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## **The rise of "vetero-liberal" neighborhood politics Roman borgate from the collectivist to the privatistic era**

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## **Abstract**

Since the 1950s, the dramatic lack of affordable housing pushed internal immigrants coming to the city of Rome by hundreds of thousands to illegally build housing in expansion areas around the city. By 1981, approximately a third of a total city population of 2.800.000 dwellers lived in these informal urban areas called “borgate”.

Over the years, “borgate” witnessed the increasing political influence of the Communist Party and its urban organizations, coming to form a “red belt” surrounding the conservative urban core of the Italian capital city. In the 1970s, thanks to massive turnouts in the borgate, a progressive coalition led by the Communist Party was eventually able to gain the control of city government with the central goal of “healing” the “urban fracture” between the middle and upper class core and the informal periphery: large scale plans aimed at recognizing property titles to borgate dwellers while providing them with new services and infrastructure were implemented.

The paper discusses the shift from a collectivist to a privatistic era in the treatment of the problem of informality in Rome with the rise of a desotian emphasis over property titling and formalization. More in particular, the paper presents two brief case studies of new urban policies allowing forms of private owners’ self organization in the design and provision of local services and infrastructures.

In conclusion, I argue that the analysis of these two cases potentially bring to light another case of “actually existent neo-liberalism” (.....), that is deeply embedded in and determined by some structural and non-structural characteristics of the local environment.

## **The development of the “informal metropolis”.<sup>1</sup>**

Between 1945 and 1975, Rome’s population grew by almost 800.000

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inhabitants, mostly under the push of internal migrations coming from southern and central rural regions. In the lack of an extensive industrial sector, migrants were attracted by the expansion of the construction and low-skilled service sectors on one side and of the high-skilled service sector on the other side (Coppola, 2008). The booming housing demand associated with the demographic increase proved to be a challenge for a deeply unbalanced local urban planning and housing provision system that, since national reunification, had been characterized by the relevance of private land interests, the lack of a consistent public inventory of developable land and the over-production of middle and upper-class housing and the under-production of working class housing (Violante, 2008). More in particular, during the post-war era, land and real estate interests will be effective – through the establishment of clientelistic and corruptive ties and agreements with local political powers dominated by the Christian Democrats (DC) – at orienting planning policies towards choices ensuring very high returns for private land and real-estate holdings and investments. Following this agreement – defined as “Blocco Edilizio” - the city will expand caotically mostly in the form of extremely dense, low quality and under-serviced urban neighborhoods oriented to a middle class demand (Insolera, 1981).

In this context, much of the housing demand expressed by migrants employed – both formally and informally – in the low-skilled service sector and more in general by the lower classes will be left unanswered: the lack of affordable housing on the private market will be coupled with a persistent under-production of public housing units that was functional to the hegemony of private interests over the planning process (Insolera, 1981). A consistent part of this demand will be therefore oriented towards solutions provided by a growing system of informal and illegal housing provision. Starting with the 1950s, informal settlements of variable size and morphology developed in the city and at its periphery. The phenomenon continuously expanded throughout the post-war

decades: in 1951, 150.000 people lived in such settlements, a number growing to 400.000 in 1961 and finally peaking to 800.000 in 1981 (Coppola, 2008).

Much of the informal activity will lead to the creation of “borgate”, i.e. self-built urban neighborhoods developed on peripheral privately-owned green-fields mostly located in proximity of major arterial roads. According to the literature, the development of borgate will mostly reproduce a similar development pattern: land-owners excluded from development opportunities by urban planning decisions will make their land available through the establishment of a somehow “parallel” land market, lower-class migrants and natives will buy – with or without the mediation of third parties – individual plots of land on these markets and, finally, they will develop these plots in the form of self-built and self-designed single-family homes serviced by some self-built basic infrastructures (Berlinguer and Della Seta, 1976 and 1988; Clemente and Perego, 1983, Cremaschi, 1994; Coppola, 2008; Zanfi, 2008). Over the time, the process will increase in scope and sophistication with the involvement of a wide range of mediators and professionals and – starting with 1980s – with the appearance of a housing supply more oriented to middle class customers both on the residential and second-homes’ markets (Clemente and Perego, 1983).

The “informal” nature of borgate is therefore manifold: it involves the subdivision and marketization of land not planned for private development, the actual construction of housing with no involvement of city planning activities and with no respect of planning and housing regulations, the resort to labor and design services on the “black market” and, finally, the lack of security of tenure on behalf of the inhabitants.

### **The politics of informality**

Soon, *borgate* will become the scene for the political activism of the left and especially of the Italian Communist Party (Pci). Through a complex and innovative set of newly founded urban actors – among which the most important

will be the “Unione borgate” - Pci will be able to establish its political and electoral hegemony over the informal settlements. By the years, a “red belt” of informal neighborhoods will take shape around the middle-upper class and conservative center of the city: the informal metropolis will become “alternative” to the formal metropolis also in terms of their respective political and ideological references (Coppola, 2008).

More in particular, starting with the 1960s, new neighborhood-based organizations - *Comitati di quartiere* (Neighborhood committees) - will develop across peripheral areas and in informal settlements. These organizations – that were very often linked to Pci and to its urban organizations – will become influential local participatory agencies effective at mobilizing residents around local and eventually city-wide agendas focusing on challenges such as bad housing conditions and the lack of urban services (Bnd erlinguer adella Seta, 1981).

Starting with 1960s, campaigns promoted by the left and its urban organizations will enroot themselves in sociological and urbanist interpretations of the raise of informal housing as being functional to a backward economic and social structure based on the extraction of urban rent more than on the making of industrial profits. The entrenchment of a dualistic organization of the city between a middle and upper class, relatively serviced centre and a lower-class, under-serviced (and very often informal) periphery will be seen as the most striking spatial outcome of the hegemony of the “Blocco edilizio” over city politics (Ferrarotti, 1970)

The progressive urban agenda will be centred around this interpretation proposing to solve the housing question through large investments in public housing, the control of private production and the repression of illegal private subdivisions of rural land. At the same time, Pci and its urban organizations will also advocate for policies aimed at bringing infrastructures and services to informal settlements and for the recognition of voting rights to internal migrants

living in the *borgate*, who were prevented to become formal residents of the city by the inheritance of anti-urban fascist legislation (Coppola, 2008).

Also thank to the pressure of progressive campaigning, the issue of informal housing will become more and more relevant in local politics. Starting with the 1960s, the city administration will implement policies specifically oriented at the treatment of “borgate”. In 1962, the new structural plan will acknowledge - through a zoning decision - the existence of several informal settlements, will implement a plan for the extension of sewage and water systems and for the construction of new schools, and will invest in the construction of some limited public housing projects (Coppola, 2008).

These policies will gain momentum during the following decade when Pci – thank, in particular, to the massive electoral mobilization in the borgate – will be able to form a new progressive majority at the City Council. The strategic objective of the new city government will be “to heal the urban fracture” between the center and the peripheries, still largely illegal, of the city (Perego, 1981). In 1978, the administration will take a new zoning decision recognizing the existence of virtually all illegal settlements built since the end of WWII while. Starting with 1974, the administration will also implement budget decisions aimed at funding massive plans for the extension of infrastructures, public transport and social services to the borgate. Every illegal settlement will become the site of specific regeneration plans – the so-called “piani di recupero” - integrating these new public investments in infrastructure and services with private investment in new formal and market-rate housing and with government-funded investment in public housing projects (Coppola, 2013).

Still, these zoning decisions and regeneration policies would not solve the central problem of tenure. In 1980 a regional law would introduce an amnesty aimed at granting formal property titles to people who had built illegally their own dwellings. The new provision, promoted by a coalition hegemonized by PCI, was aimed at giving a more stable legal basis to the policies implemented

by the city administration. This provision will become fully effective only in 1985 with the approval of new national legislation – the so-called “Condono edilizio” – that would establish the right to access formal property on the part of people having built illegal housing for a recognizable “social need”, meaning the impossibility to access housing neither on the private market nor through public housing. In order to fully legalize their properties, individuals applying for the Condono had to pay a fee – a forfeit sum of so-called “oneri di urbanizzazione”, a tax that applies to any new building development - while city administration had to implement regeneration plans (“Piani di recupero”) aimed at realizing basic infrastructures and services accordingly to established national planning regulations (Berdini, 2010).

The same year, the new city government approved a multi-year housing plan that had the ambition to make the planning and real estate processes finally transparent, favoring at the same time the rationalization and higher productivity of the construction industry. The plan was to be implemented mainly through the construction of large public housing (“edilizia popolare”) and social housing (“edilizia convenzionata”) projects. In 1984, projects for 260.000 residents had already been completed or were on the way to being completed. Such massive public housing projects were supposed to respond not only to the housing needs of a low-income demand but also to the lack of urban services and facilities affecting the illegal settlements.

Contextually, the creation of new decentralized municipal councils and the mobilization of the Pci-controlled urban organizations and community associations were supposed to ensure a large citizens’ participation to the entire process of the new urban policy (Salvagni e Garano, 1985).

### **A desotian experiment in the Global North?**

Among the different policies promoted by the Italian state in order to support widespread access to homeownership during the long post-war era (Coppola,

2012), the “titling” of informal self-built housing – through the mentioned “condono” procedures - has been one of the most important, both from a qualitative point of view – the exceptional character of this policy in the context of a “first world” country – and from a quantitative point of view – over 400,000 Romans, many of them living in the borgate, will file an amnesty request since 1985 (Berdini, 2010). Anticipated by local legislation, the 1985 law allowed a process of massive albeit “distorted” “democratization” in the access to homeownership and to urban rent specifically benefitting social groups that were once extremely marginal in the city class hierarchies (Clementi and Perego, 1983).

What happened in Rome seems to be comparable to what is described in Hernando De Soto’s account of formalization processes involving the housing sector of the city of Lima (De Soto, 1989, 2000). At first glance, it might look inappropriate to use an analytical model developed in a Global South context to discuss a Global North case study. Yet, if we look at the processes of self-construction for residential purposes and mass access to home ownership mentioned by De Soto in reference to the city of Lima, it is not possible to underplay its proximity to the Roman case. Furthermore, we have to consider how, since the 1960, critical social theory will explain – as already mentioned – the raise of informality as one of the most blatant outcomes of the “backward modernity” characterizing the evolution of Rome (Ferrarotti in Coppola, 2008). Discussing the case of informal housing production in Lima, De Soto will stress some particular aspects that seem relevant for the analysis of the Roman case as well. In Lima, informal housing production was not happening in a legal void, but in "an extra-legal system of rules aimed to some extent at regulating social relations, addressing the lack of legal protection and gradually gaining stability and security for the acquired rights" (De Soto, 1989). In this context, informal housing was not just the self-managed response to the right to housing of many migrants but also a form of compensation for those owners who were unable, for

specific urban planning and regulation decisions, to develop their land and extract rent on a formal market. By means of collective action - both at the time of self-construction and during the collective mobilizations aimed at obtaining legal recognition of their properties - the “informals” were able to overcome the barrier represented by the high costs of formality. Informality was therefore to be understood as a massive reaction to the unsustainable costs of formality, through the stratification of a regulative dimension that was somehow parallel and alternative to the legal regulative framework. This parallel dimension was supposed to produce and distribute the good the migrants needed – a dwelling – in a material and unmaterial form that was for them viable and desirable (De Soto, 1989). While praising informals’ ingenuity in setting up a parallel market and normative system, De Soto would also stress the costs of informality, above all those related to the uncertainty that descended from the absence of formal property titles: "the informal do not use or preserve the resources available to them as they would if they were sure of their rights" (De Soto, 1989). Part of these costs was also, the impossibility to transfer property easily or to use it as a collateral, a factor that was limiting the productivity of their assets.

The neo-liberal policies De Soto would famously suggest are based on this analysis of informality. The granting of formal ownership titles to the informals’ assets was seen as essential for the conversion of what De Soto will define, in a later book, “dead capital” - properties and economic activities placed on informal markets - in “living capital” - assets that, having accessed formality, could in turn generate capital (De Soto, 2000). Given the potential value of “dead capital”, that was actually larger than “living capital” in many Global South countries, the formalization process would have allowed, according to De Soto, a strong acceleration in the investments’ dynamic which would have greatly benefited those marginal urban social groups whose survival who previously hitherto depended on the informal markets. Discussing the case of Lima, De Soto would also argue that the “titling” policies implemented by the

city of Lima were simply recognizing the true rational standing behind the expansion of the informal housing sector: in fact, the “informals” had many times rejected the perspective of collective ownership preferring instead private ownership of the assets they built.

De Soto was happy to acknowledge how, thank to the mentioned formalization policies, homeownership was more prevalent in the city of Lima among low-income than among middle-income residents. (De Soto, 1989). In Rome too, thank to the “condono edilizio”, the borgate are the areas with the highest home ownership rates in the city (AIC and Unione Borgate, 2009). I argue, that even if not made explicit by political actors, Rome has been the stage for a massive scale experimentation of the *desotian* neoliberal recipe that had manifold political implications.

### **From collectivism to privatism**

Overall, in the Roman borgate - as a result of the new planning and zoning decisions promoted by progressive coalitions at the local level and of the “titling” policy (“Condono edilizio”) promoted at the national level – it has been produced the conversion of dead capital into living capital theorised by Hernando De Soto.

With the granting of property titles, that have been acquired under exceptionally favorable conditions, hundreds of thousands families have had access to homeownership in the form of the possession of a fungible asset usable as a collateral in any financial transactions; they have entered the real-estate market as suppliers of assets whose values have been steadily and consistently appreciating throughout the years and finally they have established flourishing family economies built around the inter-generational transmission of housing or of capitals created through the commodification of housing (Coppola, 2012).

Some of these operations were already possible before the “Condono edilizio” but - De Soto would argue - with far greater costs, costs that made any investment strategy involving housing far more uncertain and risky.

I argue that the formalization policies carried out in the Italian context have pursued, at least implicitly, the goal of regenerating informal settlements – in the case of Rome, the borgate – through the activation of the “virtuous” processes promised by the implementation of the desotian model. Following the model, once freed from the constraints of informality, the growth potential embedded in previous “dead capital” accumulated in the borgate during the decades of their development and expansion would be released allowing wide processes of assets’ valorization and urban development.

This shift is a fundamental factor in the acceleration of the evolution of the politics of informality in Rome. I argue that, from this point of view, we can distinguish two different periods: a collectivist era and a privatist era. These two distinctive periods are not to be understood as necessarily alternative: the shift from a paradigm to another, has in fact, accompanied political parties and urban organizations without apparent cultural ruptures or traumatic conflicts.

Regarding the “collectivist era”, we can affirm that starting with the 1960s the Roman left – mainly Pci and the radical left, as long as their wider organizational milieux – proposed a narrative of the “borgate problem” organized around the themes of the multidimensional deprivation and exclusion of these urban areas and populations that was seen as a direct function of a structurally unfair model of urban and, more broadly, economic development (Ferrarotti, 1970; Violante, 2008). Following this narrative, the Roman left – once sized local power – inspired its government action to the goal of making available to the excluded - through policies that were essentially redistributive, from both a spatial and social point of view - those urban rights of social reproduction in the form of "collective consumption" (Castells, 1977; Katznelson, 1992) that had previously been denied to the people of borgate

(Perego, 1981; Coppola, 2008). This goal was achieved primarily through the construction of the so-called “città pubblica” - essentially the provision of basic physical and social infrastructure in the existing informal areas and of new integrated public housing developments - that was interpreted and presented as alternative to the previously dominant mechanism of production of the urban presided by the “Blocco Edilizio” (Insolera, 1981).

Regarding the “privatistic era”, we can argue that at the end of the period of communist control of the city government, the 1985 “Condono edilizio” – anticipated, as we have seen, by a 1980 regional law promoted by a Pci dominated majority – would change in depth the collective perception of borgate. Following the Desotian model, the Roman “informal” would cease to be a “paria” with no stake in the capitalistic economy to become a potential homeowner able to forfeit and privatize part of the value created by those same policies carried out during the "collectivist" era thank to his own political mobilization. The exercise of urban-based social reproduction rights would progressively turn into the widespread internalization of private real estate generated capital gains. At the same time, the decline and crisis of public housing programs would emphasize even more the credibility and desirability of mass homeownership, “titling” of informal assets included, as a solution of a specific social problem - access to housing – and as an opportunity to enhance social mobility by the means of mass integration in the circuits of the form of capitalism which had the highest social recognition in the Italian society: real estate capitalism.

Across this shift, borgate would cease to be a space of exception – a dystopian condition that was also the ground for the successful organization of the victims of this same dystopian condition (Violante, 2008) – becoming gradually “normalized” and integrated into the “ordinary city” and its political and economic workings. I argue that the “privatistic era” in the treatment of the “borgate problem” will reach its climax with the formulation of some innovative

planning and urban policy devices introduced in the 1990s and 2000s. More specifically, a 1997 city ordinance will establish the principle of the direct mobilization of owners involved in the process of accessing formal titling through the “condono edilizio” in the design and construction of infrastructures and services in their area of residence through the creation of local associations (“ConSORZI di autorecupero”); while the 2008 structural plan will introduce a new planning tool defined as “Programma Integrati” (Print) establishing the principle that in peripheral areas including former borgate, needed urban regeneration processes had to be based – in terms of generation of public resources – on the activation of private development schemes. In this paper I focus on the creation of ConSORZI, putting aside the issue of “Programmi Integrati” that has been the object of another recent study (Coppola, 2013).

### **The experience of “ConSORZI di autorecupero”**

The idea of a direct participation of property owners in the construction and management of basic public services in the context of rehabilitation plans had already emerged in the 1970s. However, the idea will be materialized in 1997 by a center-left city administration: according to the new city ordinance, property owners were granted the opportunity to deposit the fees needed in order to access formal titling – the already mentioned “oneri di urbanizzazione” - in the coffers of new local associations named “ConSORZI di auto-recupero”. “ConSORZI”, that are formed by property owners who freely decide to join them, are granted the power to use their budget for the design and implementation of public infrastructures and services like roads, sewage and water systems, public parks and social centers (Cellamare, 2010). Using this new device, owners associated in the “consorzio” had the opportunity to directly employ the proceeds of the fees, that would have been otherwise deposited in the city budget, in the implementation of upgrading projects to be located within the perimeter of the “ConSORZIO” in which they were included. Successive changes in

the regulation have granted Consorzi also the power to raise fees generated by new formal private developments that would normally be collected in the city coffers.

“Consorzi” generally have a rather slim management structure: they have a president and a board of directors who are elected among and by the members who collectively decide the projects that are to be realized in the area. For the implementation of their programs, “Consorzi” rely also on intermediary structures that offer support in the design and construction of the projects and manage the lengthy and cumbersome process of filing individual owners’ amnesty requests at the city government. These intermediary organizations have been created both by urban organizations already active in the “collectivist era” - as in the case of *AIC Recupero*, founded by the formerly communist-leaning “Unione Borgate” – and by different coalitions of Consorzi, as in the case of “Consorzio Borgate Romane” or “Consorzi Associati Roma Sud”.

There are however some limits to the action of “consorzi”: the city administration evaluates and approve the projects submitted, actually authorizing the expenditure of funds. It needs to be stressed that consorzi’s budgets are in fact technically part of the city budget, the last say about their use is entitled to the city government (Cellamare, 2010). In about fifteen years since the introduction of the 1997 city ordinance, there are today 140 “Consorzi” with over 40,000 members for a total of about 120,000 residents involved in their activities (City of Rome, 2012).

### **Case Study: Consorzi di autorecupero in Morena and Centrone**

#### **Morena**

“Consorzio di autorecupero Morena Sud” was born in 1997 thank to the initiative of the local Neighborhood Committee, that was already part of “Unione Borgate”. Roughly 250 property owners decided to become member of

the Consorzio, the 50% circa of all owners potentially involved in the area. The founders of the new association saw in it the opportunity to use the fees they still had to pay for their amnesty request in order to upgrade infrastructures and services in the area. According to the Consorzio president, the amount of the individual fees deposited in the Consorzio's coffer was rather small – the 1985 “Condono edilizio” required the payment of very small fees – ranging from 200 to 1000 Euros for each property owner. Given the limited amount of the fees collected, the President of the Consorzio started to establish contacts with private developers active in the area in order to persuade them to deposit the fees they would otherwise deposit in the city coffers in the Consorzio's coffers: through this attempt, the Consorzio was able to raise 450.000 Euro circa more than the initial sum. Regarding the projects decided and implemented, the Consorzio will first address the idea of investing in the creation of a public park but, after the emergence of a controversy around property rights relative to the area where the park was supposed to be located, it will decide to move its attention towards a new project aimed at rehabilitating the roads and sidewalks served by the only mass-transit connection available at the time in the neighborhood. Despite initial hopes, the Consorzio will be able to start the projects' implementation only in 2010, 13 years after its foundation, completing them in 2012.

Since its foundation, the “Consorzio Morena Sud” has chosen to contract the intermediary organization “AIC Recupero” for the already mentioned bureaucratic and design duties, granting to it 13% circa of the sum spent for the realization of the projects as suggested by the city ordinance.

It needs to be noted that the Consorzio does not have a very strong democratic life. Board of directors' meetings are rare and are convened in coincidence with the more relevant meetings of the Morena neighborhood committee while its leadership actually overlaps with that of the Neighborhood committee: both the president and many board of directors' members sit in fact in both bodies.

Regarding the Consorzio's agenda, the link between what it has decided to implement and the Neighborhood Committee's historical platform is very evident

### ***Consorzio Centrone-Villa Senni***

Founded at the end of the 1990s, the "Consorzio di auto-recupero di Centrone-Villa Senni" has a membership of over 550 property owners who, differently for the case of Morena, have filed their amnesty requests under three different laws: 1985, 1994, 2004. Thank to the larger number of members and to the more consistent fees that were due under the 1994 and 2004 amnesties, the Consorzio Centroni has been able to raise a total sum of circa 4 million Euros, significantly more than in the case of Morena. This financial success has depended also on the greater ability of the Consorzio Centroni's President to collect fees generated by private development initiatives. Since 2000, the area has in fact experienced a significant expansion in housing and demographic terms. At the same time, it is to be noted that these fees have been generated by private initiatives located not only within the perimeter of the Consorzio but also elsewhere in the Municipality. The role of the Consorzio's President is key for understanding this success: the President is in fact an architect who has been active in several of these projects, finding himself in the condition to persuade developers for whom he worked as a professional to deposit the due "oneri di urbanizzazione" in the Consorzio's coffers instead than in the city coffers. At the same time, the Consorzio Centroni has showed some degree of solidarity towards the less fortunate neighboring Consorzio Morena: in at least one case, its President has asked a private developer who was willing to deposit his fees in the coffers of the first to deposit them in the coffers of the second, a "favour" that has been apparently returned later by the Consorzio Morena's president. Overall, the greater financial wealth of Consorzio Centrone has allowed it to implement a larger program of initiatives: since its starting, some new segments of the

sewage system have been built, some roads have been paved and sidewalks created and finally the area has been given a new square – where an open-air market should be located – that, even if completed, has never been inaugurated due to persistent bureaucratic problems with the city administration. Despite these initiatives, the Consorzio still has in its coffers a significant sum of money that could be used for the implementation of new projects – first of all a public park - that have been already designed and presented to the city administration. Approval has been denied for reasons that would not be apparent at a first glance but that actually illuminate one of the many distortions in the actual activity of Consorzi. The city administration does not grant approval based exclusively on the assessed needs of the communities involved and on the quality of the proposed projects. Given the intense stress that austerity measures have imposed on the city's budget choices, the city administration – that technically controls, as we have said, all Consorzi's budgets – eventually denies approval to local projects in order to use the funding for other priorities. In the case of Consorzio Centrone, the approval has been denied in order to use that funding to start an hydraulic project that is functional to the implementation of a development plan in a neighboring area where significant private building activity is expected in the incoming years. The Consorzio has resisted the decision underlining the lack of coherence and consistency on the part of the city administration. The city was ultimately able to push forward its plan shifting the funding from its initial to new purposes.

### **Neighborhood Committees in Morena and Centrone**

In both cases, Consorzi rely on the existence of Neighborhood Committees (the already mentioned “Comitati di Quartiere”) for the management of the “social” and “political” components of their work. In fact, deprived of a real democratic dynamic, Consorzi rely on the Committees for the actual formulation of priorities and also for the day to day management of the relationships with the

city and municipal administrations. As already mentioned, most neighborhood committees located in borgate have developed during the “collectivist era”, very often thank to the support of the Communist Party and its urban organizations. Both in Morena and Centrone, the current affiliation of the two Consorzi to *Unione Borgate*, as long as the choice of *Aic Recupero* as intermediary agency for the development of their plans and the management of bureaucratic issues is to be explained by their historical rooting in this political field. The leadership of both Consorzi is currently in the hands of two individuals who have been members of the Communist Party till its dissolution in 1991 and are now, with no doubt in the first case and most probably in the second case, voters if not activists of the Democratic Party.<sup>2</sup> Neighborhood committees have evolved over the years: in both neighborhoods they are now registered in the municipal register of neighborhood committees that is supposed to recognize whose are the “legitimate voices” in the dealing of local political matters; they both present themselves as entities that are “autonomous from the political parties and open to people of any background” (even if, especially in the case of Morena, a pattern of strong involvement of activist of liberal and progressive orientation is still easily traceable), and they finally propose highly localized agendas with a few and scarce references to issues that go beyond the everyday life of the two neighborhoods.

Regarding Morena, the committee is currently managed by a board of directors composed by 15 residents - who are not all really active in the organization – who were elected by 200 residents. These residents, starting with the Committee President who is also the Consorzio president, are mostly engaged in establishing and preserving contacts and relationships with the municipal and city administration and with some municipal council members – mostly in the Democratic Party – aimed at solving specific problems in the area, and – more

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<sup>2</sup> Pci dissolved in 1991 giving birth to a new party that finally transformed in the Democratic Party (PD).

generally - in making sure that the “voice of the neighborhood” is heard when important decisions are taken both at the city and municipal levels. The committee’s agenda has been stable across the years: its platform includes requests that all result from the long-standing lack of infrastructure and services that characterizes the area, with a strong focus on physical development – roads, sidewalks, parks - and a minor attention to issues of neighborhood social development. More recently, it has to be noted that the committee has developed attention to environmental issues, organizing for instance initiatives aimed at promoting biking as a sustainable mode of transportation in the neighborhood. The committee’s ability to mobilize residents has been weak over the years: meetings and public demonstrations are usually attended by a very limited number of activists. The committee has not been able to promote a program of social events (through “neighborhood fests” or other initiatives of that kind). In purely quantitative terms, the most successful Committee’s communication channels are a web site and a facebook page subscribed by 550 residents circa. On both pages, the committee’s activists, beside the more typical contents like the committee’s platform and some information regarding everyday life opportunities in the neighborhood, regularly post accurate information regarding matters of local interest with a strong focus on planning, urban development and city services. Given the lack of a specific page, information regarding the Consorzio’s activities are posted on the Committee’s pages.

In Centrone, the “Comitato di quartiere” is a more recent presence. Only in 2012, thanks to a new President, the committee has been recognized by the Municipal authority as a formally registered association. The board of directors is composed by nine residents and holds its weekly meetings in the private studio of the architect who is also the President of the Consorzio. In the case of Centrone also, the committee’s main focus is to develop ties with municipal and city institutions, signaling to them specific – often very trivial - problems that

arise in the neighborhood. The Committee, that does not have an organic platform as in the case of Morena, is anyway active in proposing specific projects having again a focus on issues of “physical development”: bonds with the Consorzio’s presidente are therefore presented as very vital in this sense.

Thank to the initiative of the president, the committee also deals with specific problems that eventually arise in the neighborhood, as in the case of a recent controversy regarding the structural faults of the building hosting the local primary school. The Comitato lacks a web page but has a facebook group attended by 160 circa residents: on the page, the committee posts information regarding its activity while residents mostly post complains regarding very specific local issues. According to the committee’s president levels of local engagement are very low in the Centrone area as well.

**Actually existing neo-liberalism: the vetero-liberalism of roman borgate.**

The contradictions experienced in the context of the *desotian* experiment in Roman borgate are rather evident: as in De Soto’s Lima, formerly “informal” settlements have the highest home-ownership rates in the city but, at the same time, they are still subject to a very consistent gap in terms of urban infrastructure and services (AIC and Unione Borgate, 2010). The study area perfectly embodies this image: high homeownership rates and strong market values are combined with a persistent lack of "urbanity", visible first of all in the widespread multidimensional deprivation of collective functions.

More important is another limitation of the “desotian experiment” in its roman version: its apparent inability to create more advanced and sophisticated forms of “privatism”. The implications of an increasingly influential “homeownership ideology” (Ronald, 2008) are particularly relevant in the context of previously informal settlements, where it has been associated to a desotian vision of the individual and collective benefits of formal “titling”.

With particular reference to the anglo-american contexts, this ideology has underscored the supposed positive urban externalities and byproducts brought by private property. According to this literature, homeowners not only take more care in the physical quality of their homes but tend to be more involved in neighborhood politics arenas contributing to the generation of important local goods. More specifically, the spread of individual property would contribute to the formation of localized networks of social capital arising from the logic of protection and enhancement of assets' value (Coppola, 2008). Strictly subordinating urban citizenship to property, this model envisions local collective action as being the product of individual accumulation strategies. The development, especially in the North-American context, of homeowners' associations and common interest developments (McKenzie, 1996) represents the transfer of this model, at different levels and in different forms, in the complex structures of neo-liberal urban governance. If policies implemented during the "privitistic era" have been fully successful in the conversion of what was once "dead capital" into "living capital", they have viceversa been unsuccessful in the generation and diffusion of the *habitus* of "responsability" and "civic engagement" that are presented as being connected to homeownership. In other words, economic capital has had a low conversion-rate in social and cultural capital, contributing to the persistent condition of collective multidimensional deprivation of these areas.

At the apex of the privatistic era, through Consorzi, the city administration has invested in forms of urban governance based on the recognition and enhancement of individual owners' role. But this attempt does not have produced sufficient levels of activation and participation among individual owners: just a portion of them have become members of Consorzi and even among them participation to the design, implementation and monitoring of projects has stayed very small if not entirely absent. The projects' decision is in fact entrusted to the good sense of Consorzio's Presidents and to a few neighborhood committees' activists and

has followed an agenda that seems to drag almost unchanged from previous decades.

Therefore, the risk of a neighborhood politics monopolized by individual owners seen as rational agents involved in the subordination of public choices - at least of those achievable by the consortium - to the interest of their assets does not materialize. As clearly stated by Consorzio Presidents, individual owners - who seldom participate to the life of the two organizations - do not pay much attention to the projects actually implemented.

Overall, Consorzio's members seem to have interpreted the birth of the structure not as an opportunity to exercise, in the wake of the *desotian* model, forms of "local sovereignty" based on individual/family accumulation and investment strategies, but as a more effective way to permanently close their dispute with the state. From this point of view, among former "informals", "consortium" are welcomed because they facilitate and simplify the "condono" transaction with the state. This minimalist reading of the device is surely a function of long-term factors - such as the entrenched individualistic and privatistic culture that has been one of the key components in the birth of the "informal metropolis" - but also of more contingent factors such as the persistent weaknesses in the urban institutional and regulative frameworks. After the initial design and launch, many "consorzio" have not been adequately supported in their activities by the city administration and the intermediary structures that had shared the concept phase of the device, sliding towards minimalist and bureaucratic practices.

Furthermore, in recent years, the city administration has produced with its non-linear decisions a sort of "functional heterogenesis" or "perversion" of "consorzi". As made evident in the case of Centrone, the city administration has made an opportunistic use of consortia and their finances that is basically indifferent to their "declared" goals. The city administration's practices tend, in fact, to transform consortia into an "unexpected" niche of public finance in times of acute budgetary difficulties, using it in a discretionary way in the

formulation and implementation of land use and development decisions (that might bring money to the city's coffers).

There are also more endogenous forms of perversion too. As mentioned above, since their origins, consortia have been authorized to collect the fees of new development projects as well. The financial advantage enjoyed by the Consorzio Centrone-Villa Senni depends on the very intense building activity that has characterized the area in recent years and on the ability of its president to establish direct relationships with property developers. Without these additional revenues, both consorzi – in Morena and Centrone - would not have reached the financial capacity to implement programs of any significance. This poses a problem of formalization of the relationship between private developers and consorzi: while individual owners do not seem to exercise any strategic leadership in relation to the consortia choices, private developers seem more willing to exercise pressure on them. It is not illegitimate to imagine a situation in which a private developer agrees to pay fees to the consorzio in exchange of its engagement to realize projects aimed at directly enhancing the market attractiveness of newly built property.

The practice that sees consortia acquiring fees paid by developers for development projects realized in areas that are beyond their perimeters – a practice made possible by recent changes in the regulations - is even more controversial. This more radical “perversion” of the device illuminates a pattern of increasing privatization of urban planning regulations and policies that sees individual organizational units - in this case, the consortia - freely moving and competing on the market of “oneri di urbanizzazione”. Although at a micro scale, this mechanism can lead to distorted and opaque patterns in the distribution of public resources and to the development of social networks based on corruptive exchanges between professionals, developers and political leaders (Donolo, 2001).

Overall, the introduction of consortia suggests a potential shift to a broadly speaking privatised and localist urban planning model. Localist insofar as it introduces a hyper-local level of withdrawal and spending of development fees; privatist because it builds communities of actors based on the principle of individual property. From a macro point of view, the governance logic behind the consortia initiative arises with no doubt a problem of “induced” uneven geography contributing to an urban environment in which access to certain urban rights depends on the “market potential” – and on the development fees that can be generated – of each location and also on the skills and the social capital of consortia’s ruling circles. There is no more redistribution in a traditional sense from strong to weak areas – as was the case in the “collectivist era” – but a form of “competitive urbanism” based on the confronting of the individual parts of the urban territory. According to this view, weaker areas have the potential to become stronger precisely for the development opportunities that, unlike in the denser areas, are concentrated in low-density peripheral contexts in which borgate are located. This leads to a shift of public action from a framework taking in account the city as a whole – as in the case of 1970s and 1980s policies aimed at “healing the urban fracture” – to a framework that is based on the growth potential of its individual parts. In conclusion, I argue that the analysis of this case potentially brings to light another case of “actually existing neo-liberalism” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), that is deeply embedded in and determined by some structural and non-structural characteristics of the local environment (Cremaschi and others, 2008).

The rise of consorzi has moved from a deep reconsideration of the concept and practice of citizenship and more specifically of urban citizenship. Linking the exercise of specific rights – the possibility to decide what public infrastructural projects have to be implemented – to the possession of property represents in many ways a step backward in the Marshallian conceptualization of citizenship

towards renewed forms of “propertarian citizenship” and the creation of local polities explicitly based on ownership (Balibar, 2012).

This deep reconsideration of citizenship is linked to a process of governance rescaling that – in line with the redesccovery of the neighborhood scale by neoliberal urban policies (Brenner, 2005) – actively mobilizes a new scale in the organization of urban governance in which this new local polity is embedded. In many ways, this new reality represents a conflation of different motives and rationals that have all been part of often disconnected strains of neoliberal urban and social policy, both in the fields of its “traditional” and “social investment” variations (Donzelot, 2008). Among them we can mention the already discussed activation of forms of “ownership-based urban citizenship”, the investment in the spread of entrepreneurial logics of collective action across different social groups, the restructuring of public action through a strategical use of contractual forms of government action (Perulli, 2010), the use of scale and territory as a strategic tool for the shaping of new forms of social organization (De Leonardis, 2008), the idea of “responsibilizing” citizens through their mobilization in the provision and management of formerly government-run and designed urban services (Brenner, 2005) and the focus on the activation of locally embedded forms of social capital as a mean and a goal of public policy (Cremaschi, 2008). In this context, it is also worth our attention the way in which inherited forms of social and political capital that had developed during the “collectivist era” have been mobilized and somehow converted during the “privatistic era” in the tentative shaping of this new scale and polity (Coppola, 2008; 2013). This is both a confirmation of the historical coexistence of different cultural motives and frames in the making of collective action experiences organized around the issue of urban informality in the city of Rome, and of the role that the “desotian experiment” of property creation has had – with all the limits that we already discussed – in the evolution of former informals’ cultural and political habits.

At the same time, the case studies sketched in this paper are another confirmation of the highly contextual and historically determined characters of “actually existing neoliberalisms” (Brenner and Theodor, 2002). What, in fact, can be deemed as a neoliberal project from the point of view of its mere “policy morphology” is, at least partially, the result of entrenched cultural and social habits – in this case, the privatistic and localist traits of the informal urbanization process in Rome - and of the evolution of specific organizational actors involved in its evolving “politicization”. Furthermore, when they come to their actual operativization, these projects activate dynamics that are peculiarly shaped by the actors’ characteristics and by the surrounding regulative and structural environment. In the case of the “consorzi” experience – and more widely of innovative planning policies implemented in the city of Rome (Coppola, 2013) – elements of neo-liberal urban rescaling are operated in a context characterized by low levels of social organization, inadequate institutional quality and the lack of accountability and reliability of laws and regulations (Cremaschi, 2008; Donolo, 2001).

This is way, I argue, for the case of the evolution of urban informality in the city of Rome we can talk of *vetero-liberalism* instead of *neo-liberalism*: a form of privatization and localization of urban policy that is more entrenched in the inheritance of local past than in the integration in global policy mobilities.

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