squatting is chocolate [it is addictive]. You squat in a place, you get information about

**‘Giuseppe’  
(He squatted in his  
home in 2008)**

I was born here. [...] I have never owned a house. Today, my siblings own their homes, but I don't.

My housing pathway begins in 2003, when my wife and I lived in Turin, where I worked in a factory. I lived in Turin from 1974 until the 8th of April 2008. In the 1960s, my rent was around 10,000 lira.

In 2003, my mother-in-law (who lived in the house where we live now) got sick. My wife commuted between Turin and Naples every month until 2008, when we decided to move. It was a couple of months before my retirement. My wife – and her siblings – used to take care of their mother. Each sibling spent a period of time (three weeks) with my mother-in-law. We decided to move our legal residence to my-mother-in-law's house. In this way we would be able to pay a very cheap public rent. It would be perfect with respect to the amount of my retirement benefits. In 2008 (after some months of 'testing'), we moved to our current house permanently. Years later, in 2012, my mother-in-law died; then we applied to inherit the apartment.

neighbours. I think that it made my wife and I bicker often. We decided to go away for this reason. We did not like that place at all.

another empty place to squat and inform a friend of yours.

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I am paying my mother-in-law's debts. She did not pay the public rent for her house. Thus, we have inherited the condition of illegal occupant of the house. [...] Here, as you know (Paper 1), you can inherit the occupied flat. You need to speak with a relative or a friend and they enable you to squat. The local administration does not apply any form of control.

Table 3 – Thematic matrix ‘Meaning of home’

<i>Themes</i> <i>Interviewed subject</i>	<i>Attachment to the neighbourhood</i>	<i>Neighbouring relationships</i>	<i>Perception of the role of local authorities</i>	<i>Attachment to home</i>	<i>Quality of dwelling</i>
<i>Francesca</i>	<p>[...] Then Camorra’s clan began to establish its roots in the district. I think that it is normal when ignorance and unemployment achieve high rates. Camorra is ‘addictive’. [...]</p> <p>[...] However, I decided to come back to the De Gasperi district in order to move closer to my family. My mother and siblings still live here. [...] I accepted to living alone for this reason. [...] I have been away for a long time, forty years. Sometimes, I came to visit my relatives and friends. It has been easy for me to come back. [...]</p> <p>Today, the neighbourhood is scary. You can see, we live among walled houses. It is not normal. In the night, it is terrible. Before, the district was ‘alive’; today it is scary. I have been away for a long time, but I was born and raised here. [...] The district was prettier. People called it ‘the De Gasperi Park’. Today, it is riskier and dirtier, but I feel at home at the end of the day.</p>	<p>////////////////////////////////////</p>	<p>The district is in a very bad condition from a structural point of view. Buildings are old and crumbling; sewers do not work well; public gardens are decaying; the trees are ill. Moreover, in this period (summer) extermination of rats is needed. We reported those problems to the local administration, but as you can see . . . no answer [...]</p> <p>I would like to understand why and how local administration did not approve the amnesty in 2008 and 2018. It would have involved many people, like me. [...] The local administration has never adopted any measure to avoid the illegal occupation of public houses [...]</p> <p>It is normal that the administration invests funds in restyling Naples’ historic center. It is the most attractive and touristic part of the city. However, it should take care of other parts of the city and, in particular, it should respond to the housing emergency of the people. [...] I illegally occupy my house; I only declared my occupation to local authorities. I am not paying the rent. I will do it (and I will pay my debts) when the local administration legalises my position.</p>	<p>Since I could not sustain any other housing solution (private rent, for instance), squatting is the most suitable for my needs. [...] It is the best achievable solution for me.</p>	<p>It is okay for me here since I live alone. I have a lot of space; my son is part of my family here, but he lives with his family, close to Ponticelli.</p> <p>My home is around 40 m<sup>2</sup>; it is enough for me. 20 m<sup>2</sup> would also be good for me. [...] The quality of dwelling is good for me.</p>
<i>Davide</i>	<p>Since I’ve lived here, the conditions have gotten worse.</p>	<p>When people decide to cooperate, the district’s conditions get better; but</p>	<p>There is a state of abandonment; you can feel it. I think that it is because of walled houses. [...] If</p>	<p>We like our home now. It has a garden outside that is wonderful during the</p>	<p>We live in a school, not a proper house. We are four, and one more is coming.</p>

There is a state of abandonment; you can feel it. I think that it is because of walled houses. It seems that local authorities are going to forget us.  
Our conditions are worse than those of other public housing complexes in Naples; we are isolated. [...] There are moments that the district seems to be looked after [...] If I had an alternative solution, I would profit from it.

it follows the ebb and flow of the inhabitants' mood.

you pay (the rent, the utilities) you can access to each kind of right or service.  
Well, when people make a mess, the local administration acts.

summer. [...] We know that it is not a proper house; it is better. It was a school. You see that it was a school, but we transformed it. Now it is our home. [...] I would not leave it. It is nice. I have spent a lot of time, energy and money to make it as we desired. [...] I would not leave this house now. It is better than the previous place where we lived, and it is much better than many apartments in this district.

The dwelling is nice, but we need more space. I would not leave this house now. It is better than the previous place where we lived, and it is much better than many apartments in this district. [...] Here, we have the living room/kitchen, then a bedroom (where my wife, my sons and I sleep) and a bathroom. The bathroom is in very bad condition.

*Giuseppe*

Let's not talk about this. I don't like this district. Services are lacking and inhabitants do not take care of anything. [...] If something falls downstairs, you will lose it. [...] Controls are lacking, and organized crime is spreading. We are like hostage here. [...] I would not remain here in Ponticelli unless the local administration would assign us a public house.

Inhabitants are not able to keep spaces clean. They soil it after the street sweeper has gone. [...] In 1965, the district changed. People from another district of Naples came and began to take possession of the district. Many built up their own balconies or gardens illegally. It is messy.

Services are lacking; since I occupy my home illegally, I cannot ask the local administration to intervene. I used to repair shared spaces by myself. [...] Every public housing complex is similar to this one; controls and services are lacking. Inhabitants take care of shared spaces (like, stairs or gardens) there too, since local authorities do not do it. [...] Institutions have been sleeping for a long time; they do not care about the illegal management of public housing; now they have woken up and noticed that there are many people illegally occupying public flats. [...] I would like for the local administration to put in place policies or any kind of intervention to improve the area. [...] Local authorities cannot even control the assignment of new public flats in the whole district. New public flats

The house is good enough; it fits our needs. We remodeled it according to our desires. [...] We made the kitchen bigger; then we repaired the bathroom. This was my mother-in-law's house. We inherited it when she died. [...] My wife spent a lot of time taking care of her. She is attached to this place.

Our home is good. I mean, it fits our needs as we remodelled it according to our needs. [...] However, if we had a bigger family, the house would be tiny. It is around 50 m2. It is good for two people. I made the kitchen bigger and changed the living room.

[those from the renewal program]  
have been vandalized, for instance.  
The local administration only  
comes here to meet us just before  
elections.

Table 4 – Thematic matrix ‘Dimensions of housing choices’.

<i>Interviewed subject</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Perception of homeownership tenure</i>	<i>Perception of private rented housing</i>	<i>Perception of public rented housing</i>	<i>Perception of squatting</i>
<i>Francesca</i>		<p>I think that homeownership is convenient, more convenient than renting a house. Today, renting a house is expensive. Thus, if you have enough money to buy a house, you save your money. In other words, you can ask for a loan rather than rent. Of course, you need to have a stable job. In order to secure a home loan, you must pledge something as collateral. I would like to own my home, but I cannot afford it. I could not even ask for a home loan. Banks would not give me a loan. [...] However, to own a home can create inheritance problems. When you have many children, how do you manage it? Which one would be the best option? I don't know, I think it could be not so easy.</p>	<p>Renting is convenient when you can afford it. What I mean is that renting is better suited to poorer people than a home loan. If you cannot pledge anything for a home loan, maybe you can try to rent a house. It depends on your economic conditions. [...] I came back to De Gasperi and squatted in my home because I could not afford a rent (when my son got married).</p>	<p>Take into consideration two families. The first one lives in a private rented house; the second one lives in a public flat. The second one might spend more money to take care of the house. [...] The new public flats [those established by the renewal program] are in good condition. You can improve the quality of your housing. The flats are bigger and new; buildings have elevators. It would be better to move there.</p>	<p>My case is blatant. When my son got married, I could not afford a private rent. Occupying a public flat was the fastest way to find shelter. I think that squatting often is an economic necessity. If you could afford a rent, you would do it. It can happen that you cannot find a stable job; in that case rent will be hard to pay a rent. Squatting can become a convenient option [...] Then, if you regularise your position, you start to pay the public rent; but when you decide to squat, it is evident that is a matter of necessity. Take into consideration a couple with children. How can they guarantee a shelter?</p>
<i>Davide</i>		<p>We did not even consider buying a dwelling. Nobody in my family bought their own house. It is something for rich people. [...] I think that homeownership is for high-income families [...]. If you have a very good job you can buy your own home (in the future). If you have an unstable job you cannot do it. How can you ask for a loan? Will you repay it?</p>	<p>[...] rented housing is for working-class households, for those that are poorer than homeowners are. [...] I lived in a private rented house when I had a stable job. Since I had a stable source of income, I was aware that a part of that money would be used to pay the rent. I could afford it [...] I spent around 50% of my income for housing costs (rent and utilities); but it was okay for me since I could afford it.</p>	<p>[...] And public housing is for, let us say, very poor people. [...] Public housing complexes were thought to be for working class people; then, it is normal that you find the poorest people in the city here . . . from an economic point of view, I mean. [...] If you pay your rent and the utilities, then you can be regularised. In that case, you will have access to several welfare services related to the housing [such as maintenance of shared spaces and gardens].</p>	<p>We do not live in a proper house; it was a school that the previous squatter transformed in a home. [...] Living in a squatted house means that you are in critical conditions. You will save money through occupying of course; but often your quality of life is not so good. [...] If you are up to date with the payments [rent and utilities], you will have access to several welfare services. Who still lives here are those families that are declared illegal [He refers to the families that moved from the De Gasperi neighbourhood in the light of the renewal program]. In other words, those that did not pay or those that squat their homes. [...] Those that occupied their home are those that</p>

*Giuseppe*

Each one of my siblings owns their home. I do not. I am the only one that does not own his home. According to me, from an economic point of view, it is not convenient. When you own your home, you have to pay taxes and housing costs. [...] Your income should be sufficiently high to afford all these costs. I think that renting is better; you avoid several costs.

I lived several years in a private rented house. It is better than owning a house. Housing costs are the responsibility of the property owner; sometimes you divide the costs with him. [...] however, rental costs today are too high. How can you afford it? Your income should be around 2,000 euros per month to achieve a housing stability, since today renting a house costs around 500 euro per month. [...] If local administration does not regularise my position, it might be that I will rent a private house.

I came back to the De Gasperi neighbourhood for affective reasons; I did not do it for economic reasons. This was my mother-in-law's house. We inherited it when she died. [...] My wife spent a lot of time taking care of her. She is attached to this place. [...] Of course, From an economic point of view, it is cheaper. I could still live in a rented house. [...] Public housing rent, like the ones people pay in the De Gasperi neighbourhood (around 20 euros per month), makes me live like a nabob with my pension. [...] I think that for people like me, from an economic point of view, public

cannot or do not want to pay public rent. It is low, of course, but sometimes it happens that you cannot find a stable job. Thus, some months you have money to afford the rent, but other months maybe you cannot do it. In those cases, like me, you prefer to save money for other needs, like your children's needs or the health services. [...] A public housing rent [between 17 and 60 euros] constitutes a good option if your income is high enough for it. Otherwise, it could be hard to pay even a public housing rent. [...] You feel an impulse to squat when your alternative options are not achievable (renting, for instance). My wife and I decided to live in our own home; our space! We could not afford a rent anymore; then, it happened that we occupied this place.

I pay the rent and utilities on time [and] take care of this home and shared spaces. I feel and act as 'normal citizen'. I am a 'normal citizen' in practise, but I am not officially, since local authorities do not legitimate my (and my wife's) position. [...] Illegal occupation of public flats in the district was managed by the Camorra crime organization. However, I prefer to avoid this argument since I was not involved; moreover, as you can imagine, it is a very thorny topic. [...] Today, some inhabitants who occupied their homes would like to regularise themselves, but local authorities do not permit them. Squatting often relates to housing needs and distress; but sometimes squatting is a 'habitus'. You squat just because you want to do it. It is a multifaceted topic.

housing is the best achievable solution. Housing costs are very low.

Housing needs, habitus, convenience, organized crime; each one of these features relates to squatting.

Table 5 – Thematic matrix ‘Future pathway: constrains and desires’.

<i>Interviewed subject</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Risk of eviction</i>	<i>Strategy for the future</i>	<i>Formal assignment of public flat</i>	<i>Personal future imagined</i>
<i>Francesca</i>		The risk of eviction exists for those who decide to occupy. [...] However, according to me, eviction means oppressing a relevant right, such as right to housing.	Staying together and protesting against evictions and for the right to housing would be the best means. [...] I would like to understand the reasons why the local administration has not approved the two amnesties [2008 and 2018] for squatters. [...] Usually, the local administration approves an amnesty each ten years. Why did it not do so in 2008 and 2018? If local authorities approved an amnesty, I would be regularised. [...] Since there are many inhabitants illegally occupying their homes, I would suggest regularising them in order to avoid De Gasperi becoming the district of illegal inhabitants.	Today, I do not care about the assignment of the public flats. I am out; I am not the legal recipient of my house. Thus, I have no right to housing now. [...] The new public flats [those established by the renewal program] are in good conditions. You can improve the quality of your housing conditions. The flats are bigger and new; buildings have elevators. It would be better to move there.	My future? It is dark. I think that I will stay here for a long time. I hope to be regularised.
<i>Davide</i>		We have never felt uneasy about eviction. We have two children; local authorities do not evict a family with young children. When you decide to squat, you gather information about the act, its risks and advantages [...] Eviction is a real risk, of course, but I do not think that someone in the district will be evicted.	////////////////////////////////////	When we lived in the historic centre of Ponticelli, local authorities informed us that we satisfied all the requirements for the assignment of a public flat. My wife was 41 <sup>st</sup> in the final ranking for public housing. It was 2008. We were waiting. Sometimes, we went to the department for public housing policies to ask information. [...] It seems that they lost our documents. I do not really know. However, we decided to squat as we could not wait to find a solution anymore.	I think that I will remain here for the next five years. However, I hope to move to somewhere else later.
<i>Giuseppe</i>		Institutions have been sleeping for a long time; they do not care about the illegal	I illegally occupy my home. [...]	Local authorities cannot even control the assignment of new	I do not know. Maybe I will go back to Turin. I still have some

management of public housing; now, they have woken up and noticed that there are many people illegally occupying public flats. [...]

People like me are waiting for the amnesty that would regularise squatters. If the local administration approved it, I would become a regular inhabitant. [...]

public flats in the whole district. New public flats [those that of the renewal program] have been vandalized, for instance. [...] Moreover, local authorities proposed the legal recipients of new flats should pay a guardian to keep the flats from being squatted in by other people. [...] If you all move together into a new public housing complex, you will not change anything. Same people, same conditions; you risk creating the same messy situation with regard to squatting.

contacts there. I could find a new house. [...] I could afford a rent of 400 euros; my wife and I need a tiny house, not a 'palace'.