



In recent years, the EU has experienced an unprecedented influx of migrants and refugees, and data shows that global human mobility – whether it is spurred by economic, social, environmental or political reasons – will increase in the following decades. European societies will become more diverse, plural, and multi-ethnic. Thus, integration policies applied from the European to the local level need to be improved in order to be able to respond to the changing needs, and to guarantee social cohesion while respecting the rule of law and promoting a human rights-based approach.

This FEPS and SOLIDAR publication is a collection of contributions by academics, high level experts and policymakers presenting progressive policy solutions to turn the challenges linked to migration and integration into social and economic opportunities for the European Union and its Member States. The analysis touches upon the institutional frameworks in which integration policies are developed from the European to the local level as well as the existing cooperation models between local authorities and civil society organisations to provide services to migrants and refugees. This book underlines the positive and constructive role played by local actors in the process of integration of migrants and suggests how to improve cooperation between different levels of governance to support the active participation of migrants and refugees in the economic and social life in the receiving societies.

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FROM EUROPE TO LOCAL: MIGRATING SOLIDARITY



FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES
FONDATION EUROPÉENNE
D'ÉTUDES PROGRESSISTES

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Tina ALICKE
Brando BENIFEI
Tanja FAJON
Hedwig GIUSTO
Nevena GOJKOMIĆ
TURUNZ
Elsa LAINO
Claudia MARÀ
Enza Roberta PETRILLO
Piotr PLEWA
Conny REUTER
Daniel RIEMER
Andrea ROMANO
Miriam SALUSSOLIA
Venere Stefania SANNA
Davide SARDO
Nadine SEDDIG
Markéta SEDILOVÁ
Mirra SOVERINI
Ernst STETTER
Stephanie WARKENTIN

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CRISIS AND COMMUNITY: GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES AS SPACES OF MIGRANT INTEGRATION IN ROME

VENERE STEFANIA SANNA

Sapienza University of Rome

This chapter will give an insight into the role of community-based initiatives (CBIs), which are in the process of transitioning into sustainable economic models, taking into account the crucial themes of social inclusion and of equity. Having mapped the CBIs that operate in Rome, the article will focus on those civil society organisations that provide services to migrants and will investigate the mechanisms through which these organisations receive material (e.g. spaces) or financial support from relevant authorities, and how they engage in discussion, consultation, and negotiation with local authorities on integration policies.

Rome is a city in crisis for many reasons: it is undergoing significant changes in population growth, experiencing economic hardship, and suffering from corruption scandals. Moreover, in common with most major European capitals, Rome is also experiencing a vast increase in migrant numbers, both those in transit and those who end up settling in the capital. Migrants arrive daily into a city struggling with its own issues, largely unprepared and unable to cope with their presence, which exacerbates the many privations they are forced to undergo. However, in turn, the city's many problems are exacerbated by the growing migrant population.

Historically, Italy's capital has had a long roster of community action, sometimes in opposition to, but sometimes as an adjunct to, the city's local authorities. In many cases, Rome's community-based initiatives (CBIs) owe their survival to passive support granted by local government and satellite bodies, particularly in the allocation of underutilised public spaces in which to operate. As Rome's migrant population continues to expand, CBIs are increasingly filling the gaps in service caused by both poor city management and lack of local government funding, and are heavily involved in assisting immigrants and alleviating some of their issues.

In this work I investigate some examples of CBIs in Rome and how they currently work with the city's migrants. I also show the ways in which their work is being threatened or curtailed. I argue that current neglect by the city's authorities, and even ideology-driven policies, threaten to undermine work that must necessarily be performed by CBIs due to the inadequacies of the same local government that is putting their existence at risk.

Rome's migrant situation: Public attitudes and hidden aid

According to the European Agenda on Migration (2015) and Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (2011), the integration of migrants *is an ever evolving process (...) that starts on the ground and integration policies should be developed with a genuine "bottom-up" approach, close to the local level (...) and through participation*¹ and migrants (...) *should not be faced with reluctance and obstruction – they should be given every assistance to integrate in their new communities.*²

Despite losses engendered by the ongoing economic crisis, on January 1st 2015 the *Comune* (municipality) of Rome was officially home to more than 363 thousand documented foreign residents, who made up 12.7% of the city's population (Table 1). This is more

than double the proportion ten years previously, when foreign residents numbered 145 thousand, or 5.7% of the population. According to the latest figures available, the majority of foreign residents are European (44.6%, of whom 60.5% are women) followed by Asian (32.1%, of whom 56% are men), then African (12.4%, of whom 63.6% are men). While flows of migrants from Europe and Africa showed an increase over the previous year, the number of Asian migrants (as well as those from America and Oceania) decreased significantly.

Table 1 – Foreign residents in the Municipality of Rome per area of origin, January 2015

Area of origin	Total	Total (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total var. prev. year
Europe	162,317	44.6%	39.5%	60.5%	9.6%
Asia	116,625	32.1%	56.0%	44.0%	-5.4%
Africa	44,934	12.4%	63.6%	36.4%	7.1%
America	39,357	10.8%	37.5%	62.5%	-1.2%
Oceania	249	0.1%	41.0%	59.0%	-20.4%
Stateless	81	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%	-72.8%
Total	363,563	100.0%	47.6%	52.4%	2.8%

Source: Istat, 2015.

The ranking of Rome’s migrants by the top fifteen countries of origin (Table 2) shows that they make up 79.5% of foreign residents. Nearly a quarter of all foreign residents in Rome (24.3%) hail from Romania, with the next largest populations being 11.1% Filipino, and 7.8% Bangladeshi. In fourth place is the Chinese population, which has shown a large decrease over recent years; by contrast it is significant to note a massive increase in residents from Egypt (25.5%).

Table 2 – Foreign residents in the Municipality of Rome per country of origin (first fifteen), January 2015

Ranking	Country of origin	No. residents	% Total foreign residents	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total var. prev. year
1	Romania	88,404	24.3%	43.1%	56.9%	15.7%
2	The Philippines	40,463	11.1%	41.0%	59.0%	-4.3%
3	Bangladesh	28,493	7.8%	78.0%	22.0%	-8.9%
4	China	16,099	4.4%	50.8%	49.2%	-13.1%
5	Peru	14,291	3.9%	38.3%	61.7%	-3.6%
6	Ukraine	13,702	3.8%	18.5%	81.5%	0.3%
7	Poland	12,696	3.5%	32.7%	67.3%	16.3%
8	Egypt	10,328	2.8%	71.5%	28.5%	25.5%
9	India	9,075	2.5%	54.8%	45.2%	-1.3%
10	Sri Lanka	8,837	2.4%	54.2%	45.8%	13.9%
11	Moldova	8,613	2.4%	34.7%	65.3%	-1.7%
12	Ecuador	8,354	2.3%	39.0%	61.0%	7.3%
13	Albania	7,243	2.0%	51.3%	48.7%	7.8%
14	Morocco	5,232	1.4%	56.1%	43.9%	3.9%
15	Nigeria	4,181	1.2%	55.1%	44.9%	7.3%

Source: Istat, 2015.

With the European Commission’s agendas’ recommendations in mind, and given the high proportion of migrants in the population, Rome’s attitudes towards its foreign residents take two major forms, particularly towards refugees and economic migrants from Africa and the Middle East: the “public” and “hidden” faces.

In terms of public provision, despite the number of reception places for asylum seekers and other migrants being increased from 1,756 to 3,017 since 2014³, the system is constantly overwhelmed, and existing structures are showing signs of decay and neglect. It is failing to meet the needs of growing immigrant numbers.

Roughly concurrent with the marked growth in immigration, the city has also been affected by major investigations into bribes and corruption: the “Mafia Capitale” scandal of 2014⁴ that coincided with the fall of the local administration, and the incarceration of many public and political figures. Following the uncovering of the involvement of organised crime in – and embezzlement of funds dedicated to – immigrant services, dozens of migrant accommodation centres were closed and their assets impounded. One of the accused was said to have claimed that involvement in immigrant services was more profitable *than drug trafficking*.⁵

The situation with regard to the public provision of services for foreign residents has been exacerbated by an attitude expressed in some media, and by some members of the local administration, characterised by alarmism, panic, xenophobia, anger, and exaggeration of the negative impacts of incoming migrants and refugees.

To complicate matters, in the months after the Mafia Capitale scandal broke, Ignazio Marino, the relatively new mayor of Rome, was forced to resign for tangentially connected reasons.⁶ Consequently the city was managed by a “caretaker” administration, appointed in October 2015 as an emergency measure until the new mayor, Virginia Raggi, was elected in June 2016. The prior appointment had further consequences on policies regarding the reception of migrants, since the then *commissario prefettizio* (acting mayor) Francesco Tronca was particularly concerned with rigid adherence to, and application

of, certain laws with particular emphasis on evictions from unofficially occupied premises.

Despite the many shortcomings of the “public” migrant reception system, however, Rome also has a “hidden” side, with private citizens participating in numerous organisations that, via different techniques and channels, endeavour to promote and sustain the economic status and social integration of migrants on a daily basis.

CBIs in Rome

Rome boasts a long history of activism, social movements, and active citizenship⁷ including many CBIs that are aimed at, and derived from, the local population: soup kitchens, squatters’ cooperatives, self-managed spaces (e.g. urban gardens, cycling groups, agricultural cooperatives, etc.), right up to novel organisations that practice with experimental economies, that have over time become spaces of integration and urban culture centres.⁸ CBIs are found all over the city, as much in the outskirts as in more gentrified central areas, and are often characterised by physical spaces that operate largely outside the capitalist economic model.

Even those CBIs that appear to perform solely utilitarian functions can constitute “spaces of citizenship”.⁹ For example the rediscovery of urban agricultural practices – from “guerrilla gardening” movements, to community, shared, and urban gardens – which have as their founding objectives the satisfaction of basic needs relating to food and sustainable lifestyles for their members. Beyond these functions, they also facilitate socialising¹⁰ and trigger participation in the “reconquest of the city”.¹¹ Such CBIs appropriate (or reclaim) common spaces, converting them into centres of activism, places for experimentation with new social economies, and into “workshops” for artistic, cultural and

political expression. By doing so they represent social “innovation niches”¹² that are often capable of activating processes of transition towards a more sustainable and inclusive economy, and fertile ground for triggering wider social changes.

With the worsening economic crisis and the concurrent migration crises, many such CBIs now play a role that is complementary to, or even in place of, local authorities, providing services and opportunities for social inclusion, spaces for immigrant accommodation, and the opportunity for a variety of methods of cultural, educational, social and political participation. They seek to offer a concrete response to shortages of affordable housing, food and clothing for migrants, and the need for support and legal protection for asylum seekers, as well as psychological support and other services that benefit immigrants (for example Italian language courses, vocational training, etc.).

It is both politically and academically acknowledged that grassroots initiatives can produce a variety of social impacts, e.g. creating and/or increasing cohesion among a heterogeneity of participants, strengthening social interaction, and enhancing participants’ self- and social awareness and empowerment.¹³ It is therefore important not just to investigate the effects of CBIs, but the mechanisms through which these organisations receive or rely on material (e.g. spaces) or financial support, particularly from relevant authorities, and how they engage in discussion, consultation, and negotiation with local authorities on integration policies.

We have chosen three CBIs to illustrate and represent these issues. Two are oriented towards migrants by definition, of which one has changed radically in nature to confront the growing crisis; the other is more general, but has by necessity expanded its activities to provide assistance for migrant issues.

REFUGEE ScART: Immigrant art for recycling and integration

REFUGEE ScART,¹⁴ founded in Rome in 2011, is a humanitarian project of the SPIRAL Foundation which operates under the patronage of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – South Europe Office. This initiative was set up with the primary goal of providing *protection by facilitating opportunities and paths to regain one's dignity*.¹⁵ To this end, the project helps immigrants and refugees to participate in a number of for-profit activities that enable them to become active citizens, to escape from common migrant conditions of anonymity and isolation, and to gain a sense of belonging and positive identity that strengthens and encourages them on their path towards integration.

The SPIRAL Foundation has been operating abroad for several years in situations of extreme poverty such as in Vietnam (since 1997) and Nepal (since 2002). The Rome initiative was founded in 2011 at the city's central Termini Station, and initially facilitated a group of ten refugees to begin collecting plastic waste and transforming it into useful and creative items (handbags, wallets, jewellery, household items, etc.). The project headquarters are now located within the premises of AMA Roma S.p.a. (Municipal Environmental Company), the agency that handles refuse collection in the city, which are located in the Montagnola district of Rome's Municipio VIII.

The core activities of REFUGEE ScART take place in a workshop in which an average of 15 refugees create objects entirely from waste materials, the sale of which primarily allows them to obtain a small income for themselves and their often distant families (e.g. still overseas waiting to obtain the necessary documentation to obtain asylum), thus providing the migrants with the opportunity to enter the world of work, while also allowing the association to support other initiatives which share a similar vision. Purely

economically, the initiative is self-sufficient – however it is helped to achieve this in no small part by dint of its zero-rent agreement, which also includes all utilities.

REFUGEE ScART represents a particular success story among initiatives of its kind, not only for the positive contribution that the workshop's waste recovery makes to the ecology of the city of Rome (since August 2011, more than ten tonnes of plastic and cardboard have been saved from landfill, with a monthly average of around 250kg of plastic refuse recycled), but also for the earnings that it has been able to realise. From an initial investment of just €1,600, the organisation has produced revenues of approximately €250,000 over the course of three years, which have been used for the benefit of migrants and their families, and also in support of other charitable associations. Indeed since August 2013 the employees of ScART have begun helping other migrants in greater difficulty than themselves by donating a part of their monthly income to the Emergency Ong Onlus charity medical centre in Castel Volturno (Caserta, Italy), which provides medical assistance for recent migrants.

This initiative represents an exercise not only in social innovation, but also in technology. REFUGEE ScART has the merit of having devised a method of work placement that, in addition to removing some burden from the local welfare system, is based on the exercise of handicraft activities suitable for people of all ages, without the requirement for specific technical or professional training, and thus easily learned on the job. The organisation therefore promotes a model that can be replicated in other areas and contexts, not just urban ones, and which can potentially produce similarly beneficial spin-offs both in terms of social integration and of local production. The project is an interesting experiment in technological innovation, having also invented and patented a new material process, created by the fusion of plastic and paper.

REFUGEE ScART counts on the support of several institutions, and collaborates with a wide range of institutional and non-institutional actors (from the UNHCR to Emergency, to the more local Centro Astalli, Laboratorio 53, and the Associazione Sportiva Liberi Nantes). It recently partnered with one of the most important museums in Rome: MAXXI - the National Museum of 21st Century Arts. MAXXI displays various objects produced by the organisation to give visibility to the project, not only promoting its civic engagement and humanitarian aspects, but also the quality and originality of its aesthetic achievements, and genuine forms of artistic expression. REFUGEE ScART also generates extra income by providing souvenirs for sale in the MAXXI gift shop.

Thus as a humanitarian project that enjoys the recognition and the support of major international institutions, this initiative is quite different from the other CBIs currently operating in Rome (even by the standards of the highly connected Città dell'Utopia described below), enjoying a network of contacts that facilitates its work and supports its causes and intent. Among the organisation's most prestigious "clients" are the Chamber of Deputies, the Prefecture of Rome, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The organisation also receives material support from AMA, which allows the free use of workshop space, allowing the organisation to be economically profitable from the sale of goods.

The initiative has a recognised legal status (Onlus: a non-profit organisation for social benefit), and has a clearly defined internal governance of a more conventional nature than other organisations in the field, especially compared to the working realities of other social movements. It has neither political implications nor major opposition: it has been able to integrate itself into an "institutional" system without creating distrust or social tension.

One major differentiator with respect to other CBIs in Rome is that REFUGEE ScART does not seek to meet the needs of local

residents (in terms of creating opportunities for refugee integration or socialisation), has not been able to commit to transforming the relational and organisational dynamics of the context in which it exists, and (despite a few functional relationships with local bars and shops that provide plastic garbage) has not created a firm bridge between the migrants who work with it and the communities in which they reside. Nevertheless the informal collaboration and cultural *mélange* that this kind of activity stimulates show how workshops of this kind could allow migrants to be perceived less as a social “burden” and more as contributors to the common good: in other words, to be seen as a positive resource.

Città dell’Utopia: A social innovation niche in the heart of Rome

From among the Roman experiences one initiative stands out as particularly comprehensive. In many ways Città dell’Utopia¹⁶ is a microcosm of the entire landscape of social movements: a meeting place for diversity and activism, in which numerous projects are developed to stimulate and promote the processes of active citizenship. Città dell’Utopia is a project under the auspices of the International Voluntary Service (SCI - Servizio Civile Internazionale). Since 2004 the Project has rented Casale Garibaldi (Garibaldi House) from the Comune of Rome, a historical building in the San Paolo district that has recently been restructured and restored, and is surrounded by a large garden of indigenous plants.

Thanks to the cooperation of SCI volunteers and participants of all backgrounds who take part in activities concerned with the issues of human rights and international solidarity, sustainable lifestyles, social inclusion and active citizenship, Casale Garibaldi has become an “open house” and a centre of activism: a meeting

place of different territorial realities, united by the will to build a new model for development, focusing on the issues of equity and sustainability.

In terms of social inclusion, and with particular regard to the immigrant component of society, Città dell'Utopia has started integration courses – courses to promote more sustainable lifestyles, and non-formal education courses for adults. In addition to offering free Italian lessons to recent immigrants, the organisation plays host to Laboratorio 53, an association that provides legal and psychological assistance to refugees and asylum seekers in Rome, and legal aid to migrants concerning residence permits, bureaucratic problems, housing, and work. Moreover, to keep the debate on migration and border control alive, in collaboration with Laboratorio 53, Radio Ghetto and Amisnet, in 2014 Città dell'Utopia organised the “*No Border Fest*”. Now in its seventh season, the festival hosts many cultural events and discussions on the issues of migration, hosting workshops, exhibitions, debates, music and theatre.

Over the years, Città dell'Utopia has been able to build a strong network at institutional, local, national, and international levels (the European Commission, the Lazio regional government, the province of Rome, the Comune of Rome, Municipio VIII and ASL, the public health department). This initiative has one of the most dense and diverse network of contacts and collaboration at different scales among the CBIs that have been studied in Rome.¹⁷

Over the years, the local focus of Città dell'Utopia has changed and grown significantly, and it has been able to adapt to changes in alternative markets and critical consumption, such as the development of “solidarity purchasing groups” (*GAS - Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale*), organic produce markets, the “zero kilometre” food movement, produce self-sustainability, and sustainable consumption. In addition to hosting its own GAS and

the “terraTERRA” market (which deals in zero kilometre organic products), Città dell’Utopia offers the use of its space to other organisations that promote awareness and alternative forms of consumption and mobility, such as the Associazione Ruotalibera (Freewheeling Association) which encourages the use of bicycles in urban areas and for tourism. Città dell’Utopia also interacts with the local San Paolo Social Network, Eduraduno, Radio Fuori Onda, the Libellula association, neighbourhood associations, and a rich network of other active social and political urban movements.

Despite international recognition by the SCI, and the institutional legitimacy conferred on the project by its many associations, in keeping with other initiatives in Rome, Città dell’Utopia is currently suffering from various critical threats. In its relations with public organisations its main problems concern the use and management of its space, in this case one that is publically owned (as discussed below); it also suffers from “neighbourhood isolation” due to the mistrust that many local residents have towards the political activism that characterises several of its activities.¹⁸

Despite an active and connected network, Città dell’Utopia suffers from the perception that many local residents have of such organisations when they are on their doorsteps: that of self-isolation.¹⁹ Although the activities carried out in the volunteer work of many participants can help to build bridges between the project and parts of the local community, often such movements tend to be seen as “gated communities”.²⁰ It is thus no coincidence that some participants of Città dell’Utopia say they do not feel that their work is adequately recognised by the local community, traders, and many of their near neighbours. *Environments that are comfortable and secure for activists may often be considered unintelligible, exclusive, and even dangerous to local residents,* writes Pecorelli. These initiatives, then, *although designed to be*

*windows on a (better) world, can actually end up being isolated and self-referential in terms of ideas and activities, and lacking consent from the rest of society.*²¹

Baobab: Evicted – but still active – reception centre for refugees

Finally, no discussion of CBIs and migrants in Rome would be complete without mentioning the Baobab Centre.²² Founded in 2004 in a former glassworks near Rome's Tiburtina Station, the Baobab Centre was initially a volunteer-run CBI that provided Eritrean cultural activities, and eventually accommodation, to 60 (mostly African) migrants, in response to a lack of reception centre facilities in the city. When the flow of refugees underwent its major increase during 2015, the organisation mounted a massive media appeal for material and personal contributions to the project, and hundreds of Roman citizens responded. This had the effect of building and strengthening relationships between the CBI and residents of the city.

Few of the migrants passing through Baobab claim asylum in Italy, but instead use the centre for a few days as a stopping-off point on their journey from a perilous Mediterranean crossing to the eventual northern European destinations in which they will make their formal asylum application.

By the time its premises were closed down on December 6th 2015, the centre was open constantly, day and night, and despite the building being theoretically able to accommodate more than 130 asylum seekers and refugees per night – and even though the Comune only provided financial support to accommodate 60 people²³ – it was in fact feeding and providing accommodation and clothing for more than 800. Between May 2015 and its closure in December of the same year, the Baobab Centre had hosted, fed, provided advice, and rudimentary medical care,

to about 35,000 refugees and migrants, mainly from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan.

Despite the apparent moral consensus between the organisation and much of Rome's citizenship, the assumption of Tronca as a "caretaker" mayor following the Mafia Capitale scandals of 2014 coincided with a number of police raids on the centre,²⁴ and eventually the land-owner, despite being paid €25,000 rent per month on behalf of the centre by the Comune of Rome, demanded the occupants of the centre be evicted in order for the building to be redeveloped.²⁵ This eviction was not actively protested by the organisation, partly because there was a legal justification for the removal: it had been ruled in court that agreed-upon rent had not been paid to the landlord. Immediately following this ruling, on December 14th 2015 Baobab representatives met with Commissario prefettizio Tronca and the Comune's *sub-commissario* for social policy, and it was agreed that the organisation would leave without protest provided it would be re-housed. However the alternative accommodation promised turned out to be in the city's remote EUR business district, far removed from the major transport hubs. This was unsuitable, and would have been impossible to manage. Subsequently Baobab asked for further meetings to locate other premises, but received no response.

In the absence of suitable replacement premises, the organisation turned its attention to a former fish processing plant, also in the Tiburtina area, which had lain derelict since 2008. This building could potentially accommodate up to 300 people, could provide a large kitchen area, and also has a large amount of enclosed external space that could house tents in the case of overflow.

The bureaucratic situation regarding this building, however, is complex and unclear. There is little communication regarding migrant management between the Comune and the actual

owner of the building, which is the Lazio regional government. Furthermore a local residents' committee opposes repurposing the disused building for use by migrants due to negative experiences with the antisocial behaviour of former squatters, most of whom were foreign nationals. In the face of these issues, in April 2016 the building was occupied by Baobab volunteers, but they were evicted immediately, although this time the volunteers' opposition to the move was expressed by their passive resistance to police actions.²⁶

Both the glass factory and the fish plant remain unoccupied,²⁷ and despite the lack of premises, the organisation has continued to house new arrivals in the area, albeit in tents outside. At the time of writing, seasonal weather was improving and the effect of favourable conditions on the increase in migrant flows was already noticeable. Meanwhile for suitable alternative arrangements, the organisation awaits the outcomes of talks between the different institutions involved – or even that they talk at all.

CBI: Autonomy versus reliance

While from a financial point of view, two of the CBIs discussed here have been able to make small but sustaining revenues from their core activities (selling products/services, collecting donations, etc.), their existential issue is often down to the physical space they use – which was also the deciding factor in the demise of the first incarnation of Baobab.

The use of space is a common problem for many grassroots initiatives in Rome. Despite the financial crisis, rents are still relatively high in the city, and many CBIs therefore rely on external support for the space in which their activities are carried out. REFUGEE ScART has a legally-binding *comodato d'uso a titolo gratuito* (title of free use) from AMA; Baobab informally occupied a private space, and when circumstances conspired not to make rent, they

were evicted with negative effects on their activities; meanwhile Città dell'Utopia occupies its building according to legacy rules of the Council of Rome²⁸ that, due to the recent scandals, are currently "under revision" – with ominous implications. This point is crucial. Recent shifts experienced by the Council in how it regulates public real estate could reshape the entire geography of civil society organisations in Rome, threatening many CBIs with fundamental changes in how they operate or, as in the case of Baobab, peril.

The Comune of Rome has recently resolved to realise the profitability of 860 properties in the city that are currently being used for public or commercial purposes but do not reflect current income-generating potential. According to Resolution 140, 30th April 2015,²⁹ leases on these properties must be put out to re-tender in order to generate revenue in accordance with market value. In practical terms, this resolution threatens the existence of many current activities which play a complementary role in the social field and in the processes of social inclusion, but that do not operate according to a profit motive, and therefore do not have enough purchasing power to be able to honour the rents that will be demanded by the owners of the land. The problem could be solved by means of direct allocation of the spaces to these initiatives by the Comune, but this is not always feasible.

Even though Città dell'Utopia collaborates with local public bodies, and despite having the potential to act as agents for change, territorial actors, and project leaders in projects for the inclusion of migrants, thus compensating for the lack of such provision by local authorities, they are not counted as stakeholders by local government. For this kind of initiative it is difficult to engage in discussion, consultation, and negotiation with local authorities on integration policies. Instead, the organisation engages with political issues in a more confrontational way – and indeed its members have been significant participants in most of

the recent protest movements in Rome – which is another reason the organisation finds it difficult to “sit at the table” with the local authorities. Similarly, and despite its demonstrably successful work, REFUGEE ScART remains “sceptical” about being able to engage in constant dialogue with local authorities. They interact, but the bureaucracy, climate of corruption, and promises made but never honoured push the organisation into acting independently and in its own best interests. Finally, Baobab’s major problems relate to its premises. Despite being a legal association, collaborating with an extended network of international organisations and local associations – including the UNCHR, the Italian Red Cross, INTERSOS, Doctors Without Borders, Medici per i Diritti Umani (MEDU), ARCI, Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati, LasciateCIEntrare, and A Buon Diritto – if it is unable to find another headquarters, for bureaucratic reasons it will not be able to bid for public grants/money to run its initiatives, and will thus be hampered in its activities.

All three of the initiatives that we interviewed expressed feelings common to many CBIs in Rome: that there is a significant lack of attention paid to the social problems that they and their beneficiaries face, they feel their activity does not have recognition, and they face the issues of corruption. As is also evident in the case of Baobab, there is a total absence from the local authorities of consistent planning to cope with the increasing numbers of migrants, and there are no organised integration processes: management of the growing numbers is constantly in a state of “firefighting”, and despite requiring the assistance of CBIs to help, local government often acts in ways that are counterproductive to what they can achieve.

Conclusion

This brief exploration of community-based initiatives that involve themselves in promoting integration and social inclusion for migrants shows that they can serve as a resource both for local communities, and as an adjunct to – or even a replacement for – an institutional reception system for migrants. Rome, a city in crisis, is currently overburdened and therefore facing serious difficulties; therefore such CBIs should be seen as a vital resource to achieve this, despite forms of activism that often criticise local authorities and seek to undermine the neoliberal production model – instead proposing alternative creative forms and the solidarity-based, “alternative” (and sometimes rebellious) management of self-organised spaces. Reliant on publically-owned land, such CBIs may be seen as symbiotic with, yet sometimes attacking, their host.

In Rome, territorial projects that are implemented by the local government system (for example SPRAR - System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees) are necessarily complemented by a number of associations and informal initiatives, mostly self-managed and self-financed, that have shown – particularly in the case of Città dell’Utopia – that they are able to operate in concert with the different actors involved in such areas as the reception of migrants, municipal departments, educational institutions, the public health department, etc.

More generally, grassroots initiatives are able to create territorial projects that can operate outside the “borders” of institutionally defined responsibilities. This does not mean that the role of the institutions and local authorities should be disregarded by the CBIs, and in turn it is important that institutions show foresight, political sensitivity and willingness to explore local practices, to understand their scope, and to capitalise on their transformative potential.

In the light of these complex and sometimes self-defeating circumstances, various recommendations can be made, particularly for governments and policymakers:

- At both national and local levels, policymakers need to guarantee a true long-term vision and continuity of specific policies, even if legacy policies may conflict to a minor degree with the stated ideology of an incoming regime.
- Coordination between institutional actors must be improved. The extent of responsibility must be more clearly defined (e.g. between the purview of municipal and regional governments); communication between these actors must be regular – or indeed must happen in the first place.
- Dialogue between CBIs and local government could also be improved: to create channels for cross-pollination of ideas, for CBIs to ask for and receive support, and to acknowledge how CBIs fill the gaps created by a lack of local authority resources, and to assist them in that goal.
- At a local level governments and institutions should ensure that the initiatives and the principles that CBIs promote – and thus assist the local institutions with their responsibilities – reach a wider number of beneficiaries, by improving CBIs' access to land, property and funding. The availability of property is vital for the important roles that CBIs perform in the absence of adequate institutional support, and lack of it can threaten their existence.
- On the part of CBIs, the ideological drive that prevents some of their members from engaging in dialogue with, or even violently opposing, the public institutions on which they rely to survive should be overlooked when the wider objectives of the organisations are at stake.
- CBIs should also engage with the local communities in which they exist. Local residents who are more comfortable with CBI neighbours will tend be more favourable towards their goals

and action. CBIs could be more effective by encouraging synergies between themselves and local communities, particularly in the case of raising awareness about migrant support and integration. Moreover if CBIs could educate local people on how they fill gaps left by failing authorities, they would lower barriers and thus increase their impact.

In the context of a city in deep crisis, such initiatives are effective responses to the increasing needs of a population that features a growing number of migrants. Operating outside the paradigm of neoliberal development, they mobilise local resources, create spaces for collective action, and fill in the inadequate response from a local government crippled by scandal, economic restriction, and negligence. Nevertheless, they are in turn reliant on the same local authorities for their survival, mainly in terms of provision of physical operating spaces. It is vital that this symbiosis be acknowledged by both parties, and particularly that local governments realise that the provision of buildings is cheaper than the alternative, which is the discontinuation of such CBIs, and a subsequent collapse in, and a requirement for extra funding for, the provision of services to the waves of immigrants that will only keep growing in the foreseeable future.

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