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## ID 1432 | THE REUSE OF ABANDONED PUBLIC BUILDINGS: AN ANSWER TO HOUSING CRISES? AN INVESTIGATION ON THE CITY OF ROME

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**ABSTRACT:** The recent financial crisis had a strong impact on housing affordability. To the European Observatory on Homelessness the number of homeless has increased in all countries along the last ten years (Housing Europe, 2015). The current Europe refugee crisis is feeding this population, making proper policies more complex and urgent. Regrettably, the public support for housing in EU has decreased along the last ten years. In metropolitan areas’ peripheries, where there is a default in infrastructures and services, new residential buildings have been built. The Italian capital city well epitomizes this national framework. Between 2012 and 2015 Rome has consumed 160 ha. In this context, squatting has been often the only one solution for people who is waiting for a public house. Along these years, the movements for the housing right supported many people to have a quality dwelling. The research explored the re-use of public abandoned buildings as a possible solution for housing crisis investigating the case of the so called “Casilino 900” camp and of Roma people living there. Can the self-help housing for abandoned public buildings respond to the increasing housing demand? Employing municipal data on state-owned buildings, the paper proposes in its results a housing capacity map. The map shows the empty public properties in the city of Rome and identifies for each building its housing capacity. In the conclusions, considerations from the case study are drawn considering the broader national situation on re-use for housing of abandoned public space.

**KEYWORD:** housing crisis, public building, re-use, Roma population

### 1. BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 HOUSING POLICY AND HOUSING DEMAND IN ITALY: FOCUS ON THE CAPITAL CITY

In Italy 650.000 families are waiting for public housing (Federcasa, 2015). According to governmental data, eviction notices increased 48% between 2008 and 2015. The public housing stock (ex IACP) was partially sold or need to be refurbished. A critical lack of affordable houses does exist. Yet, due to the financial crisis, they are generally empty. Regrettably, the public support for housing in EU has decreased along the last ten years, from 1.1% of GDP in 2003 to 0.8% in 2012 (Pittini, Ghekière, Dijol, & Kiss, 2015). In Italy,

the public fund for social housing (GESCAL) was abolished and a lack in policies followed during the 1990s. To face the housing demand and the shortage in the investments, private funds have been introduced and a part of public stock have been sold.

Today housing policies in Italy are regulated by the “Housing Plan” (art. 11 D.L. 112/2008) and the management passed from the state to the municipal level. Social housing is considered today as a system of solutions for the welfare, so, differently from the traditional ERP (Edilizia Residenziale Pubblica) it is part of economic strategies and, thus, urban transformation programs. The National Plan for Housing Policies (Presidenza- Consiglio-dei-Ministri, 2009) expects to increment the public stock and to refurbish the existing one, and supports housing cooperatives formed by final residents of the public houses.

In the city of Rome, where is registered the highest housing demand in Italy, the “Housing Plan”, approved in 2010, expects to build 6.000 public housing (traditional ERP with public investments) and 20.000 social housing (public-private funds). The program is based on a demand for the weak segment of city population of 52.800 housing in 2009 (CRESME, 2009) and, considering city administration contributions, can afford 25.700 of the actual demand.

According to Legambiente, one of the most active environmentalist association in Italy, the Housing Plan will increase the current land-use surface in Rome with 40 million cubic meters, producing a land consumption equal to 9700 hectares (Bianchi & Zanchini, 2011). The construction of social housing on the outskirts aggravates the expulsion process of a large population that is unable to support rents in the gentrified city that has about 245.142 empty apartments (Ibid.).

In this framework of new buildings and empty rooms, the indebted Municipality has implemented a twofold policy strategy. On the one hand, it sold the vast public assets, including ERP properties, and, on the other, purchased or leased areas for public services. In addition to the purchase of areas for social housing, the Municipality rents apartments in residences whose rent value range from 2140 to 4200 euros/month to host family in housing emergency (21 Luglio, 2011). Beyond these costs, which are part of municipal public spending, there is the expense for the rent and the management of nomad camps (around 16 million euros / year according to data in 2011 by the association “21 Luglio”).

Meanwhile, in Rome, due to the ban on lists for public housing, the movements for the right to home and the citizens with difficulties in finding a dwelling moved on their own occupying empty buildings. According to interviewees listened in this research and as confirmed in municipality official website<sup>1</sup> (Comune-di-Roma, 2011), municipal administration acknowledges that occupations in some cases really helped housing emergency and so had to regulate these processes . According to a specific regional policy, based on self-help housing regional law (Lazio, 1998), eleven abandoned buildings in the city of Rome have already been refurbished and occupied. This law states that, if the Municipality supports the most of refurbishment costs (i.e. facade and structure), low-income people waiting for housing can take part to the public announcement for the rehabilitation of empty buildings, joining a housing cooperative.

## 1.2 ABANDONED PUBLIC SPACE AND THE GOVERNMENTAL INTERVENTION

The deindustrialization processes, began in the second half of the last century, have left abandoned and nonfunctional pieces of city. With the recent economic crisis, the need to regenerate and reactivate existing assets "in a medium to long-term perspective, safeguarding the environment, landscape and limiting agricultural land consumption as a key to sustainable development has become evident" (Arcidiacono, Bruzzese, Gaeta, & Pogiani, 2015).

That of urban voids (open spaces and unused buildings) is a phenomenon that has different origins and shapes. On the one hand, the great abandonment of industrial buildings that began at the end of the last century, linked to the decline of the Fordist production system, affirms the end of the urban growth of some contexts (shrinking cities) in parallel to the growing phenomenon of the megalopolis (Oswalt, 2006). On the other hand, the disposal of large urban infrastructures become obsolete, as some railways stations<sup>4</sup>. Another issue is that of unused large public structures such as barracks, convents, ex mental hospitals

<sup>1</sup> Interview with the representative of movement BPM. See Section 2 for details.

(abolished by a national law in Italy). Finally, there are all those abandoned private spaces that, due to the economic crisis, have lost their function.

To valorize public properties, the Italian government introduced a federalism program for public properties, and it is known as *Federalismo Demaniale*. It refers to barracks, villas, historic buildings that, the government transfer to local public administration to sold and cover the public debt (Presidente-della-Repubblica, 2010). Many of these spaces have been transferred from the state to the municipalities, worsening the economic and management constraints of local administrations. This valorization policy was carried out based on the housing offer, and on the belief that the real estate is coming into crisis and has been no longer able to adequately respond to demand as in the past, mainly due to the shortage of economic resources. As a result of such a policy orientation and as a prove of such a real estate crisis, there is a large amount of unsold assets and stalled real estate transactions (Mangialardo & Micelli, 2017).

If, on the one hand, there is an immobile real estate market, on the other hand, the crisis has produced innovative and different bottom-up experiences of re-use of abandoned spaces.

An example is the temporary re-use of spaces by the so-called creative class that has occupied abandoned buildings to organize artistic, cultural or social activity for a short period of time. Such experiences, which have been implemented in several European cities in the end of last century, have revealed new political instruments of negotiation between administration and active citizens (Inti & Ingaggiato, 2011).

Other contributions to the recovery of abandoned property are related to housing occupations, as the experiences in Rome that occurred in the last decade through the work of the three main groups for the housing right (BPM, Action, Coordinamento cittadino di lotta per la casa). If squatting until the 1970s and 1980s had a political aim, those of the last thirty years have been driven, above all, by the need to find an alternative housing solution and to fill in the lack in housing policies. In the capital city, many of these occupations have been approved by the Municipality because they contribute to solve housing emergencies<sup>1</sup>. From the point of view of public intervention in the process of recovering abandoned buildings, beyond the urban regeneration policies there are different experiences of relationships between administrations and active citizenship. In Milan, the Municipality generally acts with public-private funding partnership to elaborate projects for the re-activation and re-use of vacant buildings (i.e. BASE)<sup>2</sup>, for the third sector and the creative class, to support innovation experiences<sup>3</sup>.

The city of Turin, that for its industrial productive vocation has been interested, more than other Italian cities, by the industrial decline of the 1990s, historically moved towards urban recovery and programs for citizen participation and social interest (for instance, AxTO, Case del Quartiere)<sup>4</sup>.

In Naples, the current municipal administration has shown an ideal engagement with 'commons' issue by establishing a public campaign on this issue and a proper municipal secretary (Secretary on right to the city, urban policies, landscape and commons). Within this space of public debate, the Municipal administration conveyed in a resolution that last year recognized seven 'free' municipal buildings (as the promoters of those initiatives use to define the processes), previously occupied, as strategic commons for citizenship and 'civic development environments' (Comune-di-Napoli, 2016). Being formally acknowledged as space of public and cultural relevance within a municipal administration legal act (a resolution of municipal council<sup>5</sup>), they will be ideally protected from future eviction.

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<sup>1</sup> In an interview for this research a member of BPM group explains that the recent occupations in Rome have no more a temporary character as in the past. It is supposed to be that the inhabitants will stay longer, thus, the recovery operations have more quality, and care about energy saving too.

<sup>2</sup> BASE is a cultural innovation project in Milan. It is a 6.000 sq. mt. space based that host co-working, workshops, shows and artistic performances.

<sup>3</sup> Public lesson by Carlo Calvaresi, 2017, *Innovazione e rigenerazione urbana a Milano. Da BASE a molto altro*, University of Naples.

<sup>4</sup> "AxTO" is a public program by Turin Municipality for the regeneration of peripheries according to public spaces, housing, school, job and community. "Case del Quartiere" is a network of neighborhood places where different activities for the community take place.

<sup>5</sup> The resolution is DGC 27/05/2016 n.446

In Italy, where soil consumption is still very high, i.e. 8 m<sup>2</sup> / second in the last 50 years (ISPRA, 2016), urban regeneration is today the most pursued policy to save economic and environmental resources. Moreover, cities can count on a more active and conscious population about urban issues.

## 2. THE CASE STUDY

### 2.1 HOUSING POLICIES FOR ROMA POPULATION IN ITALY AND IN THE CITY OF ROME

The present research focused on the Roma population that never had easy access to a stable housing. In Italy, in fact, the gypsy host request has always been solved through the 'camp policies', i.e., urban areas, commonly located in the city fringes or peripheries, formally delimited and conceded or abusively occupied, where Roma people are precariously settled, living in caravans or shacks. This kind of response arises from the incorrect assumption that all Roma are nomads and they base their living culture in the camps.

These ideas are based in a mentality developed during the second half of the 1980s, when the first Regional Law (R.L.), N.82 of 24-5-1985 (Norm in favor of Roma people) was enacted (Lazio, 1985). The R.L. 82/1985 recognizes and protects the practice of nomadism associating it, though, to the whole Roma population. These measures have been efficient for the most part of Sinti and Roma population, mainly composed of nomad people living in Italy with difficulty in parking (since they were moving by caravans) and staying legally for a period in a public area. Today, however, at least 2/3 of the Roma population is sedentary and lives in houses. Some Italian Regions, as Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, established a local legislation which adopt and broaden the principles of the R.L. 82/1985 already in the 1990s (Lazio, 1985). As a matter of fact, since the 90s, a large Roma migratory wave occurred, due to refugees from the wars in Ex-Yugoslavia countries.

The temporary camps hosted refugees and the minimum living standards established by laws were no more applied due to the emergency to accommodate migrants.

In 2008 after the further migration from Romania (which joined the European Union in 2007), the Italian Government conferred to the Prefects of Rome, Milan and Naples (cities that host the largest number of Roma people), and then, Turin and Venice, extraordinary powers to solve the housing problem of Roma, and the situation of "Emergency" was acknowledged and declared.

Once again, the identified policy solution was the camp: a temporary answer before the housing inclusion, according to the declarations of municipal administration, which became permanent<sup>1</sup>. Anyhow, beyond the limits of political commitment with the issue of integration, the myopia of adopted policies and the economic barriers to access the Rome formal housing market, the issues of affordable housing for Roma people still confronts a major problem of social acceptability. Without a decisive political intervention to abolishing discriminations and to promoting the cultural integration of Roma people, this community, commonly labelled as a social problem and associated with micro-crimes and high urban violence, have poor chance to rent a house outside the camp. There are, in fact, many different hindering factors that get Roma housing inclusion, harder than that of other citizens. First, the common preconception, that prevents, in most cases, the simple request to rent a house. Second, the difficult to progress in the rankings to access to a public house for which, one of the requirements, is to have suffered an eviction, a condition in which most of Roma has never been, as they always lived in camps in Italy (and not in a formal house). Another hindering factor is that the political decision related to the location of a camp follows the real estate market and the profitability criteria linked to the rent of the area. It is necessary to free that area from a camp to raise its value. Conversely, if a land is not attractive for the real estate, it is more interesting to start an urbanization process building a new camp. There is, finally, a business barrier that involves the so-called nomad "equipped" camps<sup>2</sup>, linked to the land and infrastructures costs, as well

<sup>1</sup> This view has clearly emerged from the surveys of ethnographic work, both in communal documents and in articles produced by various field research.

<sup>2</sup> Equipped camps represent the answer of Rome Municipal Government to Roma people informal settlement. As alternative to the informal camps, the Municipality provides regular "equipped" camps that consist in private area where Roma families live in small modular containers. Conversely to the informal settlements, all the equipped camps are located outside the ring road which bypass city-center around Rome (Grande Raccordo Anulare - GRA)

as to the public funds for the associations involved. This factor is also related to another issue: the low claims of Italian government to the European funds for Roma Emergency (Italy had requested 1 million euro of EU funds in 2011 whereas Spain, which requested 62 million euro). In the city of Rome, when the “Nomads Plan”, the main tool of municipal policy on Rom issue, was presented in 2008, there were at least one hundred camps: “equipped” camps (so-called “solidarity villages”) with video surveillance and managed by non-Roma organizations; ancient partially-equipped camps, where often some services were provided; and, finally, informal settlements frequently evacuated and reformed in more invisible areas of the city (Romito, 2008).

The aim of the “Nomads Plan” was to host a maximum of 6000 Roma within 13 camps equipped in the capital territory (outside the ring of the so-called Gran Raccordo Anulare, whose acronym is GRA, the ring road which bypass city-center around Rome), for a total cost of 32 million euros, from the Roma emergency fund. The plan was based on the data collected by a census carried out by the Italian Red Cross in 2008, which reports: 2700 people in the fourteen “tolerated” camps, 2200 in over eighty abusive settlements and 2241 in the seven authorized villages. About 100 settlements for 7200 people.

## 2.2 THE CASILINO 900 : FROM THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENT TO THE EQUIPPED CAMP

The study focused on the real experience of a Kosovo community currently living in a last generation camp in the Rome suburb. The research has been structured as a story of transition from the slum, “Casilino 900”, where the community lived up to the settlement demolition, to the “equipped camp”. The failure of both housing solutions, one informal, the other regular, has prompted the community to organize themselves and move out of the camp to claim the right to housing.

“Casilino 900” was one of the most ancient informal settlement in the city of Rome. From the 1960s to the 1980s it hosted Italian southern migrants that arrived in the capital for job. Around the end of the 1960s the first Roma groups occupied the camp. Then, as an effect of wars in the Balkans, many refugees arrived. In 2000, around 703 people from Bosnia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, Poland, other regions of ex- Jugoslavia, Italy, Marocco and Czechoslovakia lived there in 150 barracks (21Luglio, 2011).

In 2008 the camp experienced several initiatives aimed at participation and integration of the inhabitants, as “Savorengo Ker” (translated from romani “the everyone home”): a self-built home realized by a group of inhabitants with the support of Università di Roma Tre and Stalker|ON. “Savorengo Ker” was built to symbolize the will of a part of Roma population to live in a house, not in containers, as housing policies always provided for them. Despite the initiatives to counteract the eviction, in February 2010 the “Casilino 900” was evacuated, according to the municipal “Nomads Plan”. In around a month was completed the demolition of the barracks and the transfer of residents (618 people including 273 minors) into four new generation equipped camps outside the GRA.

The group from Kosovo was transferred to “Camping River”, 30km far away from the “Casilino 900”, living in containers in an area rent by the Municipality (7€/person a day). The equipped camp had one hundred height containers (14, 21, 23 sq.mt.), height bungalow and twenty-two rooms for four hundred seventeen people (107 from “Casilino 900”) (Figure 1). The area is very close to the riverbank and it is reached getting a train form the city center plus a shuttle, running every hour, from the “Prima Porta” station (1€ each journey) localized 3km far away from the camp.

The regeneration of the area where the “Casilino 900” was, has never proceeded and the area has been recently illegally occupied again.



Figure 1. The container house at Camping River. First author field-work photo

### 2.3 RESEARCH METHOD AND MATERIALS: THE FIELD-RESEARCH

The research was shaped by an ethnographic approach at the methodological level, accordingly, different techniques were employed to address the field research (Beaud & Weber, 2007; Gold, 1997; Olivier de Sardan, 1995). The field research last nine months and combined the following main tools for data collection: participant observation in the public assemblies organized by the Kosovo community; interviews to the actors involved, informal conversation with key informants and documental analysis/secondary source consultation (web-sites, public reports and municipal administration data). While triangulating all these different sources, a final map of the abandoned public properties in Rome was elaborated.

The assemblies were organized by the Kosovo community transferred in “Camping River” one year before in collaboration with different associations of non-Roma people (named gagé in Roma language). Meetings occurred weekly for the first four months. The group had two directions and aims: report the violation of human rights of Roma population in the capital and find a better housing solution in one of the abandoned building of the city. Through a key informant from the Kosovo Community, we could access to the “Camping River” and map it, also getting interviews with inhabitants<sup>1</sup>.

We collected five interviews with camp inhabitants, based on a life history interview approach: three with residents from the Kosovo community that have been transferred from “Casilino 900”; one with a young guy from Romania living there and finally one with the shuttle driver who has been working for Roma equipped camps services for a long period<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, three interviews were realized with members of associations involved in project for alternative solutions for housing crisis and best practices in Italy: a member of “BPM” (Blocchi Precari Metropolitani), a group for the right to home in the capital; a member of “Popica Onlus”, an association helping Roma population in the city of Rome; a representative from “Casa della Carità” a charity association from Milan.

Follows a section on best practices of self-help housing experiences in the city of Rome according to the Regional Law on self-help housing (L.R. 11 Dec. 1998, n.55 ), to explain how does it work and to carry on this as possible solution for housing crisis (Lazio, 1998).

Employing municipal data on state-owned buildings, the research proposes in its results a housing capacity map. After data collection, inspections to abandoned public properties in the city were conducted and documented by a photo archive and field-notes. This register was used to produce a housing capacity map that shows the empty public properties in the city of Rome. For each one of the considered group of buildings its housing capacity is estimated. Other properties were selected for social and public services, or appointed to be sold to finance municipal housing policy.

<sup>1</sup> Every equipped new generation camp is monitored. To enter it is necessary to show an ID and to inform the reason and the name of the resident visiting.

<sup>2</sup> The cohabitation between the Romans and Kosovars that arrived in the “Camping River” later was not pacific. The Romans did not want to be interviewed.

Finally, the map allowed to select, together with Roma community representatives, a building sample for future self-help housing activities, providing a related cost assessment. The building chosen to develop a housing project was a unused depot of the Local Transport Agency in Rome claimed by different realities in the capital.

### 3. FINDINGS

#### 3.1 CONTENTS FROM THE FIELD-WORK

The ethnographic experience – visits at the camp, participation at assemblies, interviews with housing activist at national level, secondary data and document analysis -, allowed to produce information at three level: 1) housing and human condition of roman community in Rome; 2) possible political path and operative answers to housing crisis (especially in term of reuse); 3) elements for an operative solution for Roma housing problem in Rome.

As for the first point, contents came from life history interviews made with Camp dwellers as well as from the personal researcher experience of the Camp life. As a matter of fact, the visits to the Camp showed the difficulties to access it from the city-center. Starting from Flaminio metro station in Piazza del Popolo, Camping River dwellers must take a train to Prima Porta, then a bus or private Shuttle which connects directly this point to the Camp, but passes once per hour. Therefore, Village River dwellers take at least 1 hour and a half to reach the city center. Life history interviews showed all housing diseases related with the container solution and the different approach from different communitarian group. Two different communities were joined in the Camping River, the Kosovars, mainly dislocated from Casilino 900 and the Roma people, mainly arrived there after the '90 Balkans wars. Roma people just provided one short interview. In general, this community showed fear to speak about their condition, also due to the relation with local cooperative which manages their housing in the camp. Moreover, the unique interview coming from this group showed the cultural relevance of communitarian dimension for Roma people, where being close to family and its own community is a priority which lead dwellers to accept housing diseases.

*We Romans Roma could not live alone. We are just fine when we are all together. So even when one day I get married I ought to stay in a place where my whole family is [...]. It's not because we do not have the money that we remain here, but because we need so much space to live close to our families (Dimitri, Romania).*

On the contrary, Kosovar Roma community members interviewed, showed a firm will to claim for a real house. This community arrived earlier in the city and suffered previously the eviction from “Casilino 900” to “Village River”. They are not nomads and suffer the camp housing condition based on 14/21 or maximum 32 sq.mt. containers.

*We want to create a negotiation platform [with public institutions because we only want homes, not to live with two or three thousand people in a fence (Bajram, Kosovo).*

As for the second level of contents the interviews with the representatives of Blocchi Precari Metropolitani (BPM), a coordinated network of housing struggle movement, and Popica Onlus showed an increasing reality of Italian housing policy: the replacement of public government by social movements, active citizenship and so called third sector in the provision of welfare. BPM reported a long experience in urban occupation, even testifying the recent changes of the movement action responding to the changes of housing crisis and related social demand. The interviewee told how the occupation strategy changed along the last twenty years. Until the ninetens housing struggle movement pointed at empty large building, such as school, emptied by the demographic downturn. Nowadays, the BPM promote a new kind of occupation aimed not only at large spaces but also at empty apartments. Moreover, while 1970s e 1980s housing movements were born to support mostly national community (e.g., meridional immigration), the current housing struggle has a larger responsibility and need to learn to deal with a multicultural, multiethnic and even multigenerational (from the student to the old people) demand. The interviewee referred of a proper structured administration based on desks open to the public, collecting private demands on the base of a pattern form. No more public houses are going to be built, and list to popular housing are stopped since many years. This, together with new immigration waves, leads to a crisis proved in the BPM interview by the existence of lists also for occupations.

*There are counters that address the issue of the right to housing, for example, to protect against evictions, unsecured loans. These counters come both through propaganda and word-of-mouth. One tries to understand the problem of the applicant person. You compile a chart that lets you understand the issues in terms of housing, economics or for example regarding documents in the case of immigrants. Once the problem has been identified, we explain what our goal is: to put into motion the Municipality Housing Plan of six thousand popular houses, which has never taken off, and therefore participate in the demonstrations that push this plan. Those who live in a very delicate situation are assisted in occupations that have already begun, they decide through assemblies or ask for other movements. Occupations are decided based on a project at times they are to carry out a protest, (those of those days at the former San Paolo), sometimes to stay.*

BPM interviewee emphasized in his tale the new relief acquired from the activity of reuse of occupied space. This activity has turned fundamental especially in the case of large dismissed space occupation, i.e., the occupation of those space born for a use different from housing, such as ex-industry. From this perspective, a paradigmatic experience was that of Metropoliz LAB, where BPM member and Popica Onlus<sup>1</sup> cooperated.

The Metropoliz experience concerned the occupation and reuse of an ancient bakery factory, dismissed and abandoned for twenty years. Interviewees reported how Metropoliz was a succeeded experience both on the side of cultural integration and reuse for social housing. Different cultural communities, from Latin America, eastern Europe, Northern Africa and even Italian and Roma People live there. They formed a larger community with co-habitation rules. They use local materials, still from the ancient building to build their own houses. The integration process was not an easy one, especially for Roma people who arrived later. Nonetheless, it testifies the viability of reuse and self-recovery of abandoned building as an alternative path for housing emergency. Housing emergency concerns with people in social, economic and, in some cases, political marginalized conditions. The process of occupation and reuse, guided by a partnership among different social actors, opened to member of this community a door to social inclusion. Maria di Maggio, of Popica Onlus stated:

*The community [a specific Roma Community of the neighborhood Centocelle in Rome periphery] did not rely on the third sector, and continues to be independent. Considering the need to start a residential path, they turned to BPM, as a struggle for the home. Meetings were held and the community participated in the struggles for housing rights together with the movements*

This kind of bottom-up experiences, which occurs in the informality, with no official government recognition and legitimation, and even in the struggle, reflects a logic of integration totally absent in housing solutions such as those of equipped camp.

Finally, the third kind of contents collected during the ethnographic research concerned data about abandoned/empty public building in Rome. This information based on municipal government documents, were discussed together with Roma Kosovar communities, within assemblies in the aim to identify the ideal space for re-use and housing among those listed. Results of this part of the research are presented in the following Section.

### **3.2 CONTENT ANALYSIS: THE HOUSING CAPACITY MAP**

Between 2008 and 2011 the city of Rome experienced three different occurrences which, somehow, provided different opportunities to rethink the re-use of public buildings: 1) the National government measure establishing the federalism of the public properties (federalismo demaniale) according to the d.lgs. 28 May 2010 n.85 (Presidente-della-Repubblica, 2010); 2) sale of National Ministry of Defense barracks; and 3) the Local Transport Agency (ATAC) financial crack.

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<sup>1</sup> Popica Onlus is the other association interviewed which is concerned with Roma children and in general with Roma integration issue.

To reduce public debt, the Italian Government is transferring state properties (buildings and lands) to the municipalities to propose valorization projects (properties federalism). In July 2010, a list of building complexes totaling euros 3.087.612.747 was drawn up. In Rome alone within GRA ring the municipal administration acquired 19 buildings and 37 land. About half of the complexes of historic or environmental significance, others of commercial interest, can be resold to achieve the Municipality's goal of recovering the debt (the cadastral value is euros 23.803.958 according to municipal data).

Furthermore, there are all the unused military complexes, included in a fund built up in 2010, which is a result of an agreement between the Municipality and the Ministry of Defense (art. 2 comma 195 Law n. 191/2009) (Presidenza-Consiglio-dei-Ministri, 2009). At time this research was carried out, in 2011, thanks to this agreement, the Municipality planned to collect 600 million euros in properties from the Government to ease the public deficit. So far, Rome has found fifteen building complexes, including forts old buildings and barracks.

At least 8 complexes were identified to be converted into residences to cover the housing emergency in the capital. The choice of complexes is inspired by the observations made by the "Barracks Committee" (Comitato per le caserme), a civic organization made up of groups of citizens and citizen associations to claim the public use of unused military properties.

At the local level, finally, another opportunity to re-use public abandoned properties has emerged. Following the financial collapse of ATAC, the Municipality intervened for the alienation and enhancement of the company's real estate assets to reduce the debt. Currently, there are fourteen building complexes<sup>1</sup> that could be re-converted to new use. Height of these can be transformed, respecting the existing volume, with no variation in the Piano Regolatore Generale - PRG (Rome zoning plan). The other six complexes can be converted for a different use than service public transport, according to a local regulation of 2008 for dismissed infrastructures, that provides 50% volume building increasing.

Thus, there are forty-eight public buildings of which at least eleven can be retrieved for residential use. Those located within the GRA have been selected to recover the centrality, in opposition to the sprawl that increases land consumption and traffic to the capital, where the main services are. The rest of the properties is used for public activities. Necessary expenses for the renovation of building complexes that can respond to more than three thousand homes have been estimated. Base on the costs related to self-help housing recovery, an average spending (over excess) of € 1400/sq.mt. (to be divided between cooperatives and public authorities) was established. In addition, the partial sale of other properties has been assessed to cover the public costs for the refurbishment in lack of public funds for housing. (Figure 2)

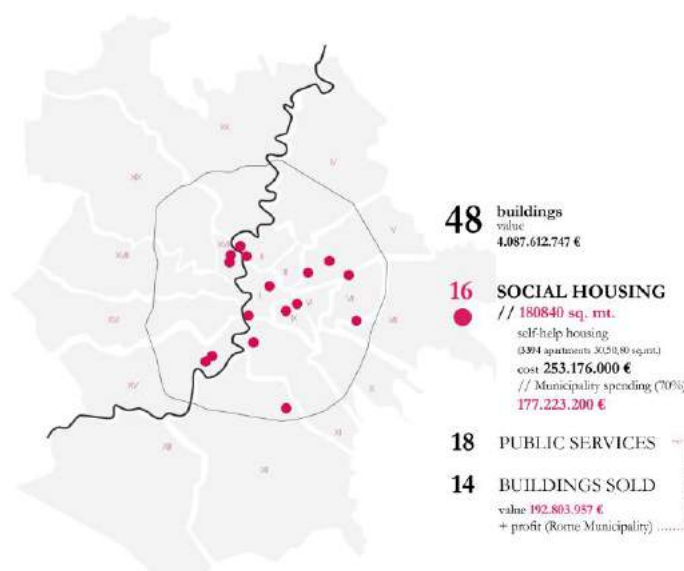


Figure 2. Housing capacity map of dismissed public buildings in the city of Rome. First author elaboration

<sup>1</sup> Resolution 39, June 2011 by Rome Municipality

Lastly, a self-help housing model is proposed on one of the selected complexes, occupied by the movements for the right to home: a dismiss depot of local public transport agency. The depot is in a central area of Rome, just steps from the metro and the Basilica of Saint Paul. The context is mainly residential and it is included in a urban regeneration program.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Italy has a vast abandoned real estate portfolio and a relevant number of people waiting for a house also because housing policies have been slow and myopic over the last decades and part of the public properties have been sold. This research provides evidences that the self-help housing to re-use abandoned public buildings can be a technical viable path for housing crisis and against land take. The case presented shows, above all, that main barriers are of political and administrative nature. Temporary solutions (i.e. containers and residences) for housing emergency (refugees, Roma population, people in the lists for housing) are no longer desirable, as they contributed to reducing public funds.

The experience of self-help housing in the Italian region of Lazio is an example of sustainable, (at the same time economic, environmental and social) recovering of public buildings. The regional administration covers the expenses to recover common and external parts. The occupants gather in co-operative and restructure the interior of their future homes. As a return to the society, common spaces inside the buildings are provided for social services or to host associations. In addition to building spaces, this practice builds communities through the recovery work and the common home need. As a result of the creative work of building his own home, a bond between the good and the inhabitant, and, thus, a sense of responsibility and care for that space is produced. In Rome many of these occupations have produced new centralities for the city: multiethnic places where social integration and environmental sustainability is experimented.

The theme of integration is more and more current in Europe, especially in Italy, increasingly affected by refugees migrations.

The assistance approaches to the Roma population have shown many limitations, as the “Casilino 900” case showed. Regarding the Roma issue, it has been pointed out that it should not be treated in the specificity of ethnicity, but within policies that concern any citizen. The limit to a specific approach to the Roma population, as a specific cultural community, which has been the most popular until today, has produced marginalization and social exclusion with inevitable negative effects on the non-Roma population as well. The camps, as the experts maintain, as complainants who live there and as evidenced by the continuing news stories, are ghettos of illicit. Nando Sigona using a Foucault expression defines them as “total spaces [...] places where the life events [...] of an individual appear to implant in a fully encoded existence” (Sigona, 2015).

The camps provided by the “Nomads Plan” are in isolated contexts, are structures designed for five hundred people, with administrative costs for the municipality comparable to rent a house for each family. Just an integration approach, driven by forward-looking policy and long-term cultural (and not only economical or technical) programs can solve situation of ordinary emergency.

If nomadism in Italy can be said to be disappeared, then speaking of nomadic camps is a non-sense<sup>1</sup>. The goal is to facilitate access to the home. Housing solutions should be considered for individual realities (families, individuals, extended families, etc.), as is the case for non-Roma families. For those who live in Italy for many years and are in the lists for social housing, it is necessary to rethink the requirements for the access.

Parks can be used as temporary structures for nomads (about 1/3 of Roma population in Italy) or for those who want to start a residential settlement. However, management should be rethought because it is subject to high costs and reconsidered location because it does not favor integration. Valuable alternatives for extended families who want to continue living together are micro-villages.

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<sup>1</sup> According to data by association helping Roma population (“Comunità di Sant’Egidio” in Rome, “Casa della Carità” in Milan, “Caritas Diocesana” in Naples) 1/3 of Roma living in 2011 in the main Italian cities stayed in camps, while 2/3 lived in houses.

Based on these conclusions, we argue that an integration approach for housing problem needs to be settled at level of national governmental policy. Thus, it is necessary to include “Roma emergency” in the more general housing issue in Italy, which is especially urgent in the capital city, where Roma population, citizens and immigrants joined to claim the right to home.

Finally, as the presented active citizenships initiatives in the capital city show, the self-help housing for abandoned buildings, can convey the civic creativity and provide an effective driver of social mobilization and political pressure, against the government inaction.

It is necessary to return to invest in housing policies. The regional law of Lazio on self-help housing is useful to rethink the social housing building programs.

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